

Waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted  
shoreward,  
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, gray coast and a seaboard ghastly,  
And shores trod seldom by feet of men –  
Where the batter'd hull and the broken  
mast lie,  
They have lain embedded these long years  
ten.

Love! Love! when we wandered here  
together,  
Hand in hand! Hand in hand through the  
sparkling weather,  
From the heights and hollows of fern and  
heather,

God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer, the shores were  
firmer –  
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd;  
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,  
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold.  
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold.

So, girt with tempest and wing'd with  
thunder  
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,  
And strong winds treading the swift waves  
under  
The flying rollers with frothy feet.

One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade  
swims on  
The sky line, staining the green gulf  
crimson,  
A death-stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun  
That strikes through his stormy winding  
sheet.

O brave white horses! you gather and  
gallop,  
The storm sprite loosens the gusty rains;  
O brave white horses! you gather and  
gallop,  
The storm sprite loosens the gusty rains;

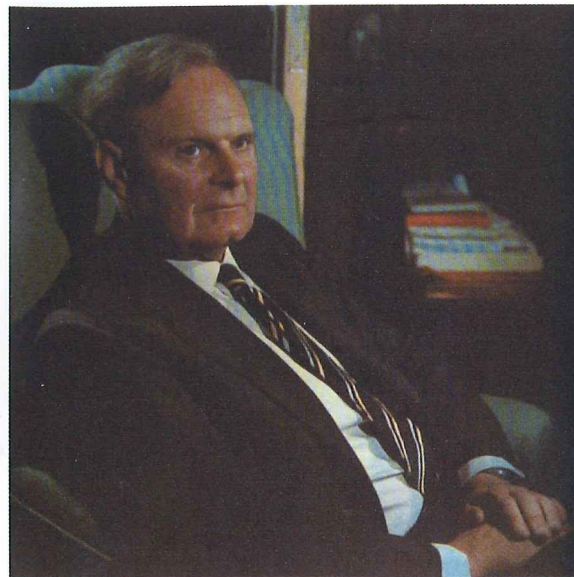
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest  
shallop  
In your hollow backs, on your high-arched  
manes,  
I would ride as never man has ridden  
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden;

I would ride as never man has ridden  
To gulfs foreshadow'd through strifes  
forbidden,  
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.  
No love,  
Where no love, no love wanes.

A.L. Gordon (1833-1870)

# George Weldon

conducts **Edward Elgar**



GLADYS RIPLEY, contralto

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

"In the South" (Alassio)  
Sea Pictures • Enigma Variations

## EDWARD ELGAR (1857 - 1934)

Concert Overture "In the South" (Alassio), Op. 50  
Sea Pictures, Op. 37 (**Gladys Ripley**, contralto)  
LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma), Op. 36  
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA  
conducted by **GEORGE WELDON** (1908 - 1963)

- |      |  |       |
|------|--|-------|
| [1]  | <b>Concert Overture "in the South" (Alassio), Op. 50</b>       | 23:14 |
| <br> |  |       |
|      | <b>Sea Pictures, Op. 37 (22:56)</b>                            |       |
| [2]  | 1. Sea Slumber Song (R.B.W. Noel)                              | 5:07  |
| [3]  | 2. In Haven (C.A. Elgar)                                       | 1:43  |
| [4]  | 3. Sabbath Morning at Sea (E.B. Browning)                      | 6:46  |
| [5]  | 4. Where Corals Lie (R. Garnett)                               | 3:20  |
| [6]  | 5. The Swimmer (A.L. Gordon)                                   | 6:00  |
| <br> |  |       |
|      | <b>Variations on an Original Theme (Enigma) Op. 36 (31:48)</b> |       |
| [7]  | Theme ? Andante  | 1:37  |
| [8]  | Var. 1 (C.A.E.), L'istesso tempo                               | 2:09  |
| [9]  | Var. 2 (H.D.S-P), Allegro                                      | 0:45  |
| [10] | Var. 3 (R.B.T.), Allegretto                                    | 1:25  |
| [11] | Var. 4 (W.M.B.), Allegro di molto                              | 0:28  |
| [12] | Var. 5 (R.P.A.), Moderato                                      | 2:13  |
| [13] | Var. 6 (Ysobel), Andantino                                     | 1:25  |
| [14] | Var. 7 (Troyte), Presto  | 1:04  |
| [15] | Var. 8 (W.N.), Allegretto                                      | 1:49  |
| [16] | Var. 9 (Nimrod), Adagio  | 4:06  |
| [17] | Var.10 (Dorabella), Intermezzo ? Allegretto                    | 2:42  |
| [18] | Var.11 (G.R.S.), Allegro di molto                              | 0:57  |
| [19] | Var.12 (B.G.N.), Andante                                       | 2:50  |

