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UNFINISHED MUSIC

PROFESSOR JEREMY SUMMERLY

There are a number of well-known unfinished novels. Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* remained incomplete at their authors' deaths in 1891 and 1940 respectively. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is a mystery in two senses: first, it is a murder-mystery; and secondly its ending is an unintended mystery because Charles Dickens died in 1870 when he had serialised only half of the novel. In the event, the story stopped dead, as did Edwin Drood. *The Knight of Sainte-Hermine* and *Titus awakes* were both interrupted by their authors' illnesses. Alexandre Dumas *père* was struck down just two chapters away from the completion of his Sainte-Hermine trilogy, whereas Mervyn Peake lived the last eight years of his life without writing, having barely started the fourth of his Gormenghast series in 1960. And while the deaths of Henry James in 1916 and P. G. Wodehouse in 1975 left *The Ivory Tower* and *Sunset at Blandings* incomplete, in both cases the writers left indications of how the books would continue. All of which examples pale into cultural insignificance next to Vergil's *Aeneid* (much of which is complete, but scenes of which remain unfinished), which the author wished to burn at his death in 19 BCE, but which Emperor Augustus insisted should be disseminated for posterity even in its incomplete state. Opera lovers and devotees of the music of Berlioz and Purcell have particular reason to be grateful to Augustus, for without his affirmative action, neither *Les Troyens* nor *Dido & Æneas* would have existed (although not all of the music for Purcell's opera has itself survived).

It is not the place here to reflect on the incompleteness of, for instance, Maurizio Cattelan's 2019 conceptual piece *Comedian*, where a fresh banana is stuck to a wall with duct tape.

There are three editions of *Comedian*, each of which was recently sold for a six-figure sum, and each of which comes with a certificate allowing the fresh banana to be replaced when it has perished. Or even of *Organ*^{2}*/ASLSP* ('As SLow aS Possible') by John Cage, a performance of which was begun in 2001 and is scheduled to end in the year 2640 – for those reading these words in 2020, that performance will remain incomplete.

In the realm of common-practice music, there are a variety of reasons for which works have remained unfinished. The composer may have died before finishing a piece, or they might have laid the opus aside, sometimes with the intention to complete it at a later date, and sometimes not. Or one movement may have be replaced by another, the initial movement thereby becoming a topic, as in the case of Beethoven's *Andante favori* (a Rondo in F major), which was the original slow movement of the 'Waldstein' Sonata of 1804; Beethoven replaced the *Andante* with a shorter *Introduzione* in F major. Touchingly, a composer's librettist may die before completing the wordbook (as in the case of Beethoven's planned opera *Macbeth*). Or a composer may lose sympathy with a libretto before even starting to compose, as in the case of Beethoven's *Alexander*. Or a composer might have made a rough copy of a work and only copied a portion in a fair hand; then the rough copy is lost. Or a work may have been banned by the censor before completion, as in the case of Beethoven's Cantata *Europens Befreiungsstunde* ('Europe's Hour of Liberation'), which never proceeded beyond the sketching stage of early 1814. Or a composer may have begun a piece, but the event for which the piece was being written was called off – this might have been the case for Purcell's 'Hear my prayer, O Lord', for instance.

When Mozart died prematurely (at the age of 35) on 5 December 1791, he left behind him an unfinished setting of the Requiem Mass. Upon Mozart's death, the composer's wife, Constanze, wanted to have the work completed (swiftly and secretly) so that she could pass the whole piece off as the work of her husband. Constanze approached Franz Süssmayr, who was in his mid-20s and had studied composition with Mozart during the last few months of the great composer's life. Indeed, Süssmayr and Mozart had grown so close

