

## **An Evening With Fen Edge Orchestra: Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018 at Histon Baptist Church**

### **Programme Notes, by Evan Turner**

#### **Isaac Albéniz (1860 - 1909) España : Six Album Leaves Op.165**

Prélude - Tango - Malagueña - Serenata - Capricho Catalan - Zortzico

Catalan by birth, Albéniz's music career started early; he was a gifted child prodigy both as a pianist and composer, and accompanied by his father who as a customs official was obliged to make foreign trips, had by his late teens already given concerts on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as completing formal music studies at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels.

In his early twenties and living in Barcelona, Albéniz met the nationalist composer Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922), and it was through his influence that Albéniz first thought to incorporate features of Spanish folk song and dance into his compositions.

*España, Six Album Leaves for Piano* were composed in 1890, during a three year period in his life when a highly successful concert career had encouraged Albéniz to set up house and home in the Brompton district of London, at the time noted as the artist's quarter of the city.

Albéniz premiered *España* at a piano recital given on the 7th June 1890 in the Steinway Hall, London. Written with an easy grace and charm, these six pieces represent a sort of musical tour guide to Spain, including among the attractions an alluring *Tango* which has endured as one of Albéniz's most popular and well recognised compositions.

#### **Claudio Monteverdi (1567 - 1643) Two Madrigals of Love and War**

(i) *Hor che'l ciel e la terra e l' vento tace* (*Now that the sky, earth and wind are silent*)

(ii) *Vago augelletto che cantando vai* (*Lovely little bird, who are you singing about*)

Claudio Monteverdi was born in Cremona, Italy. As a young man in 1591, he entered the retinue of the music-loving Duke Vincenzo of Mantua where, over the next two decades, Monteverdi's reputation as a composer steadily grew. After the death of his patron in 1612, Monteverdi was dismissed, but fortunately for him the job as *maestro* of music at the basilica of San Marco in Venice came up, and for the rest of his life he remained living and working in Venice.

A proportion of Monteverdi's compositions are now lost; he wrote sacred music for church use, was also a significant composer of the very earliest operas, and wrote many madrigals, or part songs, collections of which were published in his life-time in eight separate volumes.

The two madrigals in these transcriptions are both taken from Book VIII, a retrospective collection published in 1638 under the title *Madrigali Guerrieri et Amadorosi*, of Love and War. Both take texts by Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), more commonly known as Petrarch. In *Hor che'l ciel*, the quiet stillness of the night is contrasted dramatically with the emotional torment of love, while in *Vago augelletto*, the poet implores a little songbird to bring him heartsease in the midst of his sorrowful sufferings.

Both *España* and the *Two Madrigals* have been arranged especially for the FEO by Evan Turner.

#### **Eric Coates (1886 - 1957) London Suite (London Every Day)**

Covent Garden (Tarantelle) - Westminster (Meditation) - Knightsbridge, In Town Tonight (March)

Eric Coates was born at Hucknall near Nottingham, where he took up the violin and latterly the viola, and also learned the rudiments of music theory and harmony. At the age of twenty, a scholarship

enabled him to move to London to study viola and composition at the Royal Academy of Music, where his viola teacher was the renowned violist Lionel Tertis.

Coates' early compositions were influenced by the music of Edward German (1862-1936), and like him, Coates began his professional career playing in numerous West End theatre orchestras. From 1912-1919 he was principal viola of the Queen's Hall Orchestra, directed by Henry Wood of Proms fame.

After 1919, Coates turned exclusively to composition, honing his skills as an accomplished composer of light music. In 1933, the *Finale of the London Suite*, the *Knightsbridge March*, made him a household name when the BBC adopted it to introduce the long running show 'In Town Tonight'. Yet another of his memorable tunes - *By the Sleepy Lagoon* - is still heard whenever we step ashore on 'Desert Island Discs'.

### **William Sterndale Bennett (1816 - 1875) Symphony in G minor, Op.43**

Allegro moderato - Introduzione & Minuet - Romanze - Intermezzo & Rondo Finale

Orphaned from the early age of three, Bennett was brought up in Cambridge under the care of his grandfather John Bennett, who sang as a professional bass and lay clerk in the chapel choirs of Kings, St. John's and Trinity. In 1826, after a couple of years as a chorister at Kings, he was, on account of his circumstances and musicianship, accepted with free board and lodging into the Royal Academy of Music, London.

Such was his ability as an emerging composer and pianist that an early Piano Concerto won high praise from Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), along with an invitation to visit him in Germany. Between 1836 and 1842 Bennett made four extended visits to Germany, becoming close friends with the composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856), and achieving success abroad with his compositions.

However, in 1837 he had taken up a teaching position at the Royal Academy of Music, and this move set the pattern for the rest of his life; composing was largely put aside, to be replaced by teaching and the increasing burdens of administration. His tenure as Professor of Music at Cambridge University for ten years between 1856-1866 was succeeded, now as Principal of the RAM, by the arduous task of rescuing that institution from mismanagement and threat of closure. He remained there until his death at the age of fifty eight in 1875.

Bennett had committed more time to composing from 1858 onwards, but musical taste had moved on, and though admired, he was considered rather old fashioned. As an indication of just how pressed for time he was, the Symphony in G minor is a case in point. Commissioned by the Philharmonic Society, London in 1863, at its first performance at Hanover Square Rooms on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1864, it comprised of three movements instead of the usual four, and even then the Minuet movement was drawn from an earlier piece; a Cambridge Installation Ode of 1862.

Bennett scored the chorale-like middle section of Minuet exclusively for Brass, but on this occasion some of those parts are taken by wind players. He also added a slow movement, the Romanza, included from 1867 onwards. This lyrical movement has the character and style of a Mendelssohn *Song Without Words*, and in a rare gesture to the viola section, it is they who are given the leading voice.

The Symphony remained popular until the turn of the 20th century, after which it largely disappeared from the repertoire, so this is a somewhat rare chance to hear an infrequently played piece with strong Cambridge connections.