

PROGRAMME NOTES: This is the second of “Three Songs” written to the poetry of John Ferns and about the great English composer Edward Elgar.

The revival of Elgar’s popularity, during the 1960s and a generation after his death, was aided by a landmark TV biopic on the life of the composer produced by Ken Russell. One stunning motif of this film is the sight of a majestic white horse galloping over the Malvern Hills (to music from Elgar’s “Introduction and Allegro for Strings”,) a beauty spot, near his hometown of Worcester, where he would go for walks while creating new music in his mind.

My friend and fellow Dundasian John Ferns had this scene and movie in mind when he wrote the poem “Elgar at Worcester”.

Elgar at Worcester

Text: John Ferns

Dream of a white horse
on the Malvern hills,
music lessons in the leaner years,
your wife beside you ruling the music lines.

What “In Haven,” did she say?
“Love alone will stand.
Love alone will last.
Love alone will stay.”

Her death left you alone
with dogs and memories
life witnessed now
beneath three microscopes.

Your music rises –
a cathedral in the breeze.
What changed perspectives
in these hills and trees,
Newman’s *Gerontius*
the mass alive,
moving in these,
and later still
your final wish –
your ashes scattered
at the Severn’s source.