during 1791 that Süssmayr had become as much family friend as composition pupil. Quite how much of the Requiem is Süssmayr's work is a matter of speculation. If you believe Mozart's wife, then Süssmayr had access to 'scraps of paper' that contained many of Mozart's musical sketches for the uncompleted parts of the Requiem. Moreover, Constanze's sister insisted that Mozart had spoken in detail to Süssmayr about how the Requiem should be completed the very night before Mozart's death. Süssmayr, on the other hand, claimed almost a decade later that he had been entirely responsible for the composition of the *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei*. The fact that we'll never know makes this masterpiece an enigma as well as Mozart's glorious swan song. Purists will enjoy the opening movement (*Requiem aeternam*) to the full, since that survives complete in every detail. Thereafter, the work is exhibited in various stages of undress. From the *Kyrie* until the ninth bar of the *Lacrimosa*, the vocal parts and continuo line survive intact, and there are sketchy indications of the way in which the orchestral parts should proceed. The Offertory (*Domine Jesu Christe*) and *Hostias* survive in a similar state of near completion, whereas the *Sanctus*, *Benedictus,* and *Agnus Dei* may not contain any of Mozart's music at all.

The Requiem had been commissioned from Mozart by Count Franz von Walsegg, whose wife had died in February 1791. Walsegg was a rich eccentric, who liked to pay for music to be written, which he then claimed was his own. Mozart's widow was prepared to play Walsegg at his own game. Constanze quickly scouted around for someone to finish the Requiem so that she could collect the final payment of the commission. Initially Constanze approached Joseph von Eybler, a composer in his mid-20s who had studied composition with Mozart, and who had assisted Mozart in the rehearsal of one of his operas. Mozart had written in a testimonial for Eybler that he was 'a well-grounded composer, equally skilled in chamber music and the church style, fully experienced in the art of song, also an accomplished organ and keyboard player'. So Eybler was an obvious person to help out – talented, acquainted with Mozart's music and methods, and young and obscure enough not to draw attention to the compositional fraud. However, Eybler struggled, and quickly realised that he didn't have what it took to complete the masterpiece. Indeed, the Requiem remained a *bête noire* for Eybler since he had a stroke while conducting the work four decades later. It was only after Eybler had turned down the opportunity to complete the Requiem that Constanze approached Franz Süssmayr. If you respect Süssmayr's completion, then you'll want to believe that Mozart left fairly detailed sketches and was able to communicate his musical ideas clearly and succinctly on his deathbed. If you don't like the completion, then you'll believe that Süssmayr was flying blind and did the work of a second-rate composer.

Purcell's 'Hear my prayer' doesn't seem to warrant completion because we have no indication of what was meant to come next. It was copied by Purcell, in his own hand, into a manuscript now housed in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum (MU MS 88). In this manuscript, apart from Purcell's 'Hear my prayer', there are 11 other Purcell pieces and 34 works by others. At the end of 'Hear my prayer', there are several pages of blank music manuscript, which seems to indicate that the piece had not been copied in its entirety. Moreover, Purcell didn't include his trademark flourish with which he customarily finished copying a piece. By looking at Purcell's handwriting, and specifically the way in which the lower-case 'r' is formed, it seems that the piece was composed in 1685, and so possibly for the funeral of Charles II. The Merry Monarch allegedly converted to Roman Catholicism on his deathbed so there was no state funeral; in that case the piece that Purcell had started writing for the event would no longer have been required.

'Hear my prayer' doesn't warrant completion. What survives is part of a larger work, but the fragment is complete in itself. The same could be said of The Beatles song 'Free as a bird'. In New York in 1977, John Lennon made a demonstration cassette recording of a new song. The demo was never intended to be the finished product, but it does stand on its own for what it is. In 1994, the remaining three members of The Beatles took Lennon's demo to a recording studio and developed the melody and added lyrics. They added their three voices, drums (Ringo Starr), acoustic guitars (Paul McCartney and George Harrison), lead guitar and slide solo (George), bass guitar (Paul), and McCartney doubled Lennon's original piano accompaniment.

JL Free as a bird. It's the next best thing to be: free as a bird.
Home, home and dry; like a homing bird I'll fly as a bird on wings.
PMcC *Whatever happened to the life that we once knew?*
Can we really live without each other?

