ELGAR FESTIVAL LIVE

ENGLISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

EDWARD ELGAR

SYMPHONY NO. 1
IN THE SOUTH

Elgar for Everyone

English Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Woods *conductor*

ESO Records

ELGAR FESTIVAL LIVE, VOL. I

EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934)

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN A-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 55

TRACK		DURATION
1.	I. Andante nobilmente e semplice – Allegro	19:50
2.	II. Allegro molto –	7:45
3.	III. Adagio	13:28
4.	IV. Lento – Allegro	13:57
5.	IN THE SOUTH (ALASSIO) - CONCERT OVERTURE, OP. 50 Carl Hill, *viola solo*	24:10

English Symphony Orchestra
Zoë Beyers - *Leader and Principal Artist*
Kenneth Woods - *Principal Conductor and Artistic Director*

LIVE RECORDINGS

FROM THE CONDUCTOR

It was no accident that when the ESO's founder, William Boughton, started the orchestra in 1980, that he chose to locate the orchestra in the heart of Elgar Country. From the first concerts the orchestra gave over forty years ago through to today, Elgar's influence has been a constant. Our offices are housed in the Elgar School of Music, about a two minute walk from Worcester Cathedral, where Elgar conducted some of the most important and triumphant concerts of his career, and where, of course, these performances were recorded. Elgar's birthplace is only a few miles away, and it's only a very short drive to Malvern, where he is buried. The orchestra plays regularly in Hereford, where Elgar lived in Plas Gwyn from 1903-1912, the years in which these two iconic works were composed. First time visitors to the Elgar Festival are often surprised and hugely excited by just how much of a presence Elgar is here.

In fact, there are few composers whose sense of home, community and place was as closely connected to their creative work as Elgar. His Enigma Variations are practically a guided tour of Herefordshire and Worcestershire and the many fascinating personalities he found there. And his famous remark about the Cello Concerto's main theme to his friend Billy Reed - 'If ever you're walking on the Malvern Hills and hear that, it's only me" could apply to dozens of places and pieces, right down to the banks of the river Wye where Dan the bulldog made musical history in the Enigma Variations.

From my first contact with the ESO, it was clear to me that this music was in their blood. My predecessor, Vernon Handley, was as fine an Elgarian as there's ever been, and a protégé of Elgar's preferred conductor, Adrian Boult. Yehudi Menuhin, possibly Elgar's closest collaborator at the end of his life, was our Principal Guest Conductor for the last decade of his life. With the memory of their contributions to the orchestra's Elgar legacy still fresh, it felt from day one that Elgar here is no distant historic figure of the past, but more like a friend of a friend. Someone whose personality remains fresh in the memory. Someone whose legacy is still very much alive. Unlike Gustav Mahler, we can even see and hear Elgar the conductor, and these performances are most deeply informed by the many revelatory lessons I have gleaned from listening to his definitive and thrilling interpretations of his own music.

There are studio recordings aplenty available of Elgar's major works. Our aim with these Elgar Festival Live recordings is not simply to share a performance of a piece, but to share a memory of an occasion and a flavour of this magical place. Each is a record of a single performance that grew out of a week's immersion in all things Elgar, right down to the sights he saw, the streets he walked and the air he breathed. I never take for granted that I get to stand on the same spot in Worcester Cathedral that Elgar did so many times, not so long ago. I hope the passion and virtuosity of my incredible colleagues, the intensity of our audience's listening, and the magical acoustics of this great building all help you to feel closer to Elgar. Elgar Festival Live is to remind you that Edward Elgar is someone whose personality remains fresh in the memory. Someone whose legacy is still very much alive. Someone whom you, the listener, can think of more as a friend of a friend.

