

BBW Castaway

With Katrina Marzella



It is a pleasure to welcome the composer, **Edward Gregson**, to our desert island this edition.

Growing up in the Salvation Army, Edward (or 'Eddie' as he is affectionately known) studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music, where his Quintet for Brass caught the ear of a certain Philip Jones. Geoffrey Brand soon contracted him to work for R. Smith, although he continued to compose outside the brass medium with increasing success. His early works, such as *The Plantagenets* and *Essay*, have become cornerstones of the repertoire and *Connotations* memorably propelled the banding world forward in 1977.

His *Trumpets of the Angels*, *Symphony in Two Movements* and *Four Études* are some of the most satisfying works I have performed, the latter two having received British Composer's Award nominations. His most recent composition is a euphonium concerto, recently recorded by David Childs and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra.

Now enjoying retirement after a distinguished career in academia, Eddie continues to compose with the fervour and enthusiasm that many a millennial would envy! He is one of the UK's most significant classical composers, as well as being a tremendous advocate of brass bands in the wider musical world.

Eddie's desert island listening...

1 *1st Symphony* - Johannes Brahms, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra /Rafael Kubelik

This was the first piece of classical music I remember hearing, as an 11-year-old at my first Grammar School, and it had a profound impact on me - in fact, I was blown away! It has stayed with me ever since and is music of profound depth, passion and compositional sophistication.

2 *4th Piano Concerto* - Sergei Rachmaninov, Stephen Hough/ Dallas Symphony Orchestra/Andrew Litton

Not the usual Rachmaninov concerto choice, but another of my early passions. Completed after the composer emigrated to the USA, it is a work of nostalgia and yearning - just the ticket for a hormone-charged

teenage boy! It certainly influenced my *Concertante for Piano and Band*, written just a few years later. Since then, I've been fascinated by the concerto as a genre and have written over a dozen for nearly every instrument of the orchestra, as well as four with brass band.

3 *Yesterday (and many other songs)* - The Beatles

When I was studying at the RAM, the Beatles were reaching the heights of their creative originality and most students really 'got them.' Of course, they wrote some of the all-time

greatest popular songs and *Yesterday*, with its string quartet backing, was groundbreaking and iconic. It also has personal associations for me, as it was the first record that Sue, my wife to be, bought me.

4 *Immortal Theme - Suite for Trombone and Band* - Ray Steadman-Allen, Andrew Justice/The ISB/Stephen Cobb

Playing in a Salvation Army brass band as a teenager and as an aspiring composer, I was influenced by two 'giant' composers in that particular repertoire: Wilfred Heaton and Ray Steadman-Allen. This particular work of R S-A is regrettably not often performed, but it is one of his most original in design and execution; its first movement contains a 12-note row - very daring - and the integration of gospel songs within a classical structure throughout the work is achieved with considerable panache.

5 *Symphony No. 41 - The 'Jupiter'* - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Orchestra Mozart/Claudio Abbado

Not to have Mozart on a desert island would be a loss too great to bear. Of course there are so many wonderful works to choose from, but his final symphony incorporates everything that is so 'human', dramatic and compelling in his music. The final movement is a master class in writing counterpoint!

6 *6th Symphony* - Gustav Mahler, Chicago SO/George Solti

I'd have to have one Mahler symphony on my desert island and this is one of the best, tragic and uncompromising though it is. I was commissioned by the BBC Philharmonic to write a companion piece to this symphony for the 'Mahler in Manchester Festival' in 2010. It caused me many hours of suffering!

7 *The Rite of Spring* - Igor Stravinsky, Columbia Symphony Orchestra/the composer

Most composers of today have been influenced by Stravinsky's music and, of course, 'The Rite' is the godfather of modernism - a work of such towering, groundbreaking originality that it is still difficult to imagine how he wrote it in 1913. When I first heard it as a student at the RAM, it sent me to another planet!

8 *The Trumpets of the Angels* - Edward Gregson, Black Dyke Band/Nicholas Childs

If I'm allowed to take one composition of my own, it would be one of my orchestral concertos (for violin, clarinet, or saxophone), but as this is a brass band magazine I would choose either my *Symphony in Two Movements*, or 'The Trumpets'. They are the two compositions of which I am most proud - a pity, then, that they are rarely performed! What's that I hear you say: 'but didn't you write 'Of Distant Memories'?... No, not me guy!

Book: *The Complete Works of John Donne*

I have loved John Donne's poetry ever since I studied him for my A-level exams - some of the most passionate poetry ever written.

Luxury item: A Steinway Grand Piano and library of great piano music - a chance, at last, to exercise all the hours of practice that I was too lazy to undertake when I was younger. ■



Edward Gregson

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