

Finale: The Art of Beginning

When Elgar completed the *Enigma* Variations in 1899 it still lacked the ending with which we are now familiar. His editor August Jaeger ('Nimrod') nagged him for something better and eventually, after much complaining, Elgar came up with the now-familiar extended fourteenth variation. When he finished it, he wrote on the final page of the score a quotation from the last of the fourteen sections of Longfellow's *Elegiac Verse*: 'Great is the art of beginning, but greater the art is of ending'. Perhaps wisely, Elgar omitted the next line: 'Many a poem is marred by a superfluous verse.'!

That expurgated final line was ringing in my ears as I contemplated the prospect of writing a finale to a new set of orchestral variations by multiple composers; Elgar may have had Jaeger breathing down his neck, but at least he didn't have the daunting task of following on from the work of thirteen esteemed composer colleagues. So I reversed the problem and thought of what I was doing more as a beginning than an ending. Conductors are generally a long-lived bunch (probably due to all that cardio-vascular exercise on the podium), so it is my hope – shared I am sure by all the composers involved in this project – that as Martyn Brabbins celebrates his 60th birthday he is just beginning . . .

John Pickard