- |      |  |      |
|------|--|------|
| [20] | Var.13 (Romanza (**), Moderato         | 2:55 |
| [21] | Var.14 Finale (E.D.U.), Allegro-Presto | 5:23 |

**Total Duration: 78:11**

[1] London Symphony Orchestra  
[2] - [6] Gladys Ripley, contralto. London Symphony Orchestra  
Recorded in Abbey Road Studio No. 1., 1954 (originally opened by Sir Edward Elgar in 1931).

Recording Producer: Brian B. Culverhouse

[7] - [21] Philharmonia Orchestra  
Recorded in The Kingsway Hall, London, 1953.  
Recording Producer: Walter Legge

This compact disc has been digitally re-mastered from the original EMI tapes courtesy of the Company, by Brian B. Culverhouse and Gary Moore, Brian Culverhouse Productions, 2008.

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A cigarette clamped permanently to his lower lip, and with his penchant for sleek fast cars, George Weldon had something of a glamour-boy image, and his fan-club of adoring women was huge. Some of the more elderly supporters of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra still go misty-eyed when they recall his time as the orchestra's chief conductor.

Apparently during that period between 1944 and 1951 young ladies used to flock to the Birmingham Town Hall's choral gallery seats behind the orchestra – whether to study the players at close quarters or to be able to gaze upon the Weldon features is open to question. But he was also a conductor who was able to penetrate to the heart of works by composers dear to him, and Elgar was right at the very top of his list, as testified by the personality of these performances. Other British composers he championed, fighting against what he perceived as a perverse prejudice against home-born artists, included Delius, Alan Rawsthorne, Humphrey Searle, Arthur Bliss, Ruth Gipps (oboist for him at Birmingham, and a fine pianist) and Walton.

Weldon's career was quite a colourful one. Born with one leg shorter than the other, a condition which was to cause him considerable pain throughout his life, and for which he had to receive constant therapy, he was excused games at Sherborne School (where he still wore leg-irons) and concentrated instead on playing the piano. He studied conducting at the Royal College of Music under Malcolm Sargent (himself another flamboyant baton-wielder), and later worked as assistant to Julius Harrison at the Hastings Municipal Orchestra.

Later he toured extensively with the London Symphony Orchestra, and had a season as music director of the International Ballet. His appointment to the City of Birmingham Orchestra (the "Symphony" was added, at his insistence, only in 1948, a few years after the players in the ensemble had been put on permanent contracts) was his first and only in sole charge of a professional symphony orchestra.

Despite the increase in playing standards he achieved in Birmingham (Eric Blom once wrote in the Birmingham Post "will the orchestra please oblige by giving a bad performance for a change?") some critics detected subsequent complacency, and behind-the-scenes plotting effectively sacked him in 1951 (Rudolf Schwarz had already been head-hunted from Bournemouth as a successor). Sir John Barbirolli was so disgusted with Weldon's treatment that he immediately invited him to become associate conductor at the Hallé.

Although from 1952 until his death in 1963 Weldon continued to give concerts in England, Wales, Ireland and abroad, his main places of work were Manchester and London, where he worked with

Sadlers Wells and Royal Ballet, Covent Garden, and conducted the London Symphony, Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras. He gave concerts at the Royal Albert Hall and the new Royal Festival Hall and made recordings with all these orchestras for EMI (including 82 titles with Walter Legge's Philharmonia) in The Kingsway Hall, London, and in the now famous Studio 1, Abbey Road, a short step via Lord's Cricket Ground from his London flat. He also recorded extensively for other labels, and broadcast frequently on BBC radio.

