

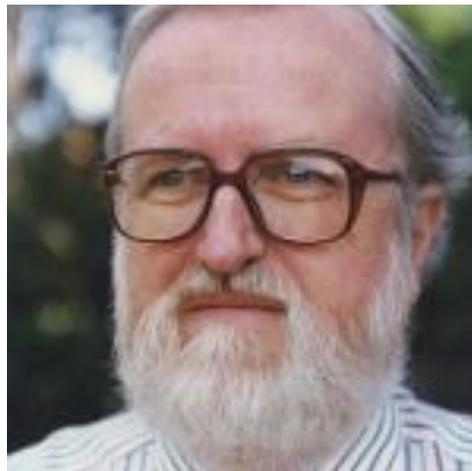
**SPECIAL FEATURE**

**A MUCH MALIGNED CELLIST:  
THE TRUE STORY OF FELIX SALMOND AND  
THE ELGAR CELLO CONCERTO**

*Tully Potter tries to lay a myth to rest*

*Firstly, gracefully acknowledging and crediting  
the wonderful investigation of **Tully Potter**  
and a brief biographical note....*

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## A MUCH MALIGNED CELLIST: THE TRUE STORY OF FELIX SALMOND AND THE ELGAR CELLO CONCERTO

Tully Potter tries to lay a myth to rest

Sometimes a myth becomes so firmly entrenched in the public consciousness that the true facts are completely obscured. So it has been with that archetypal English cellist Felix Salmond, whose career is always woefully misrepresented. In his adopted country, the United States, he is remembered for teaching at Juilliard and Curtis and nurturing most of the prominent 1930s and post-war American cellists. In Britain he is indelibly linked with the première of Elgar's E minor Concerto, an event now encrusted with fables.

Felix Adrian Norman Salmond was born in London on 19 November 1888, to musical parents: his father Norman was a professional bass-baritone who sang Richard Coeur-de-Lion in the original cast of Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* and had a busy career in light opera, also singing at many of the major festivals; and his mother Adelaide, who always appeared as Mme Norman Salmond, was a remarkable pianist. Born in New York in 1855, she was the daughter of the Italian opera conductor Mariano Manzocchi, who taught Adelina Patti. Coming to London aged 15, she so impressed Sir Julius Benedict that he gave her a letter of introduction to Franz Liszt in Weimar; but her mother sent her to Brussels, where she studied with Auguste Dupont, and to Frankfurt where her teacher was James Kwast. She knew all the great pianists and had lessons for a time from Clara Schumann. After her husband's death, she concentrated on her son's career. As a boy Felix played piano and violin, and took up the cello only at 12, taught by W.E. Whitehouse. At the Royal Academy of Music in 1903 he was highly commended but missed a scholarship. In 1904 he won the All-England Open Scholarship and in 1905 entered the Royal College of Music, where Whitehouse was a professor, remaining until 1909. From 1907 he took lessons in Brussels with Edouard Jacobs during the holidays. At the RCM his chamber music tutor was Frank Bridge, who became a close friend.

On 8 December 1908 Felix appeared at the Bechstein (now Wigmore) Hall, taking part in Brahms's G minor Piano Quartet with his mother, Maurice Sons and Frank Bridge, and premièring Bridge's Fantasy Trio. *The Times* commented that 'though nominally making his début to a London audience, he was clearly not unknown to the majority of the audience, who greeted his appearance with tumultuous applause; this must have been disconcerting, but for all that Mr Salmond played a Boccherini Sonata with great finish'.<sup>1</sup>

On 28 October 1909 he made his London recital début at the same hall, playing Beethoven's A major Sonata, Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations*, Popper's *Tarantella*, Fauré's *Élégie* and Bridge's *Serenade* with his mother, who contributed some solos. *The Times* noted 'the beauty of his tone and the smoothness of his phrasing'.<sup>2</sup> It was the first of a number of appearances by the Salmond Duo: Sir Henry Wood thought them 'an excellent and artistic combination'.<sup>3</sup> On 11 June Felix took part in the première of Bridge's Sextet, with Ernest Tomlinson and the English String Quartet, including the composer. In 1912, while playing in the orchestra at Daly's Theatre, Leicester Square,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 10 December 1908.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 29 October 1909.

<sup>3</sup> Henry J. Wood, *My Life of Music* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1938), pp. 381-2.

where English versions of Viennese operettas were produced, he met and married his first wife Lillian – his mother was far from happy at acquiring a chorus girl as a daughter-in-law and the resulting friction did not help the marriage to flourish. In 1912-14 he was a regular at the legendary late-night chamber music sessions hosted by Paul and Muriel Draper at 19 Edith Grove, Chelsea, recalled in the autobiographies of Artur Rubinstein, Eugène Goossens III and Lionel Tertis, and in Muriel Draper's own charming memoir.<sup>4</sup> On 12 February 1914 Salmond played Saint-Saëns's A minor Concerto at Queen's Hall and on 23 September, by which time Britain was at war, he made his Proms début with Eugen d'Albert's Concerto: the conductor, as for all his Proms, was Sir Henry Wood. He rapidly began to shine in such concertos as the Haydn D major and Dvořák, collaborating with many celebrated musicians. Unfit for active service in the Great War, he worked as a clerk in the Grenadier Guards' headquarters, with the rank of private, and joined in the regiment's public concerts with Guards musicians such as Albert Sammons and the Australian pianist William Murdoch. On 13 July 1917 he and Murdoch introduced Bridge's D minor Sonata at the Wigmore Hall. Among other commitments he had a regular trio with Rhoda Backhouse and Harold Samuel.

