Imagine Elgar without his moustache. Not so flippant an approach to a great composer as it may seem, for there is, surely, an element of disguise about the whole of Elgar’s life and work. Yet he was intensely self-aware, and his correspondence and reported words often drop hints of a much darker world beyond the surface brilliance of his creations – a darkness which often colours the music. He was prone to depression; even at the height of his popularity he would...
feel that he was undervalued. In these choral works Elgar was already breaking with tradition through the importance of the role he gave to the orchestra; it was the orchestra which came to dominate his writing, beginning with the Enigma Variations in 1899. Cellist Antonio Meneses and the Northern Sinfonia have just made a stunning recording of Elgar and Ga’s cello concerti with his longtime friend and collaborator, conductor Claudio Cruz. Although I wasn’t involved in the recording, Avie Records asked me to write the liner notes for the CD, which I was very happy to do. The upshot of this project is that we’re very happy to present expanded versions of the Gal and Elgar essays as special Explore the Score features, including clips from Antonio’s new CD, due out in June. Today, we start with Elgar. Sir Edward William Elgar was an English composer, many of whose works have entered the British and international classical concert repertoire. Among his best-known compositions are orchestral works including the Enigma Variations, the Pomp and Circumstance Marches, concertos for violin and cello, and two symphonies. He also composed choral works, including The Dream of Gerontius, chamber music and songs. He was appointed Master of the King’s Musick in 1924. In musical circles dominated by academics, he was a self-taught composer; in Protestant Britain, his Roman Catholicism was regarded with suspicion in some quarters; and in the class-conscious society of Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Elgar’s top 10 list.