His farewell concert in Birmingham saw traffic held up around the Town Hall because of a crowd desperate for one last glimpse of him. The final work in the programme was Elgar's *Enigma Variations*.

Like Weldon, the contralto Gladys Ripley was born in 1908. Despite education at a business college, she moved rapidly into a singing career, broadcasting frequently on radio, and performing for six seasons at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden before the Second World War. During the war she often sang for the troops, and as the war was approaching its end in 1945, she sang the role of the Angel in Malcolm Sargent's unsurpassable recording of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. She died early, in 1955 – in Chichester, coincidentally the city in which George Weldon had been born.

### *In the South (Alassio)*

This concert-overture was composed in 1904, the result of an over-wintering holiday on the Italian Riviera, and was given its première during the three-day Elgar Festival at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with King Edward VII as its patron.

It is one of Elgar's most Straussian works (he and the Bavarian composer were great friends and supportive colleagues), as crackling as *Don Juan* in its orchestration and sturdy in its structure. The opening also recalls the Act III Prelude to Wagner's *Lohengrin*. There are characterful episodes; the grinding, juggernaut-like dissonances evoking the unstoppable march of Roman legions, and the nocturnal *canto popolare*, with its sweet viola solo.

### *Sea Pictures*

Composed alongside the *Enigma Variations*, this five-movement song-cycle was given its première at the Norwich Festival on October 5 1899, Clara Butt the contralto soloist, and with Elgar conducting.



Its texts are less than edifying when read in their own right, but perhaps great literature sits uneasily on superfluous setting to music. Certainly the evocative, atmospheric orchestration of Elgar's score brings generous fulfilment to the aspirations of these rather mediocre poems (including one by his wife Alice — one winces at the memory of her texts in *From the Bavarian Highlands*).

### *Enigma Variations*

Though this is the title by which this piece — which thrust Elgar spectacularly into an eye more public than that of the church, provincial societies and local promotions with which his music had previously been associated — is universally known, it was originally entitled "Variations on an Original Theme".

That "original theme" came about as the result of an evening's post-prandial doodling at the piano at the end of a tedious teaching day in autumn 1898. Elgar's wife stopped the composer at one point, saying what a promising theme he was playing, and he responded by illustrating how so-and-so and such-and-such would play it. Thus the Variations were born, dedicated to his "friends pictured within", almost all of whom lived in the Malvern and Worcester area.

Symphonic variations were not an unknown device, but Elgar muddled the waters with his assertion that the subject of his variations was only a counter-melody. "The enigma I will not explain — its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed... another and larger theme 'goes' but is not played... So the principal Theme never appears... the chief character is never on the stage."

As Elgar certainly expected, dozens of solutions to the puzzle have been proposed, with the "larger theme" being variously identified as "Auld Lang Syne" (which Elgar rejected), "Rule, Britannia!", the National Anthem, and many others. Some have interpreted the theme as the general one of friendship. But what is significant is that the theme which we do hear, at the beginning of the work, has exactly the same outline as Elgar's beloved Malvern Hills.

After the opening statement of this melancholy G minor melody, the music moves directly into the first variation.

I *C.A.E.* A tender, affectionate portrait of Caroline Alice Elgar, the composer's wife.

II *H.D.S-P.* Hew David Steuart-Powell was a keen amateur pianist, and we hear his fingers darting over the keys as though warming up for a chamber-music session.

III *R.B.T.* Author of the "Tenderfoot" boys' books, Richard Baxter Townshend was keen on amateur theatricals, his voice liable to pipe up and down.

IV *W.M.B.* William Meath Baker was a country squire who had the habit of issuing orders for the day somewhat brusquely, to the amusement of his guests.

V *Richard P. Arnold*, son of Matthew Arnold, would intersperse deeply serious conversation with whimsical, witty remarks. His variation leads directly into

VI *Ysobel* The high-stepping viola melody at the beginning suggests the cross-string viola exercises Isabel Fitton used to practise.

VII *Troyte* Uncouth pounding from timpani and lower strings suggests the boisterous banter of Troyte Griffith, a Malvern architect and co-founder, with Elