

# ORATORIO

RTHK Radio 4  
10:00 – 11:00

Programme 2  
Sunday 13 May 2007

**MUSIC: Elgar --- The Light of Life 97 R 02 ## 1 ff**

**KANE: V.O. on 0:22 (> c.0:42)**

Hello again: this is 'Oratorio', and you're listening to the prelude to this week's work, "The Light of Life", by Edward Elgar, based on ch 9 of the Gospel of St John, about Jesus giving sight to a man born blind. Elgar called this prelude a "meditation", and it contains the oratorio's main *leitmotive*. [ 54 words]

**V.O. on 1:10 (> c.2:10)**

Oratorios, musical dramas, on all sorts of biblical and religious subjects were composed in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Most of them are completely forgotten by now, no doubt to the posthumous pleasure of playwright and music-critic George Bernard Shaw who regularly expressed his vitriolic irritation at the genre. Any composer worth his salt *had* to produce one; and Elgar is recorded as saying, towards the end of his life, that writing oratorios was "the penalty of my English environment". But as the greatest English composer of his time, Elgar raised the standard, and has left a number of choral works that are still sung. But he never completed his proposed *trilogy* of New Testament oratorios, after finishing "The Apostles" and "The Kingdom". The oratorio-singing tradition itself, though, has persisted particularly in the English-speaking world. [138]

**V.O. on 2:36 (> c.4:15)**

Elgar's "The Light of Life" was billed as a 'short' oratorio when it was first performed in September 1896 in Worcester cathedral, England. The composer revised it for another performance there in 1899. But at just over an hour, it's too long to fit our present time-slot, so we'll be omitting some sections, which I'll mention as we go on. Elgar had asked an Anglican clergyman friend for suggestions for an oratorio for the Worcester festival, and *he* proposed the blind-man story: "Call it



**MUSIC: Elgar      ## 15 – 16      6:56**

**KANE:** True to the *expectations* (if not the conventions) of English Victorian oratorios, Edward Elgar's "The Light of Life" ends with a massive rousing chorus, trumpets and organ and all : 'Light of the World, we know Thy praise'. This is a quintessentially *English* version of *oratorio*, which had begun in Italy some 300 years earlier, as rather simple musical religious drama, in the oratory chapel of St Philip Neri.

**MUSIC: Elgar      # 17      4:56**

Music 50:22

Words: 297 (exclud. Voice-over = 429)