Where did we lose the touch that seemed to mean so much? It always made me feel so…

JL Free as a bird like the next best thing to be: free as a bird.
Home, home and dry…

Was it right to take the demo tape of a dead man, add some material, and repackage it for a modern audience? In that same year, 1994, an English composer, Anthony Payne, was doing a similar thing to Elgar. Indeed, he had been doing that thing on and off for over 20 years. To be fair to the remaining three of the Fab Four, John Lennon had never expressly forbidden the reconstruction of his demo song 'Free as a bird'. Apart from anything else, Lennon had no idea that he would be shot and killed on the Upper West Side of New York City in 1980. So he didn't feel he needed to protect 'Free as a bird' from being tinkered with. Sir Edward Elgar, on the other hand, knew very well in late November 1933 that he didn't have long to live. Elgar was very clear that he wanted his incomplete 3rd Symphony left well alone. 'Don't let anyone tinker with it', he said to his daughter, Carice, and his best friend, Billy Reed. 'No one could understand', Elgar said to them both. 'No one must tinker with it'.

On 7 January 1932, when Elgar was in his 75th year, Elgar's old friend, the playwright George Bernard Shaw, had written to Elgar: 'Why don't you make the BBC order a new symphony? It can afford it.' Ten months later, the BBC did indeed agree to pay £1,000 – in instalments – to Elgar for a third symphony. The BBC announced the commission on 14 December 1832, after the BBC had mounted a mini festival to celebrate Elgar's 75th birthday; the first instalment of the BBC's fee arrived in February 1933. The première of the 3rd Symphony was envisaged for May 1934 and Elgar wrote to Lord Reith, the BBC's Director General, that 'up to the present, the symphony is the strongest thing I've put on paper'. In fact, there wasn't much to show for it on paper. Elgar had clearly planned much, if not all, of the symphony in his head, but in October 1933, Elgar was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. Physically speaking, both Elgar and his 3rd Symphony lay in tatters. Sketches and ideas haunted the dying composer, but all that was left for posterity was 83 pages and a further 44 pages of duplicate material.

Elgar died on 23 February 1934 at the age of 76. On 17 August 1934, the Irish dramatist George Bernard Shaw opined to the violinist Billy Reed that to reconstruct an incomplete Haydn symphony might be possible given the 'symmetrical design' of its Classical form. But GBS thought that in the case of Elgar's 3rd Symphony, 'though Elgar left some sketches of a third symphony and was actually at work on it when he died, no completion or reconstruction is possible: the symphony, like Beethoven's tenth, died with the composer'. In the Preface to his biography of Elgar (*Elgar as I knew him*), published in 1936, Billy Reed wrote: 'All the attempts to complete the Venus of Milo with a pair of arms have failed. In Elgar's case, we have the arms without the statue: a much more insoluble problem.' The difference here is that the Venus de Milo was once complete. Elgar's 3rd Symphony never was. Or was it? Billy Reed wrote that: 'The material for a third symphony had been in Elgar's mind for years.

Some of the themes and ideas are written down in his scrapbooks, in various guises— frequently the same phrase is repeated in different keys. In the latter part of 1933 [months before his death] he began to get all these fragments—in some cases as many as twenty or thirty consecutive bars—on paper, though they were rarely harmonically complete. A clear vision of the whole symphony was forming in his mind. He would write a portion of the Finale, or the middle section of the second movement [a slow-moving Scherzo], and then work at the development of the first movement. It did not seem at all odd to him to begin things in the middle, or to switch off suddenly from one movement to another. It is evident that he had the whole conception in his head in a more or less nebulous condition.' On 27 August 1933, the American recording producer Fred Gaisberg witnessed Elgar informally present his new symphony at the piano: 'The opening a great broad burst animato gradually resolving into a fine broad melody for strings. This is fine. 2nd movement is slow & tender in true Elgar form. The 3rd movement is an ingenious Scherzo, well designed: a delicate, feathery short section of 32nds [demisemiquavers] contrasted with a moderate sober section. 4th movement is a spirited tempo with full resources, developed at some length…The whole work strikes me as youthful and fresh – 100% Elgar without a trace of decay…The work is complete as far as structure & design and scoring is well advanced. In his own mind he is enthusiastically satisfied with it and says it is his best work.' Billy Reed commented: 'The last movement was to be fiery and rugged; but I never could find out how it was to end.

