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**ELGAR**

ENIGMA VARIATIONS  
IN THE SOUTH (ALASSIO)  
SERENADE FOR STRINGS

# ELGAR

## ENIGMA VARIATIONS • IN THE SOUTH (ALASSIO) • SERENADE FOR STRINGS

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

### Variations on an Original Theme for orchestra (Enigma) (32.46)

1	Theme	(Andante)	Enigma	1.27
2	Variation 1	(Listesso tempo)	C. A. E.	2.56
3	Variation 2	(Allegro)	H. D. S-P.	0.45
4	Variation 3	(Allegretto)	R. B. T.	1.25
5	Variation 4	(Allegro di molto)	W. M. B.	0.29
6	Variation 5	(Moderato)	R. P. A.	2.12
7	Variation 6	(Andantino)	Ysobel	1.18
8	Variation 7	(Presto)	Troyte	1.00
9	Variation 8	(Allegretto)	W. N.	2.00
10	Variation 9	(Adagio)	Nimrod	4.02
11	Variation 10	(Intermezzo: Allegretto)	Dorabella	2.33
12	Variation 11	(Allegro di molto)	G. R. S.	0.58
13	Variation 12	(Andante)	B. G. N.	2.57
14	Variation 13	(Romanza: Moderato)	* * *	3.04
15	Variation 14	(Finale: Allegro)	E. D. U.	5.40

### 16 In the South (Alassio) 22.52

#### Serenade for Strings (11.58)

17	I	Allegro piacevole	3.24
18	II	Larghetto	5.40
19	III	Allegretto	2.54
		Total timings	66.38

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA SIR ANDREW DAVIS CONDUCTOR

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# ELGAR

## ENIGMA VARIATIONS • IN THE SOUTH (ALASSIO) SERENADE FOR STRINGS

### Enigma Variations In the South (Alassio) Serenade for Strings

*After a long day's fiddle teaching in Malvern, I came home very tired. Dinner being over, my dear wife said to me, 'Edward, you look like a good cigar,' and having lighted it, I sat down at the piano. In a little while, soothed and feeling rested, I began to play, and suddenly my wife interrupted by saying, 'Edward, that's a good tune.' I awoke from the dream: 'Eh! tune, what tune!' and she said, 'Play it again, I like that tune.' I played and strummed, and played, and then she exclaimed, 'That's the tune.' And that tune is the theme of the Variations.*

So Elgar recalled the evening of 21 October 1898, when the 'Enigma Variations' were conceived. Although universally known as the 'Enigma' Variations, Elgar's autograph score of the work bears the title 'Variations for Orchestra', the sobriquet, 'Enigma' – initially appearing only above the first statement of the theme. But this is the least of the work's puzzles. Each of the variations bears a heading consisting of a name

or, more usually, a set of initials. The dedication of the work, first performed at St James's Hall, London on 19 June 1899, is to 'my friends pictured within'. Writing to his good friend A.J. Jaeger, Elgar explains further in his exuberant, quirky and occasionally baffling prose style:

*Since I've been back I have sketched a set of Variations (orkestry) on an original theme: the Variations have amused me, I've labelled 'em with the nicknames of my particular friends – you are Nimrod. That is to say I've written the variations each one to represent the mood of the 'party' – I've liked to imagine the 'party' writing the var[riation]: him (or her) self & have written what I think they wd have written – if they were asses enough to compose – it's a quaint idee & the result is amusing those behind the scenes & won't affect the hearer who 'nose nuffin'.*

This type of exuberant writing is typical of Elgar and such japes and high jinks can be seen not only in the letters, but in the composer's most basic musical sketch books right through to the completed score of a work. In the case of the 'Enigma' Variations and those 'pictured within', it took some years for all of the composer's friends to be identified, helped by Elgar's notes

for pianola rolls made of the Variations around 1927. In all, twelve friends are depicted in the fourteen variations, Elgar's wife and the composer himself acting as musical book-ends in the opening and closing variations, respectively.