#### Elgar's chamber music

On 26 April 1919, at Frank Schuster's Westminster home, Salmond took part in private performances of Elgar's new Quartet and Quintet, with Albert Sammons, W.H. Reed, Raymond Jeremy and William Murdoch. The generous Schuster footed the bill for this all-star ensemble and invited members of the musical press to hear the two works. Rosa Burley recalled that there were other trial performances in the big music room at Severn House: 'On 7 March, when I heard them, the party included Bernard Shaw, for whom in later years Edward had conceived a great admiration.'<sup>5</sup> On 21 May 1919 the same players were involved in the first public performances, at the Wigmore Hall, when the Violin Sonata, which had already been premièred, was heard as well. (These were just two of the occasions when the eminent quintet performed the Elgar chamber works: W.W. Cobbett recalled 'a wonderful performance' at the Salmond home.<sup>6</sup>)

Salmond was the natural choice for expert adviser on the Cello Concerto in E minor which Elgar now began writing. Soon Salmond was being consulted on various matters concerning the composition: on 5 June, and again five days later, he was at Severn House to try out what Elgar had written. It is possible that Elgar had not firmly settled the order of the two inner movements, as Lady Elgar wrote in her diary on 22 June that he was 'finally revising the beautiful 3<sup>rd</sup> movement of Cello Concerto, "Diddle, diddle diddle"'. Elgar, an excellent violinist, hardly needed advice from Salmond on string technique, but he may have wanted assurance that what he had written was playable. One can imagine the Scherzo came up in the discussions – generations of cellists have struggled with the saltato bowing in it, and some famous names have fallen short. Salmond had a very serviceable technique, and with his huge hands could make enormous stretches, but he must have been tested. To his credit, he evidently did not persuade Elgar to compromise

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<sup>4</sup> Muriel Draper, *Music at Midnight* (Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York and London, 1929).

<sup>5</sup> Rosa Burley and Frank C. Carruthers, *Edward Elgar: The Record of a Friendship* (Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1972), p. 201. Shaw and his wife had already heard the Quartet and Quintet at their first try-out by Elgar and W.H. Reed's own quartet, at Severn House on 7 January.

<sup>6</sup> 'Sir Edward Elgar: Chamber Compositions', letter published in *The Times*, 2 March 1934.

on the virtuoso demands of the Concerto. On 31 July he arrived at the composer's Sussex retreat Brinkwells for a short stay, so that he and Elgar could work intensively on it. After tea they went through the Concerto, and after dinner they returned to it. From Lady Elgar's diary we learn that following breakfast the next day, a further run-through took place, and that 'Mr Felix' was 'such a delightful visitor'. Elgar took Salmond fishing, with no success; after dinner more work was done on the Concerto; and Elgar then offered Salmond the première. The cellist was so thrilled that he hardly slept that night. More work was accomplished on the following morning, and Salmond left after lunch. Back home at 7 Northwick Terrace, N.W. 8, he wrote to Lady Elgar:

I must write a short note to tell you what a real pleasure it has been to me to have stayed with you & Sir Edward, & I want also to thank you for your more than kind hospitality. The three days were altogether memorable in many ways, & my stay with you both will always remain one of my most delightful recollections. Will you tell Sir Edward that I played the Concerto through this morning by heart!!

What a thrilling & proud evening its production will be for me!!

It is not possible for me to express how very deeply I appreciate the great honour Sir Edward paid me by entrusting the debüt of his beautiful work to a comparatively unknown artist. May I prove myself entirely worthy of his great faith in my powers!

It is a chance that but rarely falls to a young artist, and I intend to try my hardest to take the golden opportunity with both hands!

If hard work can make it a success, Sir Edward can rely on my industry – Once again, warmest thanks for your many kindnesses.

Greetings to you all –  
Believe me, very sincerely yours  
Felix Salmond

P.S. My calligraphy this morning is appalling, & practising is the reason! Cello playing & writing do not mix!!<sup>7</sup>

By 8 August the manuscript score was ready and Lady Elgar took the new Op. 85 in person to Fittleworth post office to send it to Novellos with the final proofs of the Quintet. On 18 September Salmond played the Lalo Concerto at the Proms and on 2 October the Saint-Saëns A minor, incidentally refreshing his memory of the acoustic of Queen's Hall, where the Elgar Concerto was to be premièred on 27 October. Most of the programme – Borodin's Second Symphony, Wagner's *Forest Murmurs* and Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* – would be directed by the orchestra's new conductor, Albert Coates, and following the Borodin the Cello Concerto would be conducted by the composer. Sir Edward was accompanied by Alice and their daughter Carice for the first rehearsal at Mortimer Hall and in her diary Lady Elgar (writing of herself as 'A.') gave a vivid description of the humiliation meted out to Britain's greatest living composer by the arrogant Coates:

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<sup>7</sup> Letter dated 3 August 1919.

October 26. ... horrid place – the new work, Cello Concerto, never seen by Orchestra – Rehearsal supposed to be at 11.30. *After* 12.30 – A. absolutely furious – E. extraordinarily calm – Poor Felix Salmond in a state of suspense and nerves – Wretched hurried rehearsal – An insult to E. from that brutal, selfish, ill-mannered bounder A. Coates.

October 27. E. and A. and C. to Queen's Hall for rehearsal at 12.30 or rather before – absolutely inadequate at that – That *brute*, Coates went on rehearsing 'Waldweben'. Sec. [of the LSO] remonstrated, no use. At last just before one, he stopped & the men like Angels stayed till 1.30 [half an hour into overtime]. A. wanted E. to withdraw, but he did not for Felix S.'s sake – Indifferent performance of course in consequence. E. had a tremendous reception & ovation.

Elgar was beginning to go out of fashion and the hall was not full, but in the audience were a fair number of critics and some of the staff of the Gramophone Company, who issued Elgar's recordings on the 'His Master's Voice' label. As Lady Elgar indicated, those present were all, or almost all, keen Elgarians and appreciated the beauties of the Concerto, even though it was not the sort of upbeat effusion that many English people might have wanted, less than a year after the trauma of the Great War.

The fiasco that never was

Just how much of a disaster was the première? Let us review some of the salient points, starting with the soloist. All those who knew him were agreed that Felix Salmond had a phenomenal memory, so there is every probability that he knew the cello part intimately by the time he arrived at Queen's Hall. As the son of a singer, he had early imbibed the virtues of a singing line and good breath control. As a virtuoso he was no Feuermann or Piatigorsky but the few discs which document him in fast-moving music show that he could move around the cello very niftily, and he had a fine trill. On his records we hear a lovely, supple legato and a well developed bowing technique. His portamento is tastefully executed. His tone, the very embodiment of Elgar's favourite word *nobilmente*, seems ample and capable of many degrees of shading. The vibrato is varied, rarely becoming too wide. On the negative side, we know from Lady Elgar's diary that he was very nervous, and he had only recently exchanged his Giuseppe Guarneri 'Filius Andreae' cello for the ex-Paganini, ex-Piatti 1700 Matteo Goffriller which he would use for the rest of his career. It is possible that he and the Goffriller had not yet achieved complete cohesion. Like another tall, gentlemanly Elgarian, the tenor Gervase Elwes, Salmond could come across as rather reserved. At other times, he could sound a bit wooden. Elgar himself was not the sort of virtuoso conductor who might be able to keep an under-rehearsed orchestra on track, but he was a sterling exponent of his own music, as we know from his records. As for the LSO, even in those days London orchestral players prided themselves on their sight-reading abilities, so there is every probability that the musicians muddled through quite well.

