

SOMM
RECORDINGS



Elgar

Rediscovered

An anthology of forgotten recordings including the first issue of Elgar's recording of his *Elegy* with the BBCSO



- | | | |
|-----------|--|------|
| 1 | Elegy for String Orchestra op.58 (1909)
BBC Symphony Orchestra, Edward Elgar
HMV matrix 2B4180-1. <i>Abbey Road Studio no 1 11.iv.33</i>
<i>Premiere recording, hitherto unpublished</i> | 4:04 |
| | Sonatina (1889) | |
| 2 | Spoken introduction | 0:18 |
| 3 | Andantino | 1:24 |
| 4 | Allegro
May Grafton, Private recording. <i>Wetherby Summer 1960 hitherto unpublished</i> | 2:14 |
| 5 | Serenade (1932)
Alfredo Campoli & his Salon Orchestra
Decca F 3611. <i>March 1933</i> | 2:47 |
| 6 | La Capricieuse op.17 (1891)
Alfredo Campoli, Harold Pedlar
Decca F 3174. <i>Chenil Galleries, Chelsea 11.xii.31</i> | 3:23 |
| 7 | Coronation March op.65 (1911)
LPO, Landon Ronald
HMV DB 2437. <i>Kingsway Hall 7.iii.35 Premiere recording</i> | 7:54 |
| 8 | Edward German: Coronation March & Hymn (1911)
LPO, Landon Ronald
HMV DB 2438. <i>Kingsway Hall 7.iii.35 Premiere recording</i> | 6:55 |
| 9 | Coronation Ode op.44 (1902) – Crown the King
The Imperial Bandsmen
HMV 0316. <i>London 22.iii.11 Premiere recording</i> | 4:03 |
| | Scenes From the Bavarian Highlands op.27 (1895) | |
| 10 | The Dance | 3:43 |
| 11 | Lullaby | 3:41 |

Sheffield & Leeds United Choirs, Henry Coward
Columbia 328. *December 1912 Premiere recording*

The Dream of Gerontius op.38 (1900)

- 12 Kyrie 2:59
Stanley Roper (organ), Mrs Baker (piano), Sheffield Choir, Henry Coward
HMV C 977. *27.iii.20 Premiere recording*

The Fringes of the Fleet (1917)

- 13 The Lowestoft Boat 3:40
14 Fate's Discourtesy 4:06
Fred Taylor
Guardsman 2068. *London Autumn 1917*

- 15 **The Pipes of Pan (1899)** 3:41
Frederic Austin with orchestra
HMV 02180. *London 3.iii.09*

- 16 **Sea Pictures op.37 (1899)** - Where corals lie 3:11
Maartje Offers, Orchestra, John Barbirolli
HMV DB 1761. *Kingsway Hall 15.iv.29*

Concerto for Violin & Orchestra in B min. op.61 (1910) – abridged

- 17 Allegro 3:50
18 Andante 3:35
19 Lento (Cadenza) 4:14
20 Allegro molto 3:41
Albert Sammons, Symphony Orchestra, Henry Wood
Columbia L 1071/2. *London April 1916 Premiere recording*

- 21 **Salut d'Amour op. 12 (1888)** 3:04
Albert Sammons, Gerald Moore
Decca F 7530. *West Hampstead Studios 5.iv.40*

ELGAR REDISCOVERED

An anthology of forgotten recordings

On April 11th 1933, Elgar conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra for a recording session at EMI's Abbey Road studios. In addition to the records of *Cockaigne*, *Pomp & Circumstance March no 4* and the Prelude to *The Kingdom* which were issued soon afterwards and subsequently remastered for LP and CD, there was a final item, the premiere recording of *Elegy*. Elgar was sent test pressings in May by which time HMV's 'Record Testing Conference' had passed them for possible publication. Wulstan Atkins recalls visiting Elgar on 21st May and hearing the test pressings. He includes *Elegy* in the list of what Elgar put on the gramophone that evening and comments that the composer had said he had greatly enjoyed making the records and what a fine orchestra Boult had developed.¹ Two days after receiving the pressings, Elgar responded: 'The records have come & are very good.' However, in a letter that Fred Gaisberg the recording manager of HMV wrote to the composer on 23rd August, he refers to an earlier conversation in which Elgar had asked for the recording of *Elegy* to be repeated.