Kenneth Woods

ABOUT THE MUSIC

High hopes and banknotes

At the end of 1907 Sir Edward Elgar, his wife Caroline Alice and their daughter Carice took a cross-channel ferry and headed for the Mediterranean to spend the winter in a rented flat in Rome. "On my way to economize 'In the South'" Elgar told a friend. It seems incredible but the man whose face until recently decorated our £20 notes simply couldn't afford to live in Britain that winter. As a knight in Edwardian London he'd have been expected to entertain and socialize on a scale commensurate with his social position. His composer's income rendered that impossible. But that wasn't the only pressure Elgar was fleeing. He was 50 years old, and after a long struggle was finally at the peak of his profession. Now the musical world was looking expectantly at him. In 1899 he'd rashly mentioned to his publisher that he was considering writing a symphony, and since then he'd been besieged with enquiries about this major new work. Conductors and promoters vied to be allowed the premiere; as early as 1901 the Leeds Festival even had a conductor (Henry Wood) lined

up for it. Elgar never responded well to external pressure, and he knew that a symphony would be the supreme test of his skill. "When I see one of my own works by the side of, say, the Fifth Symphony [of Beethoven], I feel like a tinker may do when surveying the Forth Bridge" he told the audience at his Birmingham University lectures in autumn 1905. Sometimes he despaired: *"I curse the power that gave me gifts and loathe them now and ever"*. If he was ever to write his own symphony, he needed privacy and space.

Wand of Youth

But that winter, unknown to the public, something had gelled in Elgar's creative mind and the symphony was finally under construction. Nor was this the symphony that he'd been toying with since the 1890s - a programmatic work inspired by the life and death of General Gordon. Back at his Hereford home he'd spent the summer of 1907 revisiting the music he'd written in his childhood; polishing it up, orchestrating it, and finally completing it as the delightful first Wand of Youth suite. And a few days later, on 27 June, Caroline Alice heard him at the piano playing for the first time *"a great, beautiful tune"*. It was the melody, "nobilmente e semplice" (noble and simple), that opens the First Symphony and goes on to become the guiding spirit of the whole piece. To the Edwardians, that theme may have sounded patriotic in character; even reminiscent of Land of Hope and Glory. For Elgar, it emerged from his most personal and private inspiration – and meant something very different.

Public triumph

Not that you'd know it from the Symphony's early history. There's no getting round the fact that Elgar's First – when it premiered in Manchester 3 December 1908 – the Hallé Orchestra, conducted by Elgar's friend Hans Richter - became the first British symphony ever to enter the international repertoire. The audience erupted, and the critics were bowled over. "That this work is the noblest ever penned for instruments by an English composer we are quite certain" wrote the Manchester Guardian. Four days later, Richter introduced it to the London Symphony Orchestra with the words "Let us now rehearse the greatest symphony of modern times – and not only in this country". It was the greatest success of Elgar's career, and the symphony was performed over 100 times in its first year; in the USA, Canada, Vienna, Berlin, St Petersburg, Munich, Budapest, Rome and even Australia. *"After that superb finale the audience seemed to rise at E when he appeared"* wrote Caroline Alice in her diary. *"I never heard such frantic applause after any novelty, nor such shouting… People stood on their seats to get a view"*. Elgar dedicated the symphony to its first interpreter: "To Hans Richter, Mus. Doc., true artist and true friend."

"A great, beautiful tune"

There's no doubt, the symphony is an enormously stirring work. The tune with which it opens, after a quiet drumroll, is arguably Elgar's very greatest. Yet it prevails only for a mere page of music before it's plunged into the turmoil of the first Allegro. There's a lifetime's worth of emotion between that point and

the symphony's final triumph; some of it idyllic, some of it nostalgic, much of it passionate and occasionally very dark indeed (the Catholic Elgar never shook off his lifelong doubts and fears). Throughout the struggle, that opening tune appears at crucial moments as a distant memory or a fleeting glimpse - at one point in the first movement, Elgar has it played by the back desk of second violins alone. When it finally returns at the end of the symphony it is proud and grand – but it's still battling its way through a crashing, surging full orchestra. That initial calm never returns again.