Whenever I asked the question, he always became mysterious and vague, and said, "Ah, that we shall see," or something non-committal.' And it wasn't just the ending of the whole symphony that Elgar wouldn't share with Reed. Elgar also wouldn't be drawn on how the third, slow movement was to begin. 'Of the slow movement, he wrote the main themes out on a single stave for me to play them on the violin while he filled in the harmonies on the piano…and I could not induce him to begin the slow movement at the beginning. We always started at the middle section or what I imagined would be about the sixth or eighth bar.'

Elgar was still grappling with notating fragments of his 3rd Symphony up to his last days. As Billy Reed remembered: 'Alas! that there is no Coda to be found—he never played anything to show in what manner it should end, not even improvisation…he would be very restless and ill at ease, and would not discuss the symphony any more, and it would be quite a while before he became calm and resumed his normal spirits. Then his last terrible illness began, and so there was no more writing or playing until one day, not very long before he left us, he wrote in pencil, as he lay in his bed, this last example, probably the very last notes he put upon paper, and which he kept by him to show me on my next visit to his bedside. He would not say whether it was the end of the whole symphony. All he said (with tears streaming down his cheeks) was - "Billy, this is the end.'"

The story of Antony Payne's completion of the symphony is a moving one. It is a testament to Tony Payne's sensitivity, patience, humility – and, above all, his consummate musicianship. Payne's reconstructive surgery of Elgar's 3rd Symphony spanned a quarter of a century, and showed Payne going through trials and tribulations but eventually believing that the work could be satisfactorily completed. In the end, Elgar's surviving relatives agreed to let the reconstruction be heard. What swung it was the idea that, come 1 January 2005, the sketches that had been published in Billy Reed's *Elgar as I knew him* would pass out of copyright. These might provide enough material for somebody less able and less empathetic than Payne to try their hand at completing the work. So Payne was allowed to complete the symphony, which he did with awe-inspiring craftsmanship. The justification is the final product, support for which came across the years from a conversation that Elgar himself had with his doctor: 'If I can't complete the 3rd Symphony, somebody will complete it – or write a better one – in 50 or 500 years.' It took 63 years.

Legal wrangles also stifled the completion of Berg's opera *Lulu*. Apart from a few gaps in the 3rd Act, *Lulu* was mostly completed by Berg's death, but a significant amount of Act 3 wasn't orchestrated. The following portions of the third and final act were fully scored: the first 268 bars; the instrumental interlude between scenes 1 and 2; and the finale of the opera, beginning with the monologue of Countess Geschwitz. The rest of the work remained in short score with indications of instrumentation for much of it. Cannily and pragmatically, Berg had arranged a five-movement suite for coloratura Soprano and orchestra (known as the *Lulu- Suite*) to be performed if the opera never made it to performance. In the spring of 1934 Berg learned from Wilhelm Furtwängler that production of *Lulu* in Berlin would be impossible under the current cultural and political situation. It was at this point that Berg set the opera aside in order to prepare a concert suite. Erich Kleiber conducted the *Lulu-Suite* at the Berlin State Opera on 30 November 1934 (Kleiber had premièred Berg's first opera, *Wozzeck*) and despite an enthusiastic reception by some sections of the audience, the subsequent condemnation by the authorities prompted Kleiber's resignation from the opera house four days later and his subsequent departure from Germany.

The world première of *Lulu* was planned for November 1936 in Zurich, and Helène Berg (Alban's widow) asked the composers Schoenberg, Webern, and Zemlinsky if they would complete the work, but they all declined. Stravinsky and Dallapiccola later showed interest but to no avail. The problems of completion were sophisticated and specific, but achievable in the right hands. Some reconstruction was necessary, but the task was mostly the orchestration of two-thirds of Act 3 (where some pointers were given in the composer's short score, and Berg's orchestration of the *Lulu-Suite* also gave some clues). Helène allowed Acts 1 & 2 to be performed but not Act 3. Acts 1 & 2 of *Lulu* were followed by the last two movements of the *Lulu-Suite* ('Symphonic pieces from the opera Lulu') as an epilogue.