Now for the Harbingers of Doom. It seems to me that they were all people who had inside knowledge of the fact that Elgar and the orchestra had been allowed inadequate time for preparation: Sir Edward and Lady Elgar, Felix Salmond and the young John Barbirolli, who was playing in the LSO cello section. In the history of musical performance one finds countless occasions when those involved thought that they were participating in an absolute fiasco, while everyone else enjoyed their efforts.

Alfred Kalisch, a critic friendly with Elgar and likely to be 'in the know', wrote that the Concerto 'was obviously under-rehearsed' but felt Salmond 'undoubtedly enhanced his

reputation very greatly in spite of the adverse circumstances under which he laboured'.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, only one scribe gave the performance an absolute stinker of a review. This was Ernest Newman, whose critique has often been quoted. Let us read it at greater length (he began with praise for Coates's conducting of *Le Poème de l'Extase*):

It went a long way towards compensating us for our disappointment over the new Elgar 'cello concerto – a disappointment not with the work but with the presentation of it. One never expects a first performance to be an ideal one, and Mr Felix Salmond, admirable artist as he is, may well be forgiven for feeling, and showing, the responsibility laid upon him. But we should like to have an explanation of the failure of the orchestra. There have been rumours about during the week of inadequate rehearsal. Whatever be the explanation, the sad fact remains that never, in all probability, has so great an orchestra made so lamentable a public exhibition of itself. Like all Elgar's recent work, the 'cello concerto is of a deceptively simple texture; but precisely because Elgar does without every note that is not really necessary the utmost and the right value must be given to the notes that remain. In few concertos, I should think, does the solo instrument play so continuously as this. That means that the usual orchestral outbursts of tone between the solo passages are barred to the composer. The orchestration has to be of the sort that will allow the solo instrument to be heard always; and as the 'cello tone, from the mere nature of its range and timbre, is so easily covered up by an orchestra, a quite special scale of colour is required in the accompanying parts. This scale of colour it has obviously been Elgar's preoccupation to achieve. Some of the colour is meant to be no more than a vague wash against which the solo 'cello defines itself. On Monday the orchestra was often virtually inaudible, and when just audible was merely a muddle. No one seemed to have any idea of what it was the composer wanted. The work itself is lovely stuff, very simple – that pregnant simplicity that has come upon Elgar's music in the last couple of years – but with a profound wisdom and beauty underlying its simplicity. As in his late chamber music, he makes no attempt to be modern for mere modernity's sake. He has a language, an instrument, of his own of which he is fully master; and he tranquilly uses them for the realisation in tone of a fine spirit's lifelong wistful brooding upon the loveliness of earth.<sup>9</sup>

Note that Newman had heard rumours of inadequate rehearsal; he was therefore primed to find fault. Like the other Harbingers of Doom, he was a member of the Elgar circle – he and his wife were in the party when the composer and W.H. Reed's British Quartet played the chamber works in Frank Schuster's riverside retreat The Hut at Bray-on-Thames earlier that year. His review, honest and sensitive according to his own lights, makes a vivid contrast with that in *The Times*, which bears all the hallmarks of having been written by the chief music critic, H.C. Colles. Like Newman, Colles has clearly studied the score before the concert. He gives a careful and absorbing analysis of the Concerto, but says not a word about the orchestral performance, adding: 'Both the composer and Mr Salmond, throughout a painstaking and sympathetic interpreter, were recalled many times at the end.'<sup>10</sup> The London correspondent of the *Yorkshire Post* is another who has patently done his homework. He too gives a detailed analysis of the work, concluding:

The general impression left by the Concerto is that the music expresses with peculiar truth the character of the cello. It is essentially a cello concerto. Another point is the consummate skill with which the timbre of the solo instrument is balanced by the orchestral tone colours. The solo part is an integral part of the scoring, but it is never overwhelmed by the other instruments. It is essentially intellectual, rational music, of dignity and serious sentiment, which makes the hearer

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<sup>8</sup> *Musical Times*, 1 December 1919.

<sup>9</sup> *The Observer*, 2 November 1919.

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 28 October 1919.

think. The solo part was played finely by Mr Felix Salmond, who seemed to have mastered thoroughly the spirit, as well as the executive demands, of the work. The composer conducted, and the reception was enthusiastic.<sup>11</sup>

Note that this critic gained precisely those impressions of the Concerto which Newman alleged were lacking in the performance.

The critic of the was a little less impressed by the work itself but praised the performers:

Those who are ever-ready to complain of the lack of interest in British music will be relieved to know that a large audience assembled at Queen's Hall on Monday last. The chief attraction was a new concerto for violoncello and orchestra by Sir Edward Elgar, who undoubtedly has added something noteworthy to the literature of the 'cello. The piece contains much fine melody, whilst the workmanship once again reveals the hand of a master. It must be admitted that there are dull moments, but few compositions are free from that fault. Mr Felix Salmond, the soloist, played very finely, as also did the London Symphony Orchestra under the composer's direction.<sup>12</sup>

Also at the première was the outstanding writer Marion Scott, whose review appeared in a perhaps unexpected American publication:

#### A New Elgar Cello Concerto

The first concert this season of the London Symphony Orchestra took place at Queen's Hall on October 27. It was rendered remarkable by two events – the production of Sir Edward Elgar's new concerto for violoncello, and the conducting of Mr. Albert Coates. Musicians had marked the program beforehand as one of the most interesting this autumn: when the evening came, an audience representative of every branch of the profession streamed into Queen's Hall, and their expectations were not belied. The concert was interesting – extraordinarily so: it still further enhanced Mr. Coates' renown as a conductor, and if the new concerto did not carry Elgar beyond the heights he has already achieved as a composer, it at least did not fall below the elevation of thought he has taught us to hope for.