Secrets and memories

Because the First Symphony is about private, not public emotions it's full of the little musical games that Elgar loved – you'd never guess that the serene, glowing Adagio begins with exactly the same sequence of notes as the tense, bristling Allegro molto that precedes it. And musicians' folklore has it that Elgar wrote the symphony in response to a bet with a friend that he couldn't write a symphony in two keys at once! (Large stretches of the first movement are in a turbulent D minor – far removed from the calm A flat major with which the symphony opens and closes). But more important are the emotional clues he left to the work's inner narrative. Elgar was always prone to depression; the middle of the first movement, and the sinister opening of the finale are moments of black despair. That's not the whole story, though. Listen out for the sweet interludes and moments of quiet amidst the crashing waves of the first movement – like sudden glints of light or pangs of nostalgia. There's a wonderful example, for solo violin and harp, at the centre of the second

movement's fierce march. Elgar told one orchestra to play this passage *"like something you hear down by the river"*. The rural dream of Elgar's distant youth was never far behind his greatest music.

Faith, hope and melody

So what is this Symphony about? Over a century on it should hardly need saying that it's emphatically not about empire, about the Edwardian era, or about pomp and circumstance – though all of these things were part of Elgar's world, and find distant echoes in the symphony, just as Mahler's symphonies are full of the waltzes and marches of imperial Vienna, and Shostakovich draws on the mass spectacles and steely bombast of Soviet Russia. Even the greatest artists speak in the accent of their time and place. But when it comes to the heart of this symphony, Elgar gave us one crucial hint: *"There is no programme beyond a wide experience of human life with a great charity (love) and a massive hope in the future"*. It's about idealism, it's about life, and it's about hope – hope in the face of great adversity. There's deep consolation on the way, nowhere deeper than in the Adagio, which rises from the ashes of the second movement to become a rapturous, sunset-hued meditation comparable in emotional intensity to Nimrod. (Elgar's publisher Augustus Jaeger – the original "Nimrod" himself – wrote to Elgar that it was *"one of the greatest slow movements since Beethoven").* But the Symphony's final message is that of the great tune from the opening, after a long struggle, striding through the final bars no matter what's thrown at it...head held high. *"A massive hope*

in the future". No British composer in 1908 had ever written a symphony that lasted, and Elgar the man was uncertain, cash-strapped and insecure. But genius finds a way.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934) In the South (Alassio) - Concert Overture, Op.50
A flurry of strings; the horns vault skywards, and in a dazzling flash the whole Italian Riviera lies spread before us, shimmering under the mid-day sun. From Mendelssohn's Italian symphony (1833) to Sibelius's The Oceanides (1914), northern European composers have pursued a love-affair with the land of cypresses and lemon blossom. But perhaps only a composer from our rainy island could capture the sheer delight; the heart-stopping, somersaulting elation that a Briton feels when, through a train window or from a sudden bend in the road, they catch that first glimpse of sun-baked hills plunging down to an endless blue sea.

Even when the reality was slightly different. In November 1903 Elgar and his wife and daughter travelled to the Italian resort of Bordighera. It wasn't quite what he'd hoped for – *"lovely, but too cockney for me"* he wrote to a friend, *"I want something more Italian"* – and the weather wasn't exactly idyllic either. But *"What matter the Mediterranean being rough & grey? What matters rain in torrents? Who cares for gales? Tramontana! We have such meals! Such wine! Gosh!...we are at last living a life"*. When weather allowed the Elgars simply lost themselves in the villages and hills above the coast, hiking with a hired donkey called Grisia *("She's a love").* Soon, Elgar found the Italy he'd been looking for,

not in Bordighera, but another, quieter resort further down the coast: *"We go to Alassio on Thursday".*

As so often when Elgar was able to relax, musical ideas tumbled upon him. The name of a village near Alassio, Moglio, suggested a rhythm. The towering Roman ruins at La Turbie, just over the French border, created striking musical images, and an exuberant musical pen-picture of Hereford Cathedral's resident bulldog Dan, "*triumphant (after a fight)",* reinvented itself as that rocketing opening. It was timely: an Elgar Festival was planned at Covent Garden for March 1904. Elgar had promised a new work and rumours were circulating about a symphony.

