Sir Arnold Bax, English Composer (1883-1953)

Sir Arnold Bax was a writer and composer with a love of English literature and poetry, including William Butler Yeats. He studied in London and later settled in Dublin where he wrote poetry, short stories, plays and music. His music evokes the rich heritage of the British Isles.

Tintagel  composed in 1919, duration is 15 minutes

Tintagel is the name of a castle in England that is the legendary birthplace of King Arthur. The ruins still exist and many fans of the King Arthur story make pilgrimages there to see it. Composer Sir Arnold Bax wrote a tone poem evoking the setting of this Arthurian legend. The fable tells of how Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawain, riding with King Arthur, came upon a remote site at the edge of the sea where they found the ruins of an old castle. An aged priest reveals the story of King Arthur’s birth - that the castle, Tintagel, fell into a mystic decline decades before because, while King Gorlois was away, his Queen, Igraine, was deceived by the magic of Merlin to believe her husband had returned. To her chamber she accepted the rival King Uther, who was perfectly disguised. The child she conceived, in honorable sin, was named Arthur, who, from his lowly birth in disgrace, would one day become the most worthy and revered King. Bax creates a sonic canvas for this story that conjures the mystique of the castle at the edge of the frothy sea.
Nielsen’s Violin Concerto is a flash-back to the flair of the great Baroque traditions.

For example, the opening Largo is set off in the manner of a Baroque Prealudium, calling at once for an ambitious cadenza from the soloist. This jumps right into a high-energy storm of color. Reflecting Bach-ward once again, at the very beginning of the second big section marked Poco adagio the music begins with a quote of the famous Bach motive:

\[ \text{which in German spells out “Bach”} \]

This is called a musical cryptogram.

It is worth noting that Johann Sebastian Bach himself was fascinated by such numerology and that very same sequence of tones shows up often throughout his music. But while Bach most often used those tones in his harmonizations and counterpoint, Nielsen uses them as seeds for the principal theme of the Poco Adagio. The concerto ends with a dramatic and adventurous cadenza for the violin and a race between orchestra and violin soloist to the finish!

Jennifer Koh, violin soloist

Jennifer Koh is dedicated to performing the violin repertoire of all eras from traditional to contemporary, believing that the past and present form a continuum. She is also committed to exploring connections in the works she performs, searching for similarities of voice among diverse composers and associations within the works of a single composer. She is especially fascinated with Johann Sebastian Bach’s music and is releasing a 3 CD series called Bach and Beyond which includes the music of diverse composers with musical connections to Bach. She travels the world performing recitals and soloing with orchestras.
Sir Edward Elgar, English Composer (1857-1934)

Sir Edward Elgar grew up in a music shop—his father’s—where he learned to play many instruments and began composing. He did not enjoy success as a composer until later in his life when he was recognized for his “Enigma” Variations, and several other pieces. It is now one of classical music’s most enjoyed pieces of music, both for its beauty and for the interesting musical portraits that its creates.

“Enigma” Variations, Op. 36 composed in 1899, duration is 29 minutes

The “Enigma” Variations are based on a theme, the origin of which Sir Elgar never revealed to the listeners, hence its “enigma.” There are 14 variations, each a musical portrait of someone that Sir Elgar knew well. Elgar writes, “It may be understood that these personages comment or reflect on the original theme & each one attempts a solution of the Enigma.” Many people have tried to solve the enigma of the theme (Sir Elgar claimed that it was based on a well known tune which he altered in some unusual way creating a “hidden melody”) and some say there must be a musical cryptogram in the theme, because Sir Elgar loved puzzles and sometimes sent musical cryptographic messages to friends. To this day, the enigma has not been solved!

After hearing the theme we hear each of the variations in turn:

1 - Listesso tempo..............Caroline Alice Elgar, Sir Elgar’s wife
2 - Allegro......................H.D. Steuart-Powell, a pianist and chamber musician
3 - Allegretto..................R.B. Townsend, Oxford professor and author
4 - Allegro di molto...........W.M. Baker, a squire (man of high social standing and landowner)
5 - Moderato....................R.P. Arnold, a pianist and son of a poet
6 - Andantino...................Isabel Fitton, a viola student of Sir Elgar’s
7 - Presto.......................A.T. Griffith, an architect and one of Sir Elgar’s closest friends
8 - Allegretto..................Winifred Norbury, a secretary at the Worcester Philharmonic Society
9 - Adagio.......................A.J. Jaeger (Nimrod), a music publisher and a close advisor to Sir Elgar, who often gave him encouragement and advice when the composer was feeling down about his music
10 - Intermezzo: Allegretto...Dora Penny, close friend
11 - Allegro di molto..........G.R. Sinclair, organist at Hereford Cathedral—this variation is inspired by his bulldog!
12 - Andante....................B.G. Nevinson, cellist and friend
13 - Andante....................Lady Mary Trefusis, a well-to-do sponsor of a local music festival
14 - Moderato....................Sir Edward Elgar, a self portrait

Variation 9, often called “Nimrod,” is the most well-known variation and in fact is often performed by itself. The story goes that Sir Elgar was feeling depressed and was going to stop writing music, but his friend A.J. Jaeger came to his house and reminded him that Ludwig van Beethoven also became depressed but continued to write incredibly beautiful music. The beginning of the variation has a hint of Beethoven’s “Pathetique” Piano Sonata.
Explore and Learn:

Can you create your own musical cryptogram? The most famous is Bb, A, C, B natural (spelled with an “H” in German) which spells Bach. Here is a key for creating your own musical cryptogram:

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- Since 1940, the orchestra’s permanent home has been Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Landmark designed by Eliel and Eero Saarinen with an international reputation as one of the finest concert halls in the United States.