Borodin's "Heroic Symphony" in B minor stood first on the program, a work of which the great Russian critic Stassov said: "It owes its strength chiefly to the national character of its subject," and as one listened, one could well believe that Borodin was "a national poet of Russia in the highest sense." The rendering of the symphony under Mr. Coates left nothing to be desired: it was spacious, masterful, glowing with color, and absolutely authoritative.

#### In the Place of Honor

Second on the program, in the place of honor, came Sir Edward Elgar's new concerto for violoncello and orchestra. He himself conducted, and Mr. Felix Salmond played the solo part with rare finish, refinement of style, and consistency of characterization. It was more like the performance of some actor who completely merges himself in the part he plays than a virtuoso coming before an audience to exhibit his own abilities.

This new concerto is too big a work to analyze or appraise quickly. The most that can be done after a single hearing is to record the salient impressions received. Prominent among these is the one that Elgar's conception of concerto form is totally different to that of the majority of composers. With him a concerto is not a public oration, nor a pyrotechnic display, but a psychological poem. It was so in his violin concerto; it is so in this. He feels the solo instrument to be as much a person as Browning felt his characters to be real in the "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics," and exactly as the characters speak for themselves – unfolding their ideas through his poems – so does the concerto deal with a subjective drama, the solo instrument expressing a sensitive, intimate train of thoughts in the language of music. This necessitates a wholly different

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<sup>11</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 28 October 1919.

<sup>12</sup> *Sunday Times*, 2 November 1919.

attitude in soloist, orchestra, and audience from that usually taken toward a concerto, and while Mr. Salmond understood and acted upon it perfectly, one had a sense that the London Symphony Orchestra only partially apprehended their role in this work, fine as they are and well though they played.

The concerto had been contemplated by Elgar for some time before he wrote it in the summer of this year, and he bestowed special care on the balance of tone between the 'cello and orchestra. He has solved the problem with singular success. The solo instrument is never entangled nor swamped by the accompaniment, and there is a lucent quality in the orchestration which removes all justification for a coarse or showy tone on the part of the 'cellist.

#### The Scheme of the Work

The work is in four rather short movements, well contrasted, and it opens with an introduction (*recitativo*), which leads to the first movement proper. This in turn is joined to the scherzo by a bridge-passage of unusual interest and beauty, music that compels one to follow it with close and expectant attention wheresoever it may lead. But on arrival at the scherzo, interest flags, for the scherzo itself is the least satisfactory movement of the four. Though it is sparkling and graceful, it approximates to the type of a "Moto Perpetuo." However, the lyrical adagio which follows is pure "Elgar," and the finale (*allegro non troppo*) is the best and most strongly designed movement in the work, binding the whole thing together. This is largely due to a remarkable passage near the end, in which the solo instrument seems to review the concerto as Abt Vogler did his extemporization in Browning's [1864] poem:

...and I stand on alien ground,  
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep.

Wagner's "Waldweben," next on the program, came as a restful interlude after so much that was unfamiliar. It received a fine performance under Mr. Coates, but the climax of the evening lay in what followed – Scriabine's "Poème de l'Extase." This splendid work, so large that it lies on the borderline between a symphony and a symphonic poem, expresses some of its composer's profoundest conclusions, and while all music lovers may appreciate its beauty and intensity, it must always make a special appeal to composers, for in it Scriabine endeavors to convey the joy of the artist in the shaping of his work. The sequence of ideas and emotions, the harmonic methods and the orchestral structure of the "Poème de l'Extase" are extremely complex, but in Mr. Coates' hands they became lucid and eloquent. The music seemed lambent with meaning, the audience caught the glow and were swept on to such a fervor of enthusiasm that they clapped and cheered long after it was over, recalling Albert Coates to the platform again and again.<sup>13</sup>

It will be seen that Scott thought the members of the LSO played well, although she felt they did not fully apprehend the scope of what they were playing. She also thought Felix Salmond showed a complete comprehension of the new kind of concerto that Elgar had composed. Indeed she went out of her way to praise his performance.

(Incidentally, a decade later the première of the other great English string concerto of the era, Walton's Viola Concerto, was also under-rehearsed. No one seems to have complained particularly bitterly on that occasion, even if some people had doubts about Paul Hindemith's solo playing.)

It seems clear to me that the 'disaster' or 'fiasco' element of the Elgar première – if it ever existed – has been blown up out of all proportion, and that the work received, if not a brilliant rendering, at least an adequate one, which greatly pleased the vast majority of the audience. The negative impression which entered the history books was the result of a few insiders being overly concerned and sensitive about Elgar's reputation.

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<sup>13</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 December 1919.

### A tissue of untruths

But the mythmakers did not rest there. Somehow an elaborate structure of supposition, nonsense and pure invention has been built around poor Felix Salmond. In article after article, book after book, you can read the following (with variations according to a particular author's whim or fancy): that after the première Salmond never played the Concerto again in this country; that he was so ashamed of his failure that he emigrated to the United States with his tail between his legs; and that he never taught or played the Concerto in America. All wrong, wrong, wrong...

When he got home after the performance, Elgar wrote to the orchestra to thank them for their performance and to Salmond in gratitude for his contribution. This letter has not come to light, so we do not know if he mentioned the rehearsal issue, but we do have the reply which the cellist sat down to write at 11.00 p.m. on the 28<sup>th</sup>:

It is quite impossible to tell you how very deeply your wonderful letter has touched me. I can only thank you from my heart for the great honour you bestowed upon me, & above all, for the expression of your friendship which I shall proudly cherish. I cannot say anything more, but I am certain you will understand what a joy your letter is to me.

Believe me, your affectionate friend,  
Felix Salmond

The Cello Concerto was never going to be a riproaring success from day one. For many years it was seen as Elgar's rather depressed response to the Great War, which had swept away the Edwardian world of his heyday, a world dominated by the certainties of the British Empire. The writer J.B. Priestley, who used the music so poignantly in his 1947 play *The Linden Tree*, certainly saw it that way. And Elgar's cryptic explanation of the work as 'a man's attitude to life' was interpreted as substantiating the gloomy view, even though he had said similar things about other works. (Only in the past six decades have performances by such interpreters as Jacqueline du Pré and Paul Tortelier – building on the bridgehead established by Pablo Casals, whose interpretation was considered un-English in the 1930s – shown us that the work is by no means irredeemably melancholy. Perhaps it needed cellists of their lavish endowments and powerful personalities to take it firmly on to the world stage.)