What eventually coalesced in Elgar's mind was something quite different; something that no British composer had yet pulled off – a full-blown symphonic poem written in the ultra-modern idiom of Richard Strauss, In the South (Alassio). And he did it with breathtaking verve. The musical language is Wagnerian, the inspiration Italian, and it's all headed with a quote from Byron: *"...a land which was the mightiest in its old command And is the loveliest..."*

After that tremendous beginning, and the great vista that opens beyond it, comes a quieter second set of ideas based on the "Moglio" rhythm (with a bittersweet hint of lemon), and two extraordinary episodes both inspired by the Italian landscape: a powerful representation of a Roman aqueduct in huge, striding chords, followed by a ravishing, wave-lapped intermezzo, entitled

'canto populare' and sung by solo viola and horn. (Elgar later published this section as a song to words by Shelley under the title 'In Moonlight'). Then, with a brusque toss of the head, Elgar re-summons the energy of the opening and sets about reviewing all his Italian dreams before gathering them together in a glittering headlong final sweep for the finish. *"I love it"* declared the usually reticent composer. *"It's alive!"*. In the South was premiered by the Hallé Orchestra at Covent Garden on 16 March 1904, with Elgar himself conducting.

Notes by @ Richard Bratby

ABOUT THE ELGAR FESTIVAL

Elgar For Everyone!

Since its inception in 2018, the Elgar Festival has grown from a weekend to a nearly a fortnight celebration of Worcester's most famous son set in his hometown and surrounding areas. Held annually over the week closest to Elgar's birthday (2 June 1857) the festival combines symphonic, string orchestra and chamber concerts by the festival's orchestra-in-residence, the English Symphony Orchestra, with choral and ensemble concerts by world renowned visiting artists, outdoor events, talks, masterclasses, film and exhibitions and the chance for hundreds of people to participate - we believe that Elgar is for everyone.

The festival provides exceptional performance opportunities for hundreds of children, young people and adults through initiatives including the Elgar for Everyone, Family Concert, Young Composers Competition, Elgar Festival Chorus, and through participation in masterclasses and workshops. In addition, each year the festival celebrates the work of a featured living British composer – these have included David Matthews, Steve Elcock, Donald Fraser, Eric McElroy, and in 2025 Ian Venables - and commissions and world premieres form an important part of the programming.

There are few composers whose sense of home, community and place was as closely connected to their creative work as Elgar and it's easy to understand how the beauty of Elgar Country – Worcestershire and the Malverns - inspired him. The Festival continues to maintain those connections, inhabiting many venues as performance spaces that Elgar knew well including Worcester Cathedral, Worcester Guildhall, Royal Porcelain Works and Museum of Royal Worcester, St. Martin in the Cornmarket, Huntingdon Hall, Cathedral Square, St Geroge's RC Church, St. Martin's London Road, Malvern Priory, and The Firs - Elgar's Birthplace at Lower Broadheath.

The Elgar Festival was The Guardian's Crtic's Pick in 2018 and in 2022 featured as one of the top 20 Jubilee events.

elgarfestival.org

KENNETH WOODS

Hailed by Gramophone Magazine as "a symphonic conductor of stature", **Kenneth Woods** was appointed Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the English Symphony Orchestra in 2013, and has quickly built up an impressive and acclaimed body of work and recordings with them. Woods also serves as Artistic Director of both the Colorado MahlerFest – the only US organisation other than the New York Philharmonic to receive the International Gustav Mahler Society's Gold Medal – and (since 2017) the founding Artistic Director of The Elgar Festival in Worcester. Woods has conducted the National Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and the English Chamber Orchestra, and has made numerous broadcasts for BBC Radio 3, National Public Radio and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He has appeared on the stages of some of the world's leading music festivals, such as Aspen, Scotia and Lucerne.

