

Sir Edward Elgar: forgotten musical genius revisited

THE NETHERLANDS | It is one hundred and fifty years since the birth of one of history's most talented but almost forgotten composers and musicians. The life and works of Sir Edward Elgar are to be celebrated with four concerts that promise to surround audiences in sound, passion and classical colour.

By Andrew Balcombe

On behalf of the 20th Century Song Foundation, four concerts entitled Songs of Sir Edward Elgar will be playing in Rotterdam, The Hague, Amsterdam and Eindhoven until 31 October. Among the works to be performed of the great English classical composer, is the magnificent song-cycle Sea Pictures.

Elgar's songs will be in combined with the projection of paintings made by his contemporaries such as Nocturne blue and silver-Chelsea (1871) by James Abbott McNeill Whistler and Winter Sea (1925-1937) by Paul Nash.

While colour-rich images flood the audience's vision, celebrated English soprano Amanda Roocroft and the up and coming English baritone Konrad Jarnot, will wrap listeners up with the melody of their voices. Both will be accompanied by the well-known Dutch pianist Reinild Mees.

As artistic leader of the 20th Century Song Foundation and the force behind the Elgar concerts, Mees told *The Times* "I just rehearsed today with Amanda and Konrad in Rotterdam, it is going to be so nice to listen too, because Elgar has heart and



The talented British soprano Amanda Roocroft, one of the performers singing in four concerts to celebrate the works of Sir Edward Elgar.
Photo 20th Century Song Foundation

soul and it just pores out through the songs."

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934) was an English Romantic Composer who only struck fame when he was 47. He is best known for several major orchestral works including the Pomp and Circumstance Marches 1-4. From which, came the tune for

the song Land of Hope and Glory (1901). The tune then became the Coronation Ode for King Edward VII in 1902.

The vocal accompaniment to the music will be provided by the gifted English opera duo, "The English language is so beautiful for singing," said

Reinild Mees. "Everyone says this about Italian, but I think it is also so true for English." Baritone Konrad Jarnot is a recent winner of the Munich ARD International Music competition in 2000 and is of English, Polish and French origins. He made a successful debut at the Royal Opera House in June 2007 as Don Fernande in (FIDELIO). "I have to say that when he opens his mouth to sing, people are flabbergasted."

Amanda Roocroft is a regular at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and at the Glyndebourne Festival. Mees describes the gifted soprano's performances to those of an angel. "The way she looks, behaves and sings is like an angel and she gives herself so completely to what she is doing. Amanda is the complete professional. Last night she got a call to go to Amsterdam and sing the last four songs of a Strauss concert for the Shell company and she was magnificent."

Reinild Mees is a well known Dutch pianist who is accompanying the singers. She describes her own affinity with music to being "as natural as reading the newspaper. As an accompanist for chamber music, I have to dictate the tempo and match the music to the voices and the artists." Mees said she wanted to provide a different experience for the audience for the Elgar concerts, "I thought the older ways need to be more visual. The combination of music and pictures is like a kind of slow motion film, a mini opera, something unique. It's hard to convince people just how magical the whole effect is, but once they come they won't want to leave." For concert dates and venues: see opposite page.