Elgar's final recording session took place in the Kingsway Hall with the London Philharmonic Orchestra on the afternoon of 29th August. First on

¹ E Wulstan Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1984), 457.

the agenda was the *Serenade for Strings* and then at the end of what was probably a long and somewhat arduous afternoon for a 76 year old who was not by then in the best of health, a new recording of *Elegy* was cut, making it the last music Elgar conducted. It was this recording that was issued shortly after Elgar's death – presumably someone at HMV considered that 'newest is best' – and this is the version that has been made available on LP and CD.

The assumption has always been that the masters and test pressings of the April recording were destroyed. What has now come to light is a test pressing from the April session and the handwritten annotation on the label "Bea from Carice" would suggest that this was the copy sent to Elgar. (I understand that the disc was part of a collection that came from the home of husband and wife, Peter Bates and Beatrice Sherwin. Both were pianists and I have seen their copies of the *Enigma Variations* piano scores – his dated 1931, hers 1934.)

What makes this such a significant find is that this is not merely a variant take of the published recording but a totally different performance made with a different orchestra and in a different location. More than that it certainly sounds startlingly different, much more alive – there is a much greater sense of ebb and flow, of this very personal music being treated with the utmost sensitivity, beside which the LPO record sounds rather penny-plain.

A year earlier, Keith Prowse, who had recently become Elgar's publisher, issued three short pieces for solo piano. One was a revision of the *Sonatina* he had written in 1889 to encourage the piano playing of his eight year

old niece. 70 years later, Jerrold Northrop Moore was able to persuade May Grafton (1880-1963) to allow him to record her playing 'her' *Sonatina* (from the original rather than the published version), making this the only recording of an Elgar dedicatee performing a piece dedicated to them.

Serenade was one of the other short piano pieces and arrangements of it were recorded in 1933 very soon after its publication, by the Cedric Sharpe Sextet and then two months later by Alfredo Campoli (1906-1991) with his salon orchestra. The earliest of his three recordings of *La Capricieuse* had been made two years earlier in 1931. In the 1950s, Campoli was to make a celebrated recording of the *Violin Concerto* with Adrian Boult. There is a story that he became known only by his surname when he tired of radio announcers being heard to say – apparently – “I’m afraid old Campoli has just played the Elgar Violin Concerto”.

HMV celebrated the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935 with a pair of discs adorned with special labels, containing marches by Elgar and Edward German (1862-1936) both of which had been written for the 1911 Coronation Service. They were conducted by Landon Ronald (1873-1938) who for many years was ‘music adviser’ for HMV, using his contacts in the musical world to help the company recruit the distinguished performers it needed and he became a founder director of EMI when HMV and Columbia merged in 1931. Ronald, the dedicatee of Elgar’s *Falstaff* was a powerful advocate for Elgar’s music and Michael Kennedy writes that Barbirolli had a high opinion of his Elgar conducting. As both were exclusive HMV artists, it was not until a year after the composer’s death that Ronald conducted

any Elgar for the gramophone and so sadly *The Coronation March* is his only Elgar recording. Elgar and German were contemporaries and Michael Kennedy comments that ‘the only really enthusiastic compliments (Elgar) ever paid to other English composers were to Edward German and Delius.’²

24 years earlier, the 1911 Coronation had been marked by an arrangement of the first section of the *Coronation Ode*, written for the 1901 Coronation, recorded by what the label describes as ‘The Imperial Bandsmen’. More often known as the Black Diamonds Band, they were one of the most popular British recording bands making over 270 discs between about 1900 and the early 1930s, mostly for the Zonophone label. 66 years were to pass before this music was recorded again when the first complete recordings of the *Coronation Ode* were made to mark the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

Henry Coward (1849-1944) was for many years the highly respected conductor of the Sheffield Choir and was responsible for many early Elgar performances. In 1898 Elgar wrote to Jaeger: ‘... do you know that the chorus is the finest in the world! Not so large as Leeds, but for fire, intelligence dramatic force, they are electrical.’ Elgar conducted the choir on its tour of Canada and the USA in 1911, the year before the recordings of two of the *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands*. In Columbia’s publicity material for the record, Elgar is quoted as saying ‘Nothing human could excel their rendering’. They made a new recording of ‘The Dance’ in 1920 coupling it with a section from *The Dream of Gerontius* that is a first recording.

² Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), 295

It is perhaps some indication of the immediate impact of *The Fringes of the Fleet* that within months of the premiere in June 1917 not only did HMV make recordings conducted by the composer but also two of the songs appeared on the now very scarce Guardsman label sung by Fred Taylor with piano accompaniment. There is some uncertainty about the identity of the singer but it is likely he is the Fred Taylor (1889-1919) who was part of a Concert Party organised by the actor-manager Lena Ashwell who went to France in early 1919 to entertain the troops still stationed there. Returning from an evening concert, the car in which he was travelling slipped off an icy road into the River Somme and Taylor was drowned.

Frederic Austin (1872-1952), baritone, teacher and composer, is probably most remembered now for his Symphonic Rhapsody '*Spring*'; his restoration of *The Beggar's Opera* and for his publication in 1909 of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas', the traditional folk melody supplemented by his own two-bar motif for "Five gold rings". He gave lessons in composition to Thomas Beecham and shortly before his recording of *The Pipes of Pan*, he sang in performances of both *The Dream of Gerontius* and *The Apostles* under the composer's baton.

An aria from the *St Matthew Passion* and two of Elgar's *Sea Pictures* was the agenda for the Dutch contralto Maartje Offers (1891-1944) and John Barbirolli (1899-1970) as they gathered in the Kingsway Hall in April 1929. The recording of 'Sabbath morning at sea' had to be rejected as the 'orchestral sound was too muffled', leaving 'Where corals lie' without a coupling. It finally appeared in 1933 paired rather incongruously with

an aria by Giordani sung by Maria Olczewska with piano accompaniment. The disc was not generally available in the UK but was on the list of those for which a special order was required. Writing about Offers in The Gramophone in March 1928, Herman Klein comments 'She is not without faults but, reckoned as a whole, her balance is decidedly on the credit side. Were her method of breathing correct, her superb organ and chaste artistic style would place her among the leading contraltos of the present time.'

Albert Sammons (1886-1957) was particularly associated with Elgar's *Violin Concerto*, first playing it in November 1914, just four years after its premiere. He gave over 100 performances during his career, more than any other concerto, many under the composer's baton, as well as playing in the premieres of Elgar's Piano Quintet and String Quartet and at Lady Elgar's funeral. Elgar once remarked: 'Nobody plays my concerto like Albert, he gets to the heart of it.' It would have seemed obvious for them to make a recording together but this was not possible because they were contracted to rival companies. Sammons's 1929 electrical recording is well known and much admired but this is the first appearance since the 1920s of the acoustic version made over a decade earlier. This was the concerto's premiere recording and it would seem that the appearance of these Columbia records took HMV rather by surprise and within months they swiftly produced a rival version with Marie Hall conducted by the composer. Of course, for both of these early recordings, the music had to be severely abridged to limit the music to four 12" sides, albeit different decisions were made for the two sets. A century later, with numerous recordings of the concerto readily available, it may seem rather strange to make recordings



Albert Sammons
playing on a tank
in Trafalgar Square
1916

with such brutal cuts. However, the cost of even just two double sided discs in 1916 would have been prohibitive for most people and the price of the gramophone on which to play them would have been significant. Perhaps then instead of seeing these recordings as poor substitutes for a complete performance, they should be viewed as samples, tasters for what was then new and challenging music.