#### **Theme (Andante) - Enigma**

The famous G minor theme is built on short melodic fragments of four notes in length which supply the meat for the variations. This is followed by a contrasting, mellifluous melody in the woodwinds, leading into a reprise of the initial theme.

#### **Variation 1 (L'istesso tempo) - C. A. E.**

CAROLINE ALICE ELGAR, the composer's wife. Suitably the recipient of the first variation, it was she who seemingly encouraged Elgar to repeat the Enigma theme when he was improvising at the piano in October 1899.

#### **Variation 2 (Allegro) - H. D. S-P.**

HEW DAVID STEUART-POWELL. A pianist of note enough to be Hubert Parry's duet partner and a welcome member of chamber music evenings attended by the Elgars and others. His pianistic warm-up of running over the keys before playing is here mimicked in a manner the composer thought beyond Steuart-Powell's capabilities.

#### **Variation 3 (Allegretto) - R. B. T.**

RICHARD BAXTER TOWNSEND. A wide traveller, gold prospector, Native American sympathiser, Classics teacher, author, scholar and all-round eccentric, Townsend might have provided enough

material for a complete set of variations on his own. Elgar's take on him appears to be centred on a memory of a particular amateur theatrical event where Townsend's voice flew from baritone to soprano, as if his voice had never properly broken.

#### **Variation 4 (Allegro di molto) - W. M. B.**

WILLIAM MEATH BAKER. Country squire, sportsman and devoted Wagnerite. Apparently rather more a friend of Alice Elgar's, the variation is described by Elgar as the host (Baker) reading out the arrangements for the guests' horse-and-carriages for the day, before he 'hurriedly left the music-room with an inadvertent bang on the door'.

#### **Variation 5 (Moderato) - R. P. A.**

RICHARD PENROSE ARNOLD. Pianist and son of the poet Matthew Arnold. This variation portrays his serious demeanour which was shot through with whimsy and wit and a 'funny little nervous laugh'.

#### **Variation 6 (Andantino) - Ysobel**

ISABEL FITTON. The daughter of music-loving friends, Elgar taught her the violin and viola and dedicated a piano work, *Presto*, to her on her 21st Birthday. The variation includes a technical joke concerning an exercise for playing between the second and fourth strings of the viola, without hitting the third in error.

#### **Variation 7 (Presto) - Troyte**

ARTHUR TROYTE GRIFFITH. Architect, painter and stage designer, he was a life-long friend

of the Elgars. The music caricatures his hopelessly chaotic, if enthusiastic piano playing, and Elgar's frustrated attempts to 'make something like order out of chaos'.

#### **Variation 8 (Allegretto) - W. N.**

WINIFRED NORBURY. Friend, and co-secretary of the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society. The portrait extends beyond Winifred and her distinctive laugh to the 18th Century house in which the Norbury family lived – a building very much admired by Elgar.

#### **Variation 9 (Adagio) - Nimrod**

AUGUST J. JAEGER. Editor at Novello music publishers and great champion of Elgar's music. Nimrod, the Biblical patriarch was a great hunter (and the English translation of the German name, Jaeger), but this heartfelt tribute to a great friend appears also to refer to a period where Jaeger helped the composer out of a depression and to a particular long evening walk discussing Beethoven together. The depth of feeling in this variation has seen it come to represent numerous facets of England and it is regularly played at occasions both festive and ceremonial.

#### **Variation 10 (Intermezzo: Allegretto) - Dorabella**

DORA PENNY. An entertaining and welcome youthful influence on the Elgars, her nickname Dorabella, taken from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Her minor stammer is hinted at in the woodwind.

#### **Variation 11 (Allegro di molto) - G. R. S.**

GEORGE ROBERTSON SINCLAIR. Organist of Hereford Cathedral. Aside from Elgar himself, Sinclair is the only professional musician to receive a variation. The music's rushes, flurries and chordal flourishes might suggest the organist at work, but Elgar preferred to relate it to an event in which the Sinclair's bulldog, Dan, fell down into the River Wye and scuttled around before scurrying back up to dry land.