The next development in the saga was that Fred Gaisberg of HMV wanted to record the Concerto – he had obviously not been put off by the première. As had happened with the Violin Concerto, just four 12-inch 78rpm sides would be available, but the more compact Cello Concerto would not need to be cut quite so drastically – the Scherzo would require only a small excision and the Adagio would be accommodated complete on one side. Sadly Salmond was under contract to Vocalion, so could not be considered. Guilhermina Suggia was approached but wanted too high a fee. The choice fell on the young Beatrice Harrison, who went with her sister Margaret to play the work to the composer and ended up being accompanied with inimitable brio by Elgar himself. In the session at Hayes on 22 December 1919 she did a reasonable job, setting down three movements successfully with Elgar conducting, but had to re-make the Adagio – the make-up session, originally scheduled for Elgar's stint at the studios on 24 February 1920, did not take place until 16 November, almost a year after the first one.

## Success in Manchester

Meanwhile Salmond, unabashed by the shenanigans over the première, gave the Concerto its second performance in Manchester on 20 March 1920, the Hallé Orchestra being conducted by none other than Coates! The cellist must have felt at least a pang of *déjà vu*, as his second contribution to the concert, Bruch's *Kol Nidrei*. was followed by Scriabin's Third Symphony, *The Divine Poem*, and the rest of the programme consisted of pieces by Wagner. Samuel Langford had this to say:

Among works of its kind the 'cello Concerto of Elgar will rank high. There appears to have been some want of judgment about its first performance in London, but there was no mistake on Saturday. Mr Felix Salmond played most beautifully, with a polish and finish which set the lean and incisive technique of the work in the happiest light, and gave to the clear and serene beauties of its melodies the distinction and movement of some finely slender animal. For our own part we liked best of it all the idyllic song of its first movement. The whole plan of the work seems to be to give the sense of successive intermezzi rather than of substantial movements, but the miscellaneous matter of the closing movement gives the work in the end quite the normal duration.<sup>14</sup>

In that era when North and South were like worlds unto themselves, this concert was not noticed by the metropolis-centric musicians of London; and when Beatrice Harrison was planning her rendering with sister Margaret, on the afternoon of 29 May at the Wigmore Hall, she advertised it as 'second performance' – she was on safer ground in adding 'first with piano'.

On 7 April 1920, Lady Elgar died of cancer in her husband's arms. Carice and devoted friends did their best to solace Elgar but he was inconsolable. Alice was to be buried on 10 April in her preferred place, the hillside cemetery at St Wulstan's Church, Little Malvern, and there was little time to prepare the funeral service. Frank Schuster and Carice asked W.H. Reed to bring some colleagues to play the *Piacevole* from the String Quartet, a favourite with Alice. Some sources claim that Salmond was involved but in his memoir of the composer, Reed states categorically that the other players were Sammons, Jeremy and B. Patterson Parker, a member of the LSO and the cellist of his own quartet.<sup>15</sup> No doubt Salmond was one of the many who sent expressions of sympathy. On 20 August 1920 he wrote to Elgar from Brighton, describing a happy encounter with the former Alice Stuart-Wortley, now Lady Stuart of Wortley and known to the composer as his muse 'Windflower':

We have been here since the 9<sup>th</sup> & are staying until Sept 6<sup>th</sup>. I am wondering how you are & whether your long stay at Brinkwells has done you good – I sincerely hope so. I spent a delightful afternoon, before leaving town, with Lady Stuart – We gave a brilliant performance of the Concerto! How splendidly she plays – since then I have had a complete rest from the 'cello & I am sure it will do me good. The weather here has been wonderful, & the rest & thorough "laze" most enjoyable! I am looking forward so much to seeing you soon again & I only hope we may do the concerto together somewhere next season. My wife sends you her kindest regards – Please

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<sup>14</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 March 1920.

<sup>15</sup> W.H. Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1936), p. 67. The detailed report in the *Malvern Gazette* of 16 April corroborates his account. The quartet, seated in the gallery at the west end, played the opening of the first movement as the mourners entered, and the slow movement at the end of the service. Curiously, in *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (OUP, 1984), p. 754, Jerrold Northrop Moore purports to quote Reed's account but alters 'Jeremy' to 'Tertis' and 'Parker' to 'Salmond'.

remember us to your daughter &, when you feel inclined, let us have a line to say how you are.  
Always affectionately

Your  
Felix

His wish for a performance with Elgar in the next season was fulfilled at Birmingham on 10 November: the Concerto was framed by *Falstaff* and the Second Symphony in an all-Elgar programme with the Municipal Orchestra. Langford was again present:

Mr Felix Salmond played the concerto, which now becomes quite a clear work of well-calculated effect, and is bound to become a favourite with every leading player. The nobility of the work as read by Elgar today hardly appears in the score to the casual eye, and its true interpretation will need to be promulgated.<sup>16</sup>

Late in 1920 Salmond formed the Chamber Music Players, a piano quartet with William Murdoch, Albert Sammons and Lionel Tertis, and they gave their first concert at the Wigmore Hall on 6 January 1921. Within days the Salmonds' second daughter Muriel was born and on 15 January Lillian Salmond wrote to Elgar:

Thank you very very much for the lovely gift you have sent to our little darling.

I can't tell you how glad & proud I am that you are to be her Godfather. She is a very lucky little girl! I hope you will think she is sweet – Perhaps she may grow up to be very musical & then you may feel proud of her – I hope so.

Again best thanks. I am looking forward to seeing both you & your daughter tomorrow.

