

# Listen4 listening guides

## A brief guide to listening to Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor

This outline serves as a listening guide, or "road map," through a work being performed today. The intention is to help you follow along and enjoy it in more depth. We welcome you to email us with your reactions at [announcements@aspenmusic.org](mailto:announcements@aspenmusic.org). Now ... let the music begin!

Edward Elgar composed his Cello Concerto late in life, at the age of 62. Written after the end of World War I, in 1919, the concerto has a restrained, introspective, and somewhat world-weary attitude, reflecting not only Elgar's but the world's despairing feelings after such a cataclysmic event.

The concerto beautifully exploits the cello's ability to sing, to mourn, but also to soothe the senses. The concerto is played in four movements with almost no interruption.

1

### First Movement: Moderately slow (In Italian: *Adagio moderato*)

The opening chords of the cello announce a profound atmosphere. The solo clarinet and strings enter and the opening theme winds through the strings before the cello enters with its first solo statement. The cello's solo statements alternate throughout the movement in a call-and-response with the orchestra. Although there are very high sections in the solo cello, much of the movement is played in the instrument's middle, tenor-like range.

2

### Second Movement: Very fast and lively (In Italian: *Allegro molto*)

The opening chords from the first movement return played first with the bow and then plucked. An anguished cadenza-like section (a cadenza is an ornamental section played by a solo instrument, sometimes improvised) evaporates and a brisk section begins. Listen for the extremely quick notes in the cello, using a technique called "spiccato," where the bow bounces lightly on the strings. Bubbly playing in the cello is echoed in the orchestra with lively statements from the higher strings and higher winds in support of the soloist. Some say this movement represents the happier pre-war times, now lost.

3

### Third Movement: Slow, restful (In Italian: *Adagio*)

The cello's opening line in this movement creates a serene feeling and gives the cello a chance to sing, soaring above the orchestral accompaniment. The melody has a questioning air about it. Whereas the second movement is highlighted by perpetual motion, this movement is all long lines and heartfelt sentiment.

4

### Fourth Movement: Lively, fast (In Italian: *Allegro*)

An orchestral introduction yields to the cello, still in reminiscent mode at the beginning of the movement. Listen for the heavy-footed middle section with cellos and low wind instruments, which interrupts the flow briefly before the cello reasserts itself. The concerto comes full circle with a restatement of the deeply felt opening chords of the first movement before dashing to the end.