#### **Variation 12 (Andante) - B. G. N.**

BASIL G. NEVINSON. Cellist and piano trio partner of Elgar and H. D. S-P. (from Variation 2). Elgar describes the variation as 'a tribute to a very dear friend whose scientific and artistic attainments, and the wholehearted way they were put at the disposal of his friends, particularly endeared...'

#### **Variation 13 (Romanza: Moderato) - \* \* \***

Another Enigma. The clarinet quoting Mendelssohn's overture, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, and the timpani often thought to evoke the sound of a ship's engines have generally brought two names to mind. The first is Lady Mary Lygon, who was set to sail for Australia shortly after the work was completed, and whose initials appear in sketches of the 'Enigma' Variations. The other main candidate is Helen Weaver, to whom Elgar was engaged, but who set sail for New Zealand in 1885, and there died.

**Variation 14** (*Finale: Allegro*) - **E. D. U.**  
THE COMPOSER. EDU was a pet name often used in the diaries of Alice Elgar for her husband. This is an almost heroic self-portrait in what could be thought of as in a similar manner to Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*. But Strauss's tone poem and Elgar's variations were first performed a mere three months apart. There is a certain defiance in the music and according to the composer, it was written 'at a time when friends were dubious and generally discouraging as to the composer's future'. But, in a more positive vein, he added, 'this variation is merely to show what E.D.U. intended to do'.

As to the greater enigma of the piece, Elgar had this to say:

*The enigma I will not explain - its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes', but is not played ... So the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late dramas ... the chief character is never on stage.*

Early suggestions as to the 'larger' theme and its 'dark saying' led more than one of Elgar's acquaintances to suggest *Auld Lang Syne* as an appropriate valedictory or musical conceit. The search for suitably romantic, psychological, literary and musical 'themes' continues to

this day. Most common has been the holy grail of finding a tune that acts as a counterpoint or otherwise locks into the 'Enigma theme'. Candidates range from works by Mozart and Beethoven to *Auld Lang Syne*, through *God Save the Queen*, *Home Sweet Home*, (and even *Pop goes the Weasel!*) to the more recent revelation that the popular hymn *Now the Day is Over* fits the 'Enigma' theme like a glove. No doubt such solutions will keep coming, and Elgar's enigma, whether truly a 'dark saying' or just 'high jinks', will continue to provide happy hunting for amateur and professional musical sleuths alike.

By the time Elgar came to write his Concert Overture – *In the South (Alassio)*, he was already a composer of real note, having risen to national prominence with the 'Enigma' Variations. *The Dream of Gerontius* was making inroads, the first of his honorary doctorates had been conferred and his *Coronation Ode* for Edward VII's accession to the throne yielded another English classic in *Land of Hope and Glory*. The unheard-of honour of a three-day festival of Elgar's music had been planned for 14 - 16 March 1904, at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, for which many had hoped for a first symphony. Instead, Elgar produced his longest symphonic movement to date. *In the South* was conceived in the wake of the triumph of *The Apostles*, while the Elgars were wintering in Italy in 1903 to 1904. The overture's

moods rather reflect those of the composer at the time - fluctuating from morose to excitable and stoic to playful. The history and pleasures of Italy play their part, and a Neapolitan song even puts in an appearance. There are also unmistakable strains of his beloved English countryside, where the work was completed. Elgar's sketches for the overture's first performance at the festival cite the 'Joy of living (wine & macaroni) ... the exhilarating *out-of-doors* feeling arising from the gloriously beautiful surroundings ... in one direction & the blue Mediterranean in the other'. *In the South* was a huge hit at the Covent Garden Elgar festival, with the public and attendant royalty alike.

The *Serenade for Strings* takes us back to some years before Elgar's breakthrough '*Enigma*' Variations and is not only one of Elgar's earliest compositions to retain a place in the standard orchestral repertory, but also one of the most frequently performed of his orchestral works.

