



EDWARD GREGSON

The composer is taken in for questioning.

What is the work you are burning to write, and why?

It's about time I wrote a symphony, but having recently written a large-scale choral work (*The Dance, forever the Dance*), I would like to combine large-scale symphonic form with solo voices and choir, perhaps not so grandiose as Mahler 8, but certainly going in that direction

What would be your dream line-up for this piece?

As long as I had a conductor whom I trusted absolutely, the rest would take care of itself. However I would be very happy if the orchestra was the BBC Philharmonic, a great orchestra with lots of heart.

What are your favourite instruments?

The piano, because it has the greatest literature written for it. I've been trying to master the instrument since the age of ten but never will.

What is your earliest musical memory?

In the first year of grammar school, I was 11 years old, and the music master put on a record during what was called a 'Musical Appreciation' lesson. It was Brahms' Symphony No 1, and it transported me to another planet. All that raw passion: I was never the same after that, and from that moment I realised that I wanted to be a composer. Of course, I couldn't articulate it quite in that way, but from then on I had an inner longing to invent music of my own.

Where do you compose?

In a small room upstairs. It has a large desk, a piano and lots of manuscript paper. I overlook trees and sky: back to the womb...

What objects are always with you when you compose?

A pencil and a rubber (or for American readers, an eraser!).

What is your favourite moment in any piece of music?

If you mean the 'tingle factor', it can be at any moment during a piece, but of course it depends very much on which composer you are listening to. If it is Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Stravinsky or a few others, then there are likely to be many such moments.

How would you spend your perfect day?

In a cottage in the middle of nowhere, overlooking a lake. After cooking breakfast of bacon, eggs, coffee and toast, a walk with my wife Sue and our two dogs; then a few hours of composing, followed by late afternoon tea and scones, a short nap, then a wonderful meal with a good bottle of claret. And so to bed: sheer bliss.

Which musical figure from the past would you most like to have met?

Not Brahms; he was a grumpy old bugger. Perhaps Stravinsky, because he probably wouldn't have talked about music (he might have moaned about his publisher, but we all do that...), and would have been fun, with that wicked grin.

How do you deal with composer's block?

It depends if it is short-term or long-term. The short-term solution is to go and get another cup of coffee or a gin and tonic (depending on the time of day of course). If it's longer-term, you simply have to give yourself a break and forget composing. In any case, so much of my time these days is taken up with running a large conservatoire that composing is sheer joy. I seem to have got over composer's block (there's a moral there somewhere).

Complete this sentence: If I ruled the world...

...I would grant every child the opportunity of having free music education, including learning instruments. The world might be a different place: the capacity of music to open up people's minds and to change lives is infinite.

Edward Gregson is Principal of the Royal Northern College of Music, which, in collaboration with the BBC Philharmonic, presented a survey of his music in February. The programme included the composer's Clarinet Concerto in a performance by Michael Collins with the BBC Philharmonic; the same forces perform the work on a CD which Chandos will release

David Hill will conduct the Bach Choir and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in the London premiere of Edward Gregson's *The Dance, forever the Dance*, Royal Festival Hall, June 19. The concert will be given in aid of Voluntary Service Overseas