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Wednesday, 13 February 2019

## Youth shines: Savitri Grier in Elgar's Violin Concerto

Labels: [concert review](#)



Savitri Grier (Photo Kaupo Kikkas)

Holst, Elgar, Bridge; Savitri Grier, Salomon Orchestra, James Henshaw Reviewed by Robert Hugill on 12 February 2019  
Star rating: 4.0 (★★★★)

### A young soloist shines in Elgar's rhapsodic concerto, part of a fine all-British programme

Though Elgar's *Violin Concerto* never really disappeared out of the repertoire completely, during the period after the 1950s its popularity rather dipped and it seems to have held a tenuous hold thanks mainly to UK-based violinists. I remember hearing it performed by The Halle in Manchester in 1974, a continuation of the orchestra's long Elgar tradition when, instead of a major national or international soloist, it was performed by the orchestra's leader Martin Milner. The work's come-back, in terms of international stature, seems to date from the 1980s when Kyung-Wha Chung took up the work and I remember her performing it at the Royal Festival Hall. Since then the violin concerto has returned to its place alongside other major late-Romantic concertos.

I imagine that the young violinist Savitri Grier (she completed here Artist Diploma at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2017) is probably unaware of this back history and her performance of the solo part in Elgar's *Violin Concerto* alongside the Salomon Orchestra and conductor James Henshaw, in their concert on 12 February 2019 at [St John's Smith Square](#), is a heartening reflection of how the concerto has been taken to players' hearts. It is a large piece, and a taxing one, yet constantly delights and intrigues. Salomon and Henshaw placed the work last in an all British programme, starting with a pair of works which do not get the exposure they deserve, Gustav Holst's *Fugal Overture* and Frank Bridge's *Suite: The Sea*.

Written in 1922 after the first performance of *The Planets*, Holst's *Fugal Overture* reflects his fascination with fugue, yet the opening material with its bright rhythmic figures drew comparisons with the music of William Walton, and whilst the second theme is quieter, Holst soon returned to the opening material to create a bright and surprisingly upbeat ending.

Bridge's *The Sea* intrigues because of Bridge's links to Britten (the older composer taught and mentored Britten), the 10-year-old Britten heard a performance of *The Sea* and was knocked out by it, and you feel there are links to his *Sea interludes* from *Peter Grimes*. On its own term, Bridge's suite is part of his early, pre-First World War style before the strain of the war and interest in what was happening to music on the Continent drew his style to more austere, radical lines. *Seascape* opened in atmospheric fashion with some fine solos for the orchestral violas (Bridge's own instrument). Henshaw drew some fine fluid phrasing from the orchestra, and it flowed easily towards to terrific climaxes as if the waves were breaking. *Sea Foam* was fun and frothy, with a big tune too! *Moonlight* was lyrical and surprisingly romantic, yet the performance captured the mood. We finished with a terrific storm, yet after a quiet moment with the cor anglais Bridge brings the opening back as a conclusion.

In both works, Henshaw drew a terrific performance from the orchestra, flowing fluidly and playing as if this material was in their bones.

After the interval it was the turn of Savitri Grier in Elgar's *Violin Concerto*. The long opening orchestral introduction was rich in sound but started rather stately, yet gradually relaxed into a flexible tempo. Grier's tone was sweet and elegant, and surprisingly mellow. She sang Elgar's line effortlessly but brought welcome flashes of temperament. This was a poised performance, rather English in style as compared to the richer Romanticism of a player like Kyung-Wha Chung. Grier was wonderfully technically assured, keeping the music moving yet giving us lovely moments of peace. And Henshaw and the orchestra helped generate some thrilling excitement at the end of the movement. The *Andante* was beautifully sung, again with Grier's mellow tone, in an account which felt nicely balanced. Grier grasped all the opportunities that the bravura opening of the final movement provided, but gave us a thoughtful, inward account of the concerto. Throughout she seemed at ease with the concerto's style so that its constant changes of metre and harmony flowed naturally and were never restless. Henshaw drew a fine accompaniment from the orchestra, who made us feel they had been playing the music all their lives.

There was one final memorable moment at the concert, at the end as the leader Tara Persaud stood up to leave the orchestra applauded and presented her with a bunch of flowers. This was Persaud's final concert as leader, the end of an era.

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- [From play to opera](#): Marlowe's *Edward II* and Benjamin & Crimp's *Lessons in Love & Violence* - feature article
- [A romantic at heart](#): I chat to violinist Sarah Chang about her forthcoming Cadogan Hall recital - [interview](#)