

## THE ENIGMA

We are who we know. That's the current theory – it's not our ancestors, it's not our upbringing, it's our friends. Certainly each one of us changes according to which friend we're with. One friend may bring out a thoughtful side, while another releases the football hooligan inside all of us. The group we're in can make us hateful or generous.

So when Elgar dedicates the *Enigma Variations* to “My friends within” I don't think it's fanciful to interpret this as meaning “All these variations are the aspects of me brought out by particular people. They add up to me. Which is the real me? - Well, that's the Enigma”.

Elgar's friends are identified by their initials. Some are, like him, English buffers with hidden depths and heights. (No-one owned up to depression then. But Elgar certainly had it, and his friend Jaeger [= Hunter in German = Nimrod] certainly made it more tolerable). One (C.A.E.) was his impeccable wife. And two – Lady Mary Lygon and Dorabella (who were never allowed to meet each other – were, I am sure, the subject of secret [and almost certainly unfulfilled] passions.)

This is the list of initials and names. The poems are all based on the descriptions in “*Memories of a Variation*” by Mrs. Richard Powell – who was, and always will be, Dorabella, the tenth variation.

CAE –	Caroline Alice Elgar (the composer's wife)
HD S-P –	H D Steuart-Powell (amateur pianist)
RBT –	R B Townshend (author)
WMB –	W M Baker (country squire)
RPA –	R P Arnold (son of Matthew Arnold)
Ysobel –	Isabel Fitton (amateur viola player)
Troyte –	A Troyte Griffith (architect)
WN –	Winifred Norbury
Nimrod –	A J Jaeger (on the staff of Novello's)
Dorabella –	Dora Penny (later Mrs Richard Powell)
GRS –	G R Sinclair (organist, Hereford Cathedral) and Dan, his bulldog.
BGN –	B G Nevison (amateur cellist)
(***) –	Lady Mary Lygon (later Trefusis)
EDU –	'Edu', the name Elgar was called by his wife.

**RICHARD STILGOE**

# ENIGMA

by Richard Stilgoe

BEFORE THE PIECE, PLEASE PLAY BAR ONE.

To help remember that, think of the words “Good Companions”.

AND BARS SEVEN AND EIGHT

And to help remember that, think “You need a friend, or you go round the bend”.

## INTRODUCTION

Elgar’s the name, and music’s the game  
You may think – for I owe music what little fame  
I’ve achieved. But sometimes it is mouldy old stuff  
And I’d rather watch football. But, here – that’s enough.  
Mouldy old music – it does make me glum,  
And sometimes I do take it out on a chum.  
So I’ve written these pieces, making amends  
For the terrible drubbing I’ve given my friends.  
I’ve called it “*Enigma*” because it seems strange  
That one man should know such a very wide range  
Of people, each mirroring different facets  
Of me. My dear friends. They are life’s greatest assets.  
Here is the theme, and then you’ll begin  
To meet all the friends I have pictured within.

PLAY THEME, STOP ON PAUSE BEFORE 2

“The lady”, we call her. Alice, my wife.  
She calms me, she charms me, she orders my life,  
And when I explode with frustration  
She isn't distressed  
She simply ignores me, and waits.  
Which is probably best.

PLAY VARIATION I (C.A.E.) from 2  
STOP AT 5

I play the violin, Nevison plays the cello,  
And Hew Steuart-Powell (who's a damn' nice fellow)  
Plays the piano in our jolly little trio –  
Not with great correctness, but always with great brio!  
Though he's getting better. I told him “Hew the fact is  
You've simply got to work at it. You've simply got to practise!”

PLAY VARIATION II (H.D.S-P.)  
STOP BEFORE 8

My friend Townshend is deaf, rides a trike  
And prospected for gold in New Mexico.  
He'll tell you tall stores, as tall as you like,  
And then he'll repeat them, and not let you go.  
He's a classical scholar, a first-class shot,  
He once was a cowboy on a Colorado station  
And he's deaf – so you have to repeat yourself a lot.  
That should be enough for one variation.

PLAY VARIATION III (R.B.T.)  
STOP BEFORE 11.

William Meath Baker's a man of decision  
A punctual person, a man of precision.  
We call him the squire. He is wiry and keen  
And a slammer of doors – you'll hear what I mean.

PLAY VARIATION IV (W.M.B.)  
STOP BEFORE 15

Richard Arnold's father was a pretty well-known poet –  
(Matthew Arnold – Scholar Gypsy – I'm sure you know it)  
Poets are lonely – Richard is not.  
He likes parties and people and laughing a lot  
And his laugh – well, you'll hear what an odd laugh he's got.