Notwithstanding the fact that the vocal involvement in these two movements from the suite was limited to the use of the coloratura Soprano for the last dozen bars, Berg's widow still thought that the work should be performed in this state and that nobody should interfere with its reconstruction. This was later described by the

Austrian composer Friedrich Cerha as 'a grievous offence against one of our greatest musical dramatists'. It cannot have helped that Schoenberg *et al.* had decided not to complete *Lulu*; their lack of time to devote to the project was misinterpreted as their having artistic reservations. So, restoration of *Lulu*'s Act 3 was embargoed by Helène Berg. In spite of this, Friedrich Cerha began working on the materials in 1962. Helène died in 1976 (at the age of 91) and the opera remined disputed until 1979 (43 years after Berg's death), when the first complete performance of Friedrich Cerha's reconstruction was given in Paris in February (conducted by Pierre Boulez) and July in Santa Fé (conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas).

History relates that Bach's *The Art of Fugue* was the last work on which Bach worked, and we're told that the composer died just before he had time to complete the final fugue. It's a touching story, but partially untrue. What is true is that JS Bach had evidently planned the layout of the publication of *The Art of Fugue* carefully and in advance, but unfortunately Bach didn't live to see the print's completion. The projected order had been:

4 Simple Fugues
3 Counter Fugues
4 Multiple Fugues
3 Mirror Fugues*
4 Canons

So, the collection was to finish with four canons, which were to follow 14 fugues (all on the same subject or variations of it). The third of the Mirror Fugues* was never written because Bach died before he had time to write it. This is known from an obituary written by the composers CPE Bach (Bach's most accomplished son) and Johann Agricola: 'His last illness prevented him from…working out the last [fugue], which was to contain four themes and to have been afterwards inverted note for note in all four voices.' So, CPE Bach settled for just two Mirror Fugues, but he placed an unfinished fugue after the four canons, right at the end of the collection. The unfinished fugue was a fine choice because: first, it is by JS Bach; secondly it is in the same key as *The Art of Fugue*; thirdly it is based on a subject that is similar to that of *The Art of Fugue*; fourthly Bach never completed it; and lastly – here is the clincher – the point at which the fugue dries up is the point at which Bach had just introduced his surname (the musical notes B-flat, A, C, B-natural – the German musical notation for B A C H) into the music. So, CPE Bach placed this unfinished fugue at the end of *The Art of Fugue* and appended the sentence: '*NB* While working on this fugue, in which the name B A C H appears in the countersubject, the author died.' The implication is certainly that this fugue was part of *The Art of Fugue*, although CPE Bach didn't explicitly say that. So, this is how the manuscript of *The Art of Fugue* ended. In the printed version, CPE Bach didn't include that tear-jerking sentence. Instead of which he prefaced *The Art of Fugue* by stating that his father 'was prevented by his eye disease and his death soon thereafter from finishing the last fugue, in which he reveals himself by name in the composition of the third section'.

And after the incomplete fugue in the printed version, CPE Bach then placed a chorale harmonisation that his father had seemingly dictated while he was on his deathbed. The chorale is appropriately: '*Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein'* ('When we are in deepest need'). This was how Bach's grieving son brought closure to an unfinished work. The final fugue wasn't the final fugue, and the chorale had nothing specifically to do with *The Art of Fugue*, but it did provide touching closure to an unfinished piece of music by a master of counterpoint. Crushingly, T*he Art of Fugue* didn't sell well, and in 1756, six years after his father's death, CPE Bach sold the printing plates for the cost of the copper alone.

Further Reading

Malcolm Boyd *Bach* The Master Musicians, 3rd ed. (OUP, 2001)
Simon Keefe *Mozart's Requiem – Reception, Work, Completion* (CUP, 2008)
Anthony Payne *Elgar's Third Symphony – The Story of the Reconstruction* (Faber & Faber: London & Boston; 1998)
Douglas Jarman *Alban Berg – Lulu* Cambridge Opera Handbooks (CUP, 2008) Jeremy