Under Kenneth Woods' leadership, the English Symphony Orchestra has gained widespread recognition as one of the most innovative and influential orchestras in the UK. The first of Woods' many acclaimed ESO discs was volume one in the Complete Piano Concertos of Ernst Krenek, selected by The Times as one of their "Best Recordings of 2016." His recording of Fraser's Elgar orchestrations for Avie was a Classic FM Disc of the Month. The ESO's Nimbus Alliance recording of Kenneth's orchestration of Brahms' Piano Quartet in A Major was chosen as one of the 10 Best Classical CDs of 2018 by The Arts Desk. In 2016 Woods and the ESO launched their 21st Century Symphony Project, an ambitious multi-year effort to commission, premiere and record nine new symphonies by leading composers, with the triumphant premiere of Philip Sawyers' Third Symphony at St John's Smith Square. In 2018, the Project continued with the premiere of David Matthews' Ninth Symphony, selected by The Spectator as one of the Top Ten Classical Events of the year, followed in 2019 by Matthew Taylor's Fifth Symphony, hailed by ClassicalSource as "a masterpiece" at its premiere. The most recent offerings in the 21st Century Symphony Project include Robert Saxton's *Scenes from the Epic of Gilgamesh* and Adrian Williams's First.

www.kennethwoods.net

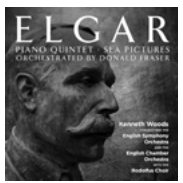
ENGLISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

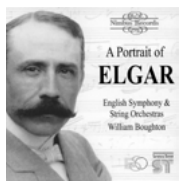
The **English Symphony Orchestra** is an ensemble which in recent years has become synonymous with artistic excellence, innovative and visionary programming, distinctive commissioning and ground-breaking recordings. In the last decade, ESO has established itself as a major force in British musical life under its Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Kenneth Woods, presenting and recording the orchestra's first full length opera (the world premiere of John Joubert's *Jane Eyre*) to overwhelming critical acclaim, presenting the 2015 Classical Music Magazine "Premiere of the Year," (Donald Fraser's orchestration of the Elgar Piano Quintet) and releasing a triumphant series of recordings, including the Complete Piano Concertos of Ernst Krenek (Sunday Times Best Recordings of 24 NI6408 2016) and John Joubert's opera *Jane Eyre* (2017 MusicWeb Opera Recording of the Year).

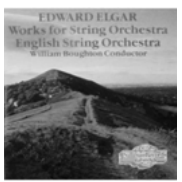
Founded by William Boughton in 1980, the ESO have a long and distinguished history of collaboration with legendary figures of British music making. As the professional orchestra of Elgar's home city, and orchestra-in-residence of The Elgar Festival, the music of Elgar has long been a central part of the ESO's repertoire. Past ESO collaborators include some of the leading Elgar interpreters of the last 50 years, including conductors Yehudi Menuhin (Principal Guest Conductor 1990-2000) and Vernon Handley (Principal Conductor 2007—8) and soloists Nigel Kennedy, Nicola Benedetti, Steven Isserlis and Alexander Sitkovetsky.

Appropriately for an orchestra based in the city of his birth, the ESO has made many acclaimed recordings of Elgar's music as well as that of major 20th century British composers including Vaughan Williams, Britten, Butterworth and Bridge. The ESO discography also highlights a commitment to the music of our time; in addition to the notable recordings which grew out of the orchestra's affiliation with Sir Michael Tippett, there are recordings of music by John Metcalfe, John Joubert, Nicholas Maw, and Michael and Lennox Berkeley. John McCabe served as the orchestra's Composer-in-Association from 2013 until his death in 2015. Following McCabe's death in 2015, the ESO appointed Philip Sawyers as "John McCabe Composer-in- Association" who was succeeded by David Matthews in 2018 and Adrian Williams from 2020-2021. The ESO's current John McCabe Composer-in-Association is Steve Elcock.

eso.co.uk







MUSICIANS OF THE ENGLISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

SYMPHONY NO. 1

Violin 1
Zoë Beyers *Leader*
Kevin Flynn
Richard Laing
Noriko Tsuzaki
Bethan Allmand
Shulah Oliver
Hannah Bowman
Gisele Boll
Rebecca Allfree
Jessica Townsend

Violin 2
Suzanne Casey
Kirsty Lovie
Emily Adams
Alicja Humeniuk
Charlotte Beresford
Zoë Davies
Dayna Townsend
Adam Hill

