

Next on

Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, February 6, 2010, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

[Edward Elgar](#) (1857-1934). *Froissart Overture* (1890). London Philharmonic Orchestra, Leonard Slatkin. RCA 60073, Tr 1. 13:45

[Dorothy Howell](#) (1898-1982). *Lamia* (1918). Karelia Philharmonic Orchestra, Marius Stravinsky. Cameo 9037, Tr 1. 15:00

[Edward MacDowell](#) (1860-1908). *Lamia* (1888). London Symphony Orchestra, Kenneth Klein. EMI 49263, Tr 3. 13:12

Poets figure greatly in the world of classical music, of course, and John Keats touches all the music on this week's *Discoveries*. Edward Elgar wrote on the score to his *Froissart Overture* this line: "When Chivalry lifted up her lance on high," which is from the Keats poem "To * * * *," which is about a secret admiration for a lady, which has nothing to do with Froissart, who was a medieval French historian, who traveled all over England, who wrote about its glorious history, thereby causing patriotic Englishmen such as Walter Scott, who mentions him in *Old Mortality*, and our previously mentioned Elgar, to hold him (Froissart) in the highest regard as a metonymy for all that is great about England.

That's clear, yes?

Froissart was Elgar's first orchestral work to earn him wide recognition (it premiered at the famous Three Choirs Festival), and although he allowed that it could be a bit stronger, he still was fond of it late in life. Likewise, Dorothy Howell's *Lamia* was her entree to larger musical society—at the age of 20 she was a hit. Having entered the Royal Academy of Music at 15, Howell was no Johnny-come-lately, but *Lamia* astonished listeners by its sure form, imaginative orchestration, and liquid melodies, all produced by one so young.

Howell bases the music on the Keats version of the Greek myth, where a young woman, cursed, is changed into a snake. Her pleas to Hermes are answered, she is changed back into a woman and falls in love, but at the wedding celebration is recognized and denounced, whereupon she vanishes and her groom dies. The story is ripe for the romantic symphonic treatment, and it's interesting to juxtapose hers and the one by the American Edward MacDowell, who composed his *Lamia* 30 years earlier.

He was only 28 at the time he wrote it, but it wasn't published until long after, and never was performed during his lifetime, the premiere taking place months after his death in 1908. A debilitating illness and a traffic accident (he was run over by a horse-drawn carriage) sadly ended his composing and teaching. But his widespread influence in American music can be inferred from some of the names of the people who supported him in his remaining years: Victor Herbert, George Chadwick, J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and Grover Cleveland.

Sir Edward's fame is set, MacDowell's has waned and waxed, and Howell—buried in the same graveyard as Elgar—is hardly known, but it is our hope at *Discoveries* that they will not, like *Lamia*, vanish completely. May their poetry live on.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).