Sammons' first Elgar recording dates from the dark days of World War One – his final one to the dark days of its successor. In April 1940 Sammons and Gerald Moore (1899 – 1987) were in Decca's West Hampstead studio making five 10" records of short pieces, subsequently released both as an album and also separately. Alec Robertson wrote in the August 1940 edition of *The Gramophone* : 'Sammons' sweet, but far from sickly, tone and musicianly phrasing make these pieces very pleasant hearing. He and Mr. Moore give a really fresh and expressive interpretation of Elgar's *Salut d'Amour*, which is as different from the "salon" interpretations as anything could well be: and they approach the other pieces of the easily oversentimentalised type in the same delightful way. I wonder if there is any hope of our commercial musicians learning from Mr. Sammons to go on a sugar ration and to stop coarsening the tastes of their hearers any further. [No, none at all.-Ed.]'

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RECORDING MAY GRAFTON'S SONATINA

It was in the early summer of 1959. At my request Elgar's daughter, Carice Elgar Blake (we had met at the Worcester Three Choirs Festival five years earlier) provided addresses of people who might supplement her help in finding photographs for a pictorial biography of her father. High on my list was Carice's cousin, May Grafton, who had taken snapshots of her uncle ever since he had written a *Sonatina* to encourage her eight year-old piano playing in 1889.

Imbued by my parents with a sense of history, I was vividly alive to the unique chances opening before me to meet surviving intimates of Elgar's world and friendship. Part of my programme was to tape-record my first interviews. The machines were relatively new, somewhat larger than a portable type-writer but several times their weight.

That was the state of play when I caught the morning train to Leeds, and on by a branch line to Wetherby in North Yorkshire. There May Grafton lived with her sister Madeline – Madge, or 'Maddy' as she was known to the family. They had been kind enough to invite me to stay at their house in a short tree-lined street close to the little railway station. As the train pulled in, there on the platform stood a single figure – an elderly lady whose look combined sensitivity with clear intelligence. Instantly I knew it must be May Grafton, and so it proved. We fell into easy conversation on the short walk up to her house.

Looking back to that day, it seems now that no friendship ever began for me more quickly or completely. Over a light lunch prepared by Madge, the on-

going conversation was punctuated with scattered irrelevancies interpolated by their pet budgerigar from its cage in the sitting room. Before I went to bed that night we were all on Christian-name terms, and I had become a sort of honorary nephew.

When May showed me the manuscript of Uncle Edward's *Sonatina* written for her seventy years earlier, my mind flew back to the tape recorder. Did she still play the *Sonatina*, and would she allow me to record her performance? Oh, but she played so little now on their upright piano. In that moment the project of a second visit the following summer rose to view. She would have an entire year to polish and perfect it. Madge added enthusiastic encouragement. May was dubious, but she did not refuse.

Returning the following summer, I consulted my tape-recorder hirers in London. They knew of a shop in Harrogate, nine miles from Wetherby; and with their recommendation I got in touch. Hiring machines was a bit out of their line. But when I undertook to do the whole thing in a single day, they relented. Thus armed, I took the train to Wetherby.

The moment I walked in the door at Chestnut Avenue, the budgerigar pronounced 'Jurryscoming, Jurryscoming!' It seemed that Madge had taught it these magic words 'Jerry's coming' to remind May to practice over the winter. The bird had learnt its lesson so well as to be unfazed by being overtaken by the event itself.

Next morning I caught the early bus for the hour's journey to Harrogate, found the shop, paid a deposit covering most of the cost of the machine,

and took it on the late morning bus back to Wetherby. May was eager to dispose of her ordeal before lunch, so I set up the machine just behind her range of vision. I asked her to begin by explaining for the recording that the original manuscript differs in places from the printed version published long afterwards. We agreed the wording, I switched on the machine, she spoke the words, and began the first and slower of the two movements. I had already explained that mistakes did not matter, as a technician at home could cut and join together all the best parts of several 'takes'.

She did one more performance of the first movement, and then went on to face the quicker and trickier second. Of this she did four performances with many more slips, but sometimes in different places. By the end of the fourth take she was clearly tired. So, with fresh assurances about my technician's skill, I asked her to speak her name at the end as a so-called vocal autograph, and we thankfully repaired to the dining room and lunch.