Viola
Vanessa Murby
Nancy Johnson
Helen Sanders-Hewett
Raisa Zapryanova
January Johnnsen
Kate Fawcett

Cello
Robert Max
Corinne Frost
Katy Whittle
Nicholas Gethin
Fraser Bowles
Abigail Blackman

Double Bass
Martin Henderson
William Henderson
David Ayre

Flute
Laura Jellicoe
Hugues Roberts
Catherine Handley
dbl Piccolo

Oboe
Lydia Griffiths
Jeremy Foster
Emma Gibbons
dbl Cor Anglais

Clarinet
Alison Lambert
Sara Temple
dbl Eb Clarinet
Duncan Gould
dbl Bass Clarinet

Bassoon
Susana Dias
Bartosz Kwasecki
Fiona Troon
dbl Contrabassoon

French Horn
James Topp
Craig MacDonald
Vikki Scanlon
Michael Gibbs
Jose Lluna

Trumpet
Matthew Wells
Stephen Peneycad
Daniel Mills

Trombone
Anthony Howe
James Druce

Bass Trombone
Omar Khokher

Tuba
Ian Foster

Timpani
Jeremy Little

Percussion
Graham Bradley
Matthew Green
Anna Newman

Harp
Rita Schindler
Ruth Faber

IN THE SOUTH

Violin 1
Zoë Beyers
Catherine Leech
Charlotte Moseley
Noriko Tsuzaki
Olivia Jago
Daniel Peev
Mathias Svensson
Charlotte Beresford
Emily Groom
Adam Hill

Violin 2
Suzanne Casey
Richard Laing
Emily Adams
Ivor McGregor
Gisele Boll
Zoë Davies
Lucia d'Avanzo-Lewis
Elizabeth Goble

Viola
Carl Hill
Vanessa Murby
Dáire Roberts
Raisa Zapryanova
Heather Hawken
Lucy Theo
Hazel Price
Mirka Hoppari

Cello
Joely Koos
Corinne Frost
Anna Joubert
Nick Gethin
Trevor Burley
Peter Wilson

Double Bass
Stephen Warner
Chris Wescott
Ayse Osman
Will Henderson

Flute
Laura Jellicoe
Catherine Handley
Oliver Roberts *dbl Picc*

Oboe
Rebecca Wood
Lydia Griffiths
Louise Braithwaite
dbl Cor

Clarinet
Alison Lambert
Meg Davies
Jill Allan *dbl Bass*

Bassoon
Bartosz Kwasecki
Louise Watson
Kim Murphy *dbl Contra*

Horn
Mark Smith
Craig Macdonald
Michael Gibbs
Rebecca Holman
Jose Lluna

Trumpet
Stuart Essenhigh
Steve Walton
Jennie Boase

Trombone
Jonathan Pippen
Kevin Pitt

Bass Trombone
Martyn Hunter

Tuba
Andrew McDade

Timpani
Philip Hughes

Percussion
Graham Bradley
Gareth Hamlin
Christina Slominska

Harp
Bethan Semmens
Marged Hall

Organ
Nicholas Freestone

Orchestra management/fixing
Andy Farquarson/
The Music Agency UK

Production Information

Symphony No. 1 - Recorded live at Worcester Cathedral, 3 June 2023
In the South - Recorded live at Worcester Cathedral, 4 June 2022

Produced, engineered and edited by Tim Burton
timburtonproducer.co.uk

Elgar Festival
Kenneth Woods - *Artistic Director*
Julian Lloyd Webber - *Patron*
Sue Voysey - *Executive Director*
Anne Renshaw - *Development Director*
Adrian Gregson - *Chair*

Elgar for Everyone

English Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Woods - *Artistic Director and Principal Conductor*
Seb Lovell-Huckle - *Chief Executive Officer*
Zoë Beyers - *Principal Artist and Leader*
Jonathan Godfrey - *Chair*

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Elgar for Everyone
ELGAR FESTIVAL
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