The *Serenade* is a little jewel of a piece and the first of his compositions with which the composer was well satisfied. Indeed, later in life he professed it to be his own personal favourite of his works. Completed in 1892, its origins lie in a suite written around four years previously, the final score and piano duet arrangement both bearing inscriptions in honour of his beloved Alice. The piece was formally dedicated to the memory of the philosopher, W. H. Whinfield.

The *Serenade* was first privately performed by the Worcester Ladies' Orchestral Class, a group Elgar was involved in training, but had to wait a further three years for a first complete public performance, in Antwerp, 1896. Ever close to his heart, it was one of the final works Elgar recorded for the gramophone in 1933, the year before his death.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

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### SIR ANDREW DAVIS

Sir Andrew Davis has served as Music Director & Principal Conductor of Lyric Opera of Chicago since 2000, where he will conduct four of

the eight productions presented in the 2008-2009 season. Maestro Davis is the Conductor Laureate of the Toronto Symphony (having previously served as the Principal Conductor), the Conductor Laureate of the BBC Symphony

Orchestra (having served as the second longest running Chief Conductor since its founder, Sir Adrian Boult) and the former Music Director of the Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Born in 1944 in Hertfordshire, England, Maestro Davis studied at King's College, Cambridge, where he was an organ scholar before taking up the baton. His diverse repertoire ranges from baroque to contemporary, and his vast conducting credits span the symphonic and operatic worlds. In addition to the core symphonic and operatic composers, he is a great proponent of twentieth century works including those by Janáček, Messiaen, Boulez, Elgar, Tippett and Britten.

With the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Maestro Davis has led concerts at the London Proms and on tour to Hong Kong, Japan, the US, and Europe. He has conducted all of the major orchestras of the world from the Chicago Symphony to the Berlin Philharmonic to the Royal Concertgebouw, and at opera houses throughout the world including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala and the Bayreuth Festival.

Maestro Davis is also a prolific recording artist. He has recorded for Decca, Deutsche Grammophone, Warner Classics International, Capriccio, EMI and CBS. Recent releases include the Beethoven Violin Concerto with violinist Min-Jyn Kim and the

Philharmonia Orchestra on the Sony label, and a CD of operatic favorites on the Decca label, featuring soprano Nicole Cabell.

In 1992, Maestro Davis was created a Commander of the British Empire for his services to British Music, and in 1999 he was made a Knight Bachelor in the New Year Honours List. In 1991, he received the Royal Philharmonic Society/Charles Heidsieck Music Award.

In the 2008-2009 season he conducts productions of *Lulu*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *The Abduction from the Seraglio* at Lyric Opera of Chicago and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at La Scala. He will be seen on the podium with the Munich Philharmonic, the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, the Deutsche Symphony Orchestra, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, and the orchestras of Melbourne, Toronto, Detroit, La Fenice and of RAI Torino when they perform at the Besancon Festival. Maestro Davis also returns to the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, and to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Maestro Davis and his wife, soprano Gianna Rolandi, reside in Chicago where she is the Director of the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago.

For more information about Maestro Davis, please visit his web site at [www.sirandrewdavis.com](http://www.sirandrewdavis.com).

# philharmonia orchestra

The Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. Acknowledged as the UK's foremost musical pioneer, with an extraordinary recording legacy, the Philharmonia leads the field for its quality of playing, and for its innovative approach to audience development, residencies, music education and the use of new technologies in reaching a global audience. Together with its relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, most importantly its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Philharmonia Orchestra is at the heart of British musical life.

Today, the Philharmonia has the greatest claim of any orchestra to be the UK's National Orchestra. It is committed to presenting the same quality, live music-making in venues throughout the country as it brings to London and the great concert halls of the world. Every year the Orchestra performs more than 200 concerts, as well as presenting chamber performances by the Soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and recording scores for films, CDs and computer games. Since 1995 the Orchestra's work has been underpinned by its much admired UK Residency Programme, which began with the launch of its residencies at the Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank

Centre, and now also includes De Montfort Hall in Leicester, the Anvil in Basingstoke and a series of partnerships across Kent and the Thames Gateway, based in Canterbury. The Orchestra's international extensive touring schedule each season involves appearances at the finest concert halls across Europe, the USA and Asia.