Afterwards, while May and Madge rested, I humped the machine back in the bus to Harrogate, where a fair portion of the heavy deposit was refunded. Then, after thanks on both sides, I caught the late afternoon bus back to Wetherby in time for a pre-prandial drink. May was still dubious despite Madge's generous praises for the endeavour, but clearly relieved that the ordeal was behind her.

The tape went back with me at that summer's end, the technician did his best, and the result is here after all these years for your curiosity and, I hope, your pleasure.

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May Grafton (left)
and her sister
Madge in their
garden,
Summer 1960



Comparison of cuts in the 1916 recordings by Albert Sammons and Marie Hall

SAMMONS

First movement

Fig. 1 to 2 bars before Fig. 9

Fig. 17 to 5 bars after Fig. 44

Second movement

3 bars after Fig. 46 to Fig. 49

2 bars after Fig. 56 from sixth quaver to upbeat to Fig. 62

Fig. 63 to 4 bars after Fig. 64, 2nd crotchet beat

Third movement

Fig. 78 to Fig. 92

Fig. 94 to Fig. 116

Cadenza

Fig. 102 from fermata quaver rest to 2nd bar of Fig. 102

5 bars before Fig. 103 (4th crotchet) to 1 bar before Fig. 103

7 bars after Fig. 103 to 9 bars after Fig. 103

HALL

First movement

2 bars before Fig. 1 to 3 bars after Fig. 8

Fig. 11 to Fig. 12

4 bars after Fig. 12 (3rd crotchet beat) to 2 bars before 13 (3rd crotchet beat)
1 bar before Fig. 13 to Fig. 14
6 bars after Fig. 17 to Fig. 39
6 bars before Fig. 41 to 7 bars after Fig. 44

Second movement

Bar 4 (4th crotchet beat) to 1 bar before Fig. 45 (4th crotchet beat)
2 bars after Fig. 46 (from last quaver) to Fig. 49
Fig. 54 to upbeat to Fig. 62
Fig. 63 to Fig. 64

Third movement

2 bars after Fig. 65 (4th crotchet beat) to 4 bars before Fig. 66 (4th crotchet beat)
2 bars before Fig. 71 to 5 bars after Fig. 71
Fig. 78 to Fig. 92
2 bars after Fig. 93 to Fig. 95
3 bars after Fig. 96 5 bars after Fig. 96
1 bar before Fig. 97 to 2 bars after Fig. 115 (3rd beat)

Cadenza

Fig. 102 to 2nd bar of Fig. 102
5 bars before Fig. 103 to 2 bars before Fig. 103
6 bars after Fig. 103 (after fermata semibreve trill) to 5 bef. Fig. 104
3 bars before Fig. 104 to 1 bar before Fig. 104 (solo minim chord) – partial cuts

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The photograph of May and her sister Madge Grafton (page 15 and rear cover) is reproduced with the kind permission of Jerrold Northrop Moore. The photograph of Albert Sammons (page 10) is from The Tully Potter collection. The producers are grateful to David Michell for making available several records from his collection that are included here and to Andrew Keener for his detailed analysis of the 1916 recordings of Elgar's Violin Concerto.

Finally, SOMM would like to thank the following for their help in making this compact disc issue possible: John Knowles, David Ll. Jones, Jerrold Northrop Moore, Andrew Neill and Arthur Reynolds.



Our discs are available worldwide from all good record shops. In case of difficulty and for further information please contact us direct: SOMM Recordings, Sales & Marketing Dept., 13 Riversdale Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey, KT7 0QL, UK. Tel: +(0)20-8398 1586. Fax: +(0)20-8339 0981. Email: sales@somm-recordings.com Website: <http://www.somm-recordings.com>

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Elgar with Marco.

Photograph courtesy
of Arthur Reynolds.

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May Grafton (left) and her sister Madge in their garden, Summer 1960

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20 Allegro molto 3:41

21 **Salut d'Amour** op. 12 (1888) 3:04

Total duration 76:36

DDD

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO



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