



# Elgar conducts Elgar

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## Edward ELGAR

**Enigma Variations**  
**Cockaigne Overture**  
**Pomp and Circumstance**  
**Marches 1-5**

**Royal Albert Hall Orchestra**  
**London Symphony Orchestra**  
**BBC Symphony Orchestra**  
**Edward Elgar**

(Recorded 1926-1933)

## Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

### Enigma Variations · Cockaigne Overture · Pomp and Circumstance Marches Nos. 1–5

Even in the 21st century, Elgar and the gramophone continue to represent the marriage of musician and new technology as a heaven sent partnership. They were both in the right place at the right time, fitted hand in glove and nurtured by two consummate artistic and technical matchmakers, Fred Gaisberg and Trevor Osmond Williams of HMV.

Elgar's first recordings were made in 1914 in the acoustic era. Aged 56, he was at the apex of his career as a composer. A string of large-scale choral and orchestral works as well as numerous smaller scale popular pieces placed him at the forefront of the British music scene, with acclaim in Europe and the United States together with several prestigious honours and appointments to his name. The obverse side of the coin, however, was already much in evidence, most pertinently to the composer himself. After the rapturous reception of his *First Symphony* and the *Violin Concerto*, the *Second Symphony* had been coldly received in 1911. Despite the public clamour for pomp and circumstance, these sentiments were already becoming out of kilter with the times and were to be tainted forever by the imminent experience of the Great War.

Elgar's trademark style was fast approaching a dead end with little place to go other than the tone-painting of the Straussian *Falstaff* or the overt nostalgia of the *Cello Concerto*. How perceptive the inscription of the *Second Symphony* "Rarely, rarely, comest thou, Spirit of Delight!" turned out to be for the composer's own waning inspiration. The combination of bewilderment at the slaughter in the trenches and the death of his wife shortly after began a prolonged period of withdrawal into disillusionment and creative block.

At just the right moment came the courtship of 'His Master's Voice' Gramophone Company Ltd. By 1914 it was the world leader in recorded sound engineering and had already started to build an estimable catalogue of serious music. Although the

acoustic process still required considerable reduction of forces, the recording of orchestral music was becoming more viable. The most recorded conductor of the time was Sir Landon Ronald and it was he who brought about the meeting of Elgar with the managing director of HMV, Alfred Clark. Given Elgar's increasing dissatisfaction with the superficialities of London social life, the isolation from his beloved Worcestershire countryside and the jolt of the non-renewal of his contract as principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra in 1913, the need for new stimulus in the capital was becoming urgent. His well-known enthusiasm for all manner of scientific experiment and innovation was the carrot fed to prompt a regeneration of musical enthusiasm and fulfilment.

The plot succeeded to the extent of inspiring Elgar to compose a short new work, *Carissima*, especially for his first sessions. The recording took place in January 1914, the month before the public premiere which was to be conducted by Landon Ronald. To secure maximum take up, its speedy release was scheduled as soon as the composer's approval would allow. Lady Elgar's diary effuses over her husband's satisfaction with the recording and the process in general. The composer was quick to appreciate not just the entertainment value but also the documentary worth of the medium. It was during these sessions that Elgar first met Fred Gaisberg, the American recording expert, who was to become as much an amanuensis in the studio as the composer's trusted editor, A.E. Jaeger, had been in the preparation of his works for publication. A contract for more recordings with HMV was signed on 16th May.

The real transformation, however, occurred with the development of electrical recording in the 1920s. Not only did the process itself become possible electronically, but in 1925, so did sound reproduction and amplification. Most significantly, it allowed

lifelike realisation of the full symphony orchestra to become possible for the first time. Already HMV's most prestigious flagship artist, Elgar's fervent endorsement and new recording projects would add untold potential and lustre to the catalogue. Several of his major works already recorded in the acoustic era were taken into the studio once again to take advantage of the latest advances.

Elgar's first electrical recording sessions took place on 27th April 1926 with a performance of *Cockaigne* with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra, but the 1933 remake with the BBC Symphony Orchestra included in this compilation immediately highlights the greater virtuosity and tighter ensemble of the recently constituted Boulton-trained orchestra, not to mention the ebullience of the composer relishing every moment even more fully than before. The first two *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* followed immediately, with the *Enigma Variations* the day after. Some of the *Variations* were rejected and remade more successfully on 30th August. Interestingly these 1926 recordings incorporated the organ for both *Cockaigne* and the finale of the *Variations*, but when the BBC version of the overture was set down, Elgar wrote to Rex Palmer in the Artists' Department of HMV stating that '*the organ can (must!) be omitted*'.

Some of the *Marches* feature minor cuts probably sanctioned to accommodate side lengths, but contemporary reports firmly trounce any other suggestion that Elgar's performances were interpretatively tailored for duration restrictions. *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 5* is another instance of recording just two days before a première guaranteed to generate maximum public interest. Given the

composer's impatience with the jingoistic high-jacking of these works by the time he came to record them, his high-speed volatility in the outer sections renders them unusually threatening rather than merely celebratory.