Sincerely yours  
Lilian Salmond

On that very day, Beatrice Harrison played the Elgar Concerto at Queen's Hall, with the composer conducting the regular orchestra of Sir Henry Wood – who took the rest of the programme. The critic of *The Times*, again almost certainly Colles, commented in the usual London-centric manner:

There was no new work in the programme of the Queen's Hall Orchestra on Saturday afternoon, but the revival of Elgar's Violoncello Concerto, produced a year or so ago, and neglected since, was a matter of more importance than first performances often are. ... a performance was secured which should produce some revision of opinion among those who were disappointed by the first one. The violoncello concerto in E minor is not a work likely to create a sensation as the first symphony did, or one to arouse the ambitions of solo performers, as the violin concerto did. Probably violoncellists are right in saying that it does not 'show off the instrument', or challenge their technical powers in any conspicuous way. There are some passages which seem rather awkward for the instrument without being particularly effective. The greater part of the music moves, as it were, in a half-light; ideas are hinted at rather than fully expressed. The first three movements at any rate have more the character of a suite for violoncello and orchestra than of a concerto. Only the *finale* is developed at length. Yet the whole work is unmistakably Elgar from the first statement of the motto theme by the violoncello to the broad peroration which draws together the various threads in the *finale*. There is scarcely a phrase anywhere which one could

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<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 11 November 1920.

imagine to be the work of anyone else. And in such an age of re-writing as the present one is, the power of any composer to be unflinchingly himself is too valuable a thing to be lightly passed over. Moreover, the violoncello concerto is certainly an advance on any of the previous symphonic works in its freedom from the tendency to labour the material with more or less vain repetition. If it is slight, it is quite frankly so; a whimsical fancy unifies its changing moods, and delicate touches of orchestration relieve the harmonic sentiment, and prevent it from cloying. Miss Harrison seemed to understand its character very well, and was able to keep the *cantilena* easily in the foreground, while the orchestral players showed themselves masters of the art of accompaniment. The work was sufficiently well received to make us hope that it will now take the place in the repertory which it certainly deserves.<sup>17</sup>

This review, while expressing one or two opinions which we would not entertain today, is important because it marks a turning of the tide in the Concerto's fortunes in London, and Harrison's self-assurance as its interpreter. (Later that year she and Elgar gave it in the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford; and she also took it to Vienna.) On 27 January 1921 John Barbirolli, still known as Giovanni, essayed the Concerto in Bournemouth with the Municipal Orchestra conducted by Dan Godfrey. To his dying day, Barbirolli – in his youth yet another metropolis-fixated musician – was convinced that his had been the first out-of-town performance; but as we have seen, it was the third. On 14 March 1921 Salmond, now recognised as England's premier concert cellist,<sup>18</sup> played Brahms's Double Concerto at Queen's Hall with Sammons and the LSO under Coates; on the 23<sup>rd</sup> the unofficial Elgar quintet got together for a recital of all three chamber works, under the auspices of the London Chamber Concert Society; and on 16 June Salmond was the soloist in Strauss's *Don Quixote*, with Hamilton Harty on the Queen's Hall podium. But he had developed the notion that in the United States he would have even more of a career – and both he and Lillian apparently felt that their marriage, now in a sticky state, would fare better there, with the Atlantic between them and Adelaide.

### The emigration

Early in 1922 the Salmonds left England for New York with their two children: Lillian had borrowed money to help pay for their passage and their living expenses while Felix established himself. On 29 March he made a successful recital début at the Aeolian Hall with Frank Bibb at the piano; but it soon became apparent that he would not earn much more as a soloist than he had in England, and that he would have to take a teaching post in order to make ends meet. He taught first at the Mannes School; when the Institute of Music Art (which became the Juilliard School) opened in 1924, he was made head of the cello department and professor of chamber music; and in 1925-42 he also headed the cello faculty at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

Salmond would gladly have given the American première of the Elgar Concerto, but he was pre-empted by the Belgian cellist Jean Gerardy, who performed it in Carnegie Hall, New York, on 21 November 1922, with the visiting Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski. Five days later Salmond made his American orchestral début with the New York Symphony under Walter Damrosch, playing *Kol Nidrei* and *Don Quixote*. On 14 December he wrote to Elgar from his home in East 76<sup>th</sup> Street:

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<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 17 January 1921.

<sup>18</sup> By the 1920s the celebrated W.H. Squire was rarely heard in concert. As a popular composer of ballads and other agreeable trifles, and a busy recording artist, he had a steady income and could afford not to exert himself on the performance circuit.

My dear Sir Edward. We both send you our kindest greetings & wishes for your happiness this Xmas & in 1923. Altho' I have been too busy with work to write you a long letter I think of you very often & miss you more than you can think. I heard the 1<sup>st</sup> performance of "our" concerto but "entre nous" I am very glad you didn't!! I intend to play it here next season & try & give it to the public as you want it! My success continues & I know you will be very glad for us both.

Yours,  
Felix

I'll write soon

It is clear that at this stage, Elgar missed Salmond's presence on the British musical scene. Some time in late March or early April 1923 he wrote to the cellist indicating that he still associated him very much with the Cello Concerto. All we have is Salmond's reply of 5 April:

Your lovely letter has given me the greatest pleasure. It arrived this morning & I hasten to send you some news of myself & our doings in this country, which you will be glad to hear, has shown me truly wonderful kindness – It is a joy to me to see you again & talk over all the lovely times we have had together. I think of them very often, of your wonderful stories & of our games of plate pool. What fun they were – "Eke the red"!!!

You can't think how very proud I am to have your friendship & to know that you, above all others, consider me the best interpreter of your Concerto! You will find that I have made much progress when you hear me play it again next year! Your God-daughter is growing lovelier & more fascinating every day & you would be proud of her! We are all well & I want you to know that my dear wife & I are very happy together. We have made many lovely friends here & people are incredibly good to us – Much love to you. Do write to me again. I love to hear from you – Your ever affectionate Felix.

While Felix Salmond was settling himself in New York, in London Beatrice Harrison was establishing her status as Elgar's favoured interpreter of his Cello Concerto. On 3 July 1923 she played it again at Queen's Hall with Elgar conducting, in a programme which also included the first London performance of the Delius Concerto, directed by Eugène Goossens III; and that September she and the composer performed it at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester.