During its first six decades, the Philharmonia Orchestra has collaborated with most of the great classical artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Conductors associated with the Orchestra include Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini, Cantelli, Karajan and Giulini. Otto Klemperer was the first of many outstanding Principal Conductors, and other great names have included Lorin Maazel (Associate Principal Conductor), Riccardo Muti (Principal Conductor and Music Director) and Giuseppe Sinopoli (Music Director). As well as Esa-Pekka Salonen, current titled conductors are Christoph von Dohnányi (Honorary Conductor for Life), Sir Charles Mackerras (Principal Guest Conductor), Kurt Sanderling (Conductor Emeritus) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate).

The Philharmonia Orchestra continues to pride itself on its long-term collaborations with the finest musicians of our day, supporting new as



well as established artists. This policy extends into the Orchestra itself, where many of the players have solo or chamber music careers as well as their work with the Orchestra. The Philharmonia's Martin Musical Scholarship Fund has for many years supported talented musicians at the start of their careers and a new Orchestral Award, inaugurated in 2005, allows two young players every year to gain performing experience within the Orchestra.

The Orchestra is also recognised for its innovative programming policy, at the heart of which is a commitment to performing and commissioning new works by leading composers, among them the Artistic Director of its Music of Today series, Julian Anderson. Since 1945 the Philharmonia Orchestra

has commissioned more than 100 new works from composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Mark-Anthony Turnage and James MacMillan. The Philharmonia Orchestra's joint series with SBC, *Clocks and Clouds: The Music of György Ligeti*, won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Best Concert Series Award in 1997 and *Related Rocks: The Music of Magnus Lindberg*, was nominated for an RPS Award. Other recent awards for the Orchestra include the RPS Large Ensemble Award and two *Evening Standard* Awards for Outstanding Artistic Achievement and Outstanding Ensemble. In May 2007 PLAY.orchestra, a 'virtual Philharmonia Orchestra' created in partnership with Southbank Centre and Central St Martin's College of Art, won the RPS Education Award.

Throughout its history, the Philharmonia Orchestra has been committed to finding new ways to bring its top quality live performance to audiences worldwide, and to using new technologies to achieve this. Many millions of people since 1945 have enjoyed their first experience of classical music through a Philharmonia recording, and in 2008/9 audiences can engage with the Orchestra through webcasts, podcasts, downloads, computer games and film scores as well as through its unique interactive music education website launched in 2005, The Sound Exchange ([www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange](http://www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange)), which is now visited by almost 2 million people a year. In 2005 the Philharmonia

became the first ever classical music organisation to be shortlisted for a BT Digital Music Award, and in the same year the Orchestra presented the first ever concert webcast. Now more than 3500 people a month download free monthly Philharmonia video podcasts, which include artist interviews and features on repertoire and projects; these films are also watched by more than 60,000 people on YouTube. Recording and broadcasting both continue to play a significant part in the Orchestra's activities: since 2003 the Philharmonia has enjoyed a major partnership with Classic FM, as The Classic FM Orchestra on Tour, as well as continuing to broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

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**Enigma Variations** recorded live at Fairfield Hall, Croydon, 18 April 2007

Engineer - Mike Hatch    Producer - Misha Donat

**In the South (Alassio)** recorded live at Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 19 April 2007

Engineer - Mike Cox    Producer - Misha Donat

**Serenade for Strings** (courtesy of ONYX Classics) recorded live at Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 20 May 2007

Engineer - Mike Hatch    Producer - Misha Donat    Producer (Executive) - Paul Moseley

Photo credit - Richard Haughton

Design - Richard Slaney (for the Philharmonia Orchestra) and Andrew Giles

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