The importance of Elgar's recorded legacy cannot be overestimated. Richard Strauss was his only contemporary to record such a large number of his own works, but these were for the most part uncoordinated and rather piecemeal issues by comparison with the attractively presented Elgar Edition marketed by HMV in 1934 at the time of the composer's death. Moreover Strauss frequently seems inhibited by the extroversion of his own music, masking its essential features almost to the extent of wilful self-effacement and embarrassed sobriety. By contrast Elgar brings transparency, fluency and irrepressible zest to his own music. His flexibility and spontaneity are remarkable object lessons in natural rubato, phrasing and articulation. Nowhere is his distinctive *nobilmente* more accurately and subtly defined than in the coda of *Cockaigne*, which, stately as a galleon, resolutely refuses to sink under its own weight. Elgar was working with musicians he knew and trusted. The chemistry is palpable and evergreen, even when compromised by momentary slips in sound quality and execution. Unlike Britten, the other major twentieth-century composer, who produced his own recorded testament, Elgar's traversal significantly benefits by distance from the moment of creation. Mostly recorded towards the end of his life, it represents a rediscovery of the most personal music nourished by its own creator's objective clarity and refreshing honesty.

Ian Julier

## Producer's Note

The sources for the present transfers were British HMV pressings for the *Cockaigne Overture*, the *Enigma Variations* and *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* 3 to 5. Prewar U.S. Victor "Gold" label pressings were used for the first two marches, as well as for Take 1 in the "accidental stereo" restoration of the third side of *Cockaigne*.

A word is in order about this last track. From early on in the electrical recording era, it was not unusual to have two turntables running during the cutting of wax recording master discs. One might be kept as a safety for backup purposes; it could be recorded at a lower volume level in case the other matrix exhibited overload problems during playback. Sometimes both the original take and the backup were released, either to replace a worn-out master or for foreign issue. In almost all known examples, both turntables were fed from the same single microphone, recording monaurally from one position.

In a handful of instances, however, two microphones appear to have been used, one to feed each turntable. Why this was done remains a mystery; perhaps there were mechanical problems with the usual equipment, or the engineers may have wanted to try out different microphones. Something like that was the case for a particular ten-inch, long-playing 1932 Duke Ellington recording for Victor: one matrix was given a prefix of "LBVE" for the older technology then in use, while another was given "LBSHQ" for their new "High Quality" recording process. In the early 1980s, record collectors Brad Kay and Steven Lasker noticed differences in the proximity of particular instruments on the issued version and an unissued test pressing of this recording. By synchronizing them on two tape tracks, they discovered that the discs had been recorded simultaneously but miked separately. They were, in fact, the left and right channels of a true stereo recording.

Kay continued to search for more stereo pairs, and eventually was able to locate and synchronize several recordings from the 1929 to 1933 period featuring such artists as Leopold Stokowski, Serge Koussevitzky, Eugene Goossens and the Elgar recording presented here. His restorations were featured in nationwide radio broadcasts in the USA (NPR) and Britain (BBC) in the mid-1980s. However, aside from the Ellington discs, none of them have ever been published.

For the present release, Kay kindly lent his copy of the alternate Take 1 of the *Cockaigne Overture*, originally issued on Victor in the United States in the mid-1930s. (It was also used in later British HMV pressings of the recording.) Using digital editing techniques and much trial and error, I was able to synchronize the two sides. The results will not be mistaken for modern stereo, but that was not the intent of the original engineers. From repeated hearings, it appears to me as though one microphone was trained on the center of the orchestra, while the other was pointed somewhat to the right.

This can be verified by consulting a photograph taken of Elgar during a recording session held in the same hall (Abbey Road Studio No. 1) some nine months earlier. (A blow-up of the photo in which seating details are clearly seen is featured on the cover of EMI's LP boxed set, "Elgar On Record" [RLS 713]). At this session for the composer's *Violin Concerto* with Menuhin as soloist, the strings are spread out across the stage with the winds behind them. The basses are along the far right, and the tuba is in the right rear. The French horns are positioned toward the left in the rear, while the rest of the brass is in the middle. (No percussion is visible for this particular session.) The sound that we hear on the synchronized "accidental stereo" sides accords with this seating arrangement. Some instruments can clearly be heard coming more from one channel than another; and although the sense of separation is not wide, it is actually more pronounced than in Alan Blumlein's intentional stereo test recording of Beecham conducting Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony, made in the same studio nine months later.

The concept of "accidental stereo" has always had its detractors, which may be one reason EMI reportedly shelved its plan to release a stereo reconstruction they had prepared for their Elgar Edition CD set of the composer conducting the *Prelude to The Kingdom* (a work recorded at the same session as the *Cockaigne Overture*). With this release, listeners can judge for themselves.

**Mark Obert-Thorn**

## Edward Elgar conducts Edward Elgar

- 1** **Cockaigne (In London Town) – Concert Overture, Op. 40** **13:39**  
BBC Symphony Orchestra  
Recorded 11th April, 1933, in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London  
Matrices: 2B 4174-1A, 4175-2 and 4176-1  
First issued on HMV DB 1935 and 1936
- Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), Op. 36** **27:12**
- 2** Theme 1:49
- 3** I. C.A.E. (the composer's wife) 1:54
- 4** II. H.D.S.-P. (Hew David Steuart-Powell) 0:44
- 5** III. R.B.T. (Richard Baxter Townshend) 1:25
- 6** IV. W.M.B. (William Meath Baker) 0:29
- 7** V. R.P.A. (Richard Penrose Arnold) 1:54
- 8** VI. Ysobel (Isabel Fitton) 1:22
- 9** VII. Troyte (Troyte Griffith) 0:53
- 10** VIII. W.N. (Winifred Norbury) 1:38
- 11** IX. Nimrod (A.J. Jaeger) 2:53
- 12** X. Intermezzo: Dorabella (Dora Penny) 2:32
- 13** XI. G.R.S. (George Robertson Sinclair) 0:48
- 14** XII. B.G.N. (Basil G. Nevinson) 2:15
- 15** XIII. Romanza: \*\*\* (Lady Mary Lygon) 2:03
- 16** XIV. Finale: E.D.U. (the composer) 4:31
- Royal Albert Hall Orchestra  
Recorded 28th April and 30th August, 1926, in Queen's Hall, London  
Matrices: CR 339-1A, 340-1A, 341-3, 342-1A, 343-1, 344-1A and 345-2A  
First issued on HMV D 1154 through 1157
- Pomp and Circumstance Marches**
- 17** **No. 1 in D major** **4:25**  
Royal Albert Hall Orchestra  
Recorded 27th April, 1926, in Queen's Hall, London  
Matrix: CR 336-2  
First issued on HMV D 1102

- 18 No. 2 in A minor** 4:03  
Royal Albert Hall Orchestra  
Recorded 27th April, 1926, in Queen's Hall, London  
Matrix: CR 337-1A  
First issued on HMV D 1102
- 19 No. 3 in C minor** 4:35  
London Symphony Orchestra  
Recorded 15th July, 1927, in Queen's Hall, London  
Matrix: CR 1454-2  
First issued on HMV D 1301
- 20 No. 4 in G major** 4:34  
London Symphony Orchestra  
Recorded 15th July, 1927, in Queen's Hall, London  
Matrix: CR 1453-1  
First issued on HMV D 1301
- 21 No. 5 in C major** 4:15  
London Symphony Orchestra  
Recorded 18th September, 1930, in Kingsway Hall, London  
Matrix: Cc 19740-2  
First issued on HMV D 1900

### **Bonus Track**

- 22 Side 3 of the Cockaigne Overture in "Accidental Stereo"** 4:52  
BBC Symphony Orchestra  
Recorded 11th April, 1933, in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London  
Matrices: 2B 4176-1A (left channel) and 4176-1 (right channel)  
First issued on HMV DB 1936 (Take 1A) and Victor 11665 (Take 1)

### **Special thanks to Nathan Brown, Brad Kay and Charles Niss**

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

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Edward  
**ELGAR**  
(1857-1934)

Playing  
Time  
67:35

NAXOS Historical

Royal Albert Hall Orchestra\* • London Symphony Orchestra\*\*  
BBC Symphony Orchestra† • Edward Elgar

- 1 **Cockaigne (In London Town) – Concert Overture, Op. 40†**  
Recorded 11th April, 1933 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London
- 2-16 **Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), Op. 36\***  
Recorded 28th April and 30th August, 1926 in Queen's Hall, London
- 17 **Pomp and Circumstance Marches**
- 17 **No. 1 in D major\***  
Recorded 27th April, 1926 in Queen's Hall, London
- 18 **No. 2 in A minor\***  
Recorded 27th April, 1926 in Queen's Hall, London
- 19 **No. 3 in C minor\*\***  
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- 20 **No. 4 in G major\*\***  
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Recorded 11th April, 1933 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London

The importance of Elgar's recorded legacy cannot be overestimated. His first recordings were made in 1914 in the acoustic era, at the apex of his career as a composer. However, it was not until the development of electrical recording in the 1920s, when a lifelike realisation of the symphony orchestra became possible, that Elgar's position as HMV's most prestigious flagship artist was confirmed. The recordings on this disc, made towards the end of his life, demonstrate the fluency and energy that Elgar brought to his own music.

Elgar conducts Elgar

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Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn  
Special thanks to Nathan Brown, Brad Kay and Charles Niss

A detailed tracklist can be found in the booklet

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Cover Photograph: Edward Elgar (Tully Potter Collection)



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