New world, old problems

When Salmond finally had the chance to play a concerto in Carnegie Hall on 28 and 29 February 1924, with the New York Philharmonic under Willem Mengelberg, either the orchestra or the conductor insisted on the Dvořák, which was better for the box office than the Elgar. And after a little flurry of gigs with the two major New York orchestras up to March 1925 – he was particularly in demand for *Don Quixote* and Brahms's Double Concerto, in which his regular partner was Paweł Kochański – he was engaged only once by the merged New York Philharmonic-Symphony, for a 1939 performance of Enescu's *Symphonie concertante* with the composer conducting. His sole bookings with the Boston Symphony were two performances of Bloch's *Schelomo* under Sergei Koussevitzky in 1929; with the Los Angeles Philharmonic he played the Dvořák twice under Walter Henry Rothwell in 1925, and a pairing of the Lalo and *Schelomo* twice under Georg

Schnéevoigt in 1928; in Philadelphia he had just three performances of Brahms's Double Concerto in 1932, with Léa Luboshutz and Stokowski; and it was a similar story with the other American orchestras. The emergence of Feuermann and Piatigorsky in the 1930s, and the enduring lure of Casals, all but froze him out of the limited number of cello concerto opportunities. Recital and chamber music dates were easier to come by – in January 1925 he toured the U.S. playing piano quartets in 12 centres with Harold Bauer, Bronisław Huberman and Tertis – but did not bring him much money or éclat. In 1927 he made his first return visit to Europe with his family, giving concerts at Baden-Baden in Germany and spending some time in England: On Elgar's seventieth birthday, 2 June, he despatched a telegram from London:

Send you affectionate Birthday greetings & heartiest congratulations  
Felix Salmond

On 3 June he gave a Wigmore Hall recital, with the Dutch composer Richard Hageman at the piano. And later that month, the Elgar chamber music quintet met for the last time, with Tertis in place of Jeremy, for a performance of all three works organised by Frank Schuster at The Hut.<sup>19</sup> Alas, while Felix and Lillian were staying at the Hampstead home of Sir Herbert and Lady Samuelson, the simmering tensions in their marriage came to a head. The resulting separation hearing is interesting for the light it casts on Salmond's American earnings: \$10,000 a year from Juilliard, \$12,000 from Curtis, \$1,000 in 1926-27 and \$1,500 in 1927-28 from his recording contract with American Columbia. He said he had never earned more than \$25,000 a year.<sup>20</sup> He subsequently obtained a divorce in Reno, Nevada, which bizarrely led to his having two wives under New York law, although his marriage to Helen Child Curtis was recognised. He and Helen, who were very happy together, went on to have a son and a daughter.

In March and June 1928 Beatrice Harrison set down a complete recording of the Elgar Concerto for HMV at Kingsway Hall, London, with the composer conducting the New Symphony Orchestra. This performance – recently refurbished in 'accidental stereo' – shows how assured Harrison now is with the work; and unlike his indulgent direction of the Violin Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin four years later, Elgar's conducting is fully alert and insightful. In November, a second Cello Concerto recording was made for Columbia by the great W.H. Squire in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, with the Hallé Orchestra under Sir Hamilton Harty. It proved to be even better than the Harrison, in some ways. For two such successful recordings of a recent work to be made within months was a miracle; but even so, it would have been good to hear the original soloist's thoughts on the work. The intense rivalry between HMV and Columbia would have precluded Salmond's being engaged for the London sessions; and to have had him as soloist in Manchester would have robbed us of Squire's noble interpretation. So we must be content with the riches we have...

### Elgar in America

At last Salmond was able to perform the Elgar in New York, at Mecca Auditorium on 16 March 1930 for the Friends of Music, with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra under Artur

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<sup>19</sup> Although Schuster had now given up The Hut, he borrowed it back for this occasion.

<sup>20</sup> *The New York Times*, 11 February 1928.

Bodanzky. A brief notice contained a hint that the work left some of the audience – and perhaps the reviewer – a little puzzled:

Whatever the auditors' reaction to the modern 'cello concerto of Elgar, which has at least the merit that it helps performers on the violoncello to eke out their scanty repertory, there can be no division of opinion regarding the musicianship and artistic sincerity of Mr Salmond's playing.<sup>21</sup>

That year Salmond made his Berlin début, toured Holland and spent much of the summer in Britain. On 19 July he broadcast the Lalo Concerto, with Frank Bridge conducting the embryo 'BBC Orchestra'; on 13 September he gave the first British performance of Bloch's *Schelomo* at the Proms; and on 1 October he had a recital at the Wigmore Hall. On 19 September he wrote to Elgar from his London hotel:

I am so delighted to have your most kind letter & to know that you are in town – Won't you come & dine with me & meet my charming Wife? It would be a real joy to see you & have a long talk overt the wonderful times we had together! How would Sunday or Monday night suit you? Not dress, as we shall go to a quiet restaurant, sans ceremonie!

I played your Concerto in New York last March & it had a fine reception from the public – Bodanzky & the orchestra were splendid & I enjoyed the occasion enormously! How I wish you could come & hear me on Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, especially in the wonderful D major Beethoven Sonata, so rarely played!! I know you would think my playing had grown since you last heard me!

With warmest greetings & much looking forward to seeing you soon.

Always affectionately yours  
Felix

P.S. We shall come & hear your second Symphony on Oct: 2<sup>nd</sup> & hope to see you afterwards for a moment!

Assuming they managed a brief conversation on 2 October, after Elgar had conducted his Second Symphony at an all-British Promenade Concert in Queen's Hall, it was probably the last time the two men met. On 23 February 1934, Sir Edward died at his home Marl Bank, in Worcester. He had been solaced on his deathbed by the HMV recordings of his Piano Quintet and String Quartet, made at his request by Harriet Cohen and the Stratton Quartet.<sup>22</sup> On 20 May Salmond wrote from New York to Carice Elgar Blake:

You would have heard from me long ago, but I have only just succeeded in obtaining your address – I send you my deep & sincere sympathy in your great sorrow –

Your dear Father was a wonderful friend to me & I shall always treasure the memories of the many happy hours we spent together. Percy Scholes heard me play the 'cello concerto in New

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<sup>21</sup> *The New York Times*, 17 March 1930.

<sup>22</sup> The Stratton Quartet violist, Watson Forbes, told me that although Elgar loved their recording of the Quartet, it did not fully represent their interpretation. Their first attempt at the *Piacevole*, lasting ten minutes, was too slow for the engineering team, who said that on both sides the label would cover the final grooves. The HMV technology was capable of cutting a six-minute side of quiet music, but on this occasion the players were asked to repeat the movement. The published version timed at just over eight minutes.