PLAY VARIATION V – (R.P.A.) Nos. 15 – SECOND BEAT OF 19  
STOP.

Ysobel Fitton is tall and thin –  
Slightly too tall for the violin.  
So she plays the viola. I taught her to play –  
And because of her size, I have made her tune say  
“From my feet to my head is a very long way”.

PLAY VI (YSOBEL) FROM 2<sup>nd</sup> BEAT OF 19.  
STOP BEFORE 23.

Troyte Griffith likes to argue.  
Troyte Griffith plays chess.  
Troyte Griffith's an architect  
And plays the piano (more or less)  
With one finger of either hand –  
He thinks it's grand. I can't stand  
The noise. It drives me round the bend!  
But he's a friend.

PLAY VARIATION VII (TROYTE)  
STOP BEFORE 30.

Winifred Norbury. Lord, what assistance  
I've gained from her patience, her gentle persistence.  
Each time I finish a piece, she will play it  
And form an opinion and, bless her, not say it.  
Reliable Winifred, sure as the trills  
Of the birds and songs of the woods and the hills.

PLAY VIII (W.N.)  
AND SUSTAIN THE 'G' IN THE BAR BEFORE 33  
UNDER THE NEXT POEM

Nimrod's a hunter. Hunter in German  
Is Jaeger. My good friend who helped reaffirm and  
Rebuild what depression was tearing asunder.  
Without you, I swear that I should have gone under.  
Oh, Jaeger, the hunter who hunted my woes  
And killed them, so I should be free to compose.  
This musical shoulder, for all of mankind  
To cry on, rely on – I think that you'll find  
This one is the best, from beginning to end –  
For the rest are just friends. Nimrod is my best friend.

PLAY VARIATION IX (NIMROD)  
STOP BEFORE 38

Dora Penny – oh, how many  
Times would I have given any-  
Thing to – no – I daren't reveal.  
Men are not supposed to feel.

Dorabella – unaware.  
You will never understand.  
I reach out to touch your hair –  
Every time, draw back my hand.

When gripped by things you cannot grasp  
A sigh can come out as a rasp,  
And what was meant to be a smile  
Twists, distorts, and comes out vile.

I shall pick upon your stammer  
Stuttering woodwinds mock your speech  
Smash my passion with a hammer  
Keep you safely out of reach.  
Cruel? Yes – and certain to annoy you –  
But if I showed my love, it would destroy you.

PLAY VARIATION X (DORABELLA – INTERMEZZO –  
38 TO END OF 46)  
STOP

This one isn't a man, it's a bulldog called Dan.  
Sinclair chucks him a log and the funny old dog  
Brings it back double quick  
Barking "You dropped your stick!"  
Sinclair throws it again,  
And the dog wags his tail  
And thinks that all men  
Are several notes short of a scale.

PLAY VARIATION XI (G.R.S.) - 47 TO END OF 51  
STOP

I introduced Hew Steuart-Powell,  
(The pianist in our band of three),  
Well, B.G.N. is Nevison,  
Our cellist. (The violin is me)  
The cello in a trio gets drowned  
But if you write its music high  
It lifts itself above the sound –  
Go on, Basil – have a try.

PLAY VARIATION XII (B.G.N.) - 52 TO END OF 54.  
STOP

Three little stars stand for three little letters –  
A word never said by our elders and betters –  
Or 'Sweet Little Mary' perhaps it could be –  
Mary Lygon, dear Mary. Dear Mary. Dear Me!  
Come to me, Mary, and make me complete  
(I must make sure Mary and Dora don't meet)  
For each is adored, and has all of my heart –  
And I only have both if I keep them apart.

PLAY VARIATION \*\*\* ROMANZA – 55 TO END OF 60.  
STOP.

And those are my friends, here pictured within –  
That “Within” is a clue, for you cannot begin  
To get inside someone at all till you’ve met  
All his friends – and from each new acquaintance you get  
A view of the man through a new pair of eyes.  
Just one variation would simply be lies.  
I’m the sum of my friends. Each one is a part.  
Between them they make up my head and my heart.  
And there’s the enigma – so simple you see  
Each variation could possibly be  
Not the truth about them  
But the truth about me.

PLAY VARIATION XIV – FINALE (61 TO END)

© RICHARD STILGOE