York in March 1930 & I hope he told your Father his impressions of the performance as he said he would –

I am proud to have had the privilege & the honour of knowing so great a man & personality as your Father was –

With kindest regards & again warm sympathy,

Believe me, very sincerely yours  
Felix Salmond

The cellist continued his U.S. career, traversing the country and occasionally penetrating into Canada. In June 1937, on his final pre-war visit to Britain, he broadcast for the BBC and gave a Wigmore Hall recital, including the first British performance of Samuel Barber's Sonata, in which the composer partnered him at the piano. He also found time to attend Lionel Tertis's retirement party, on the 13<sup>th</sup> at Pagani's restaurant, favourite pre-war haunt of London musicians. Back in America, he formed the Trio of New York with the Russian violinist Daniel Karpilowsky and the German pianist Carl Friedberg, an exact contemporary of his mother and, like her, a pupil of James Kwast and Clara Schumann. March 1938 saw him reunited with an old friend when he gave the local premières of the Boccherini-Grützmacher B flat Concerto and Bloch's *Schelomo* in Cincinnati, with the local Symphony under their chief conductor Eugène Goossens III. In 1942, the year he gave up his Curtis teaching post in protest at not being consulted over the appointment of Emanuel Feuermann, Salmond's mother died in London. At Juilliard on 29 March 1947 he played all five Beethoven Sonatas in one evening with a fellow faculty member, Leonid Hambro, to mark the silver jubilee of his American début, and in 1948 the duo recorded them. On his last trip to England, in June 1947, he repeated his Beethoven marathon with Franz Osborn at the Wigmore Hall, and broadcast for the new Third Programme. Salmond made his last appearance with orchestra on 15 November 1947, performing *Schelomo* in a Bloch festival at Juilliard, and he died in New York on 19 February 1952, having taught almost to the end.

#### A great teacher

Felix Salmond was greatly admired by his contemporaries. Eugène Goossens III, himself a violinist, wrote that he 'can put greater depths of meaning into a Brahms' cello sonata than any living player';<sup>23</sup> and even virtuosity-conscious Americans admired his tone. Inevitably Salmond's transatlantic reputation rests on his pedagogy. Although not a teacher for beginners, he was just the man to give a final polish to the talents who came his way. Although some loved his chamber music classes, the violist Peter Kamnitzer told me that Salmond's idea of coaching a chamber group was to sit there saying: 'Shake it, boy, shake it!' He could be arrogant, difficult and demanding, especially in the early days, but his successes speak for themselves: Leonard Rose, Channing Robbins, Alan Shulman, Victor Gottlieb, Orlando Cole, Elsa Hilger, Stephen De'ak, Eleanor Aller, Bernard Greenhouse, Daniel Saidenberg, Samuel Mayes, Frank Miller, Anthony Sophos, Richard Kapuscinski, Edgar Lustgarten and Tibor de Machula. He laid great stress on beauty of sound and on students listening closely to their own playing, and would shout

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<sup>23</sup> Eugène Goossens III, *Overture and Beginners* (Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, 1951), p. 153.

‘Sing!’ at them. He taught the Elgar Concerto if asked, but no one in his lifetime could have known what an essential part of the repertoire it would become. He programmed Bach’s Suites and pieces by Eccles, Sammartini, Veracini and Vivaldi, as well as the Sonatas by Barber, Beethoven, Brahms, Bridge, Dohnányi, Enescu, Franck, Grieg, Huré, Rachmaninov and Guy-Ropartz. He was a prime mover in persuading American cellists to play sonatas in their recitals. Besides the works mentioned above, his repertoire with orchestra took in Bridge’s *Oration*, Barber’s Concerto and Boëllmann’s *Symphonic Variations*. In an interview focused on his teaching, when asked about repertoire, he recommended *inter alia* Bridge’s Sonata and ‘Elgar’s splendid ’Cello Concerto’.<sup>24</sup>

Salmond first recorded acoustically for Vocalion in 1920-22: Cui *Cradle Song*, Rachmaninov *Andante* (very soulfully played), Popper *Gavotte No. 2* and *Harlequin*, Glazunov *Sérénade espagnole*, Schumann *Träumerei*, Bridge and Pierné *Serenades*, Saint-Saëns *The Swan*, and Offenbach *Barcarolle*. In 1926-29 he recorded electrically for American Columbia with the pianist Simeon Rumschisky: Bach *Arioso*, Debussy *Menuet* and *En bateau*, Pianelli *Villanelle*, Chopin *Largo*, Fauré *Berceuse*, Bizet *Adagietto*, *The Londonderry Air*, Bridge *Mélodie* and Grieg *To Spring*, plus remakes of the Saint-Saëns, Pierné, Glazunov and Popper *Gavotte*. The major duo recordings are Grieg’s Sonata, Bruch’s *Kol Nidrei* (cut to fit on two sides) and Beethoven’s A major Sonata and ‘Bei Männern’ Variations. Schubert’s B flat Trio, with Myra Hess and Jelly d’Arányi, is inevitably trumped by the Cortot-Thibaud-Casals version: Salmond’s phrasing in the *Andante* is less generous than Casals’s. Recent additions to his discography are fragments of two Brahms Trios with Friedberg and Karpilowsky – worth having just for Salmond’s solo in the B major’s *Adagio* – and three terrific Beethoven Sonatas, Opp. 5/1, 102/1 and 102/2, from the cycle recorded at Juilliard in 1948 with Leonid Hambro. For a long time, Salmond was poorly represented in the record catalogues, but there is enough available now, on the Pristine Audio, Arbiter and Opus Kura labels, to support my view that he was a great cellist. And in 2017 Arbiter will issue more discoveries: the Debussy Sonata, a complete 1940 recital of the Beethoven Sonatas, the ‘Ghost’ Trio with Friedberg and Karpilowsky and most of Bach’s D minor solo Suite.

(c) TULLY POTTER, 2016

*Thanks to Martin Bird for much assistance, also to the Elgar Estate, Raymond Glaspole and Jay Shulman. This article was originally published in the December 2016 issue of the Elgar Society Journal. The Marion Scott critique, which was supplied to the author by Pamela Blevins, was published in the August 2017 issue of the Journal. It has been added to the original article for convenience.*

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick H. Martens, *String Mastery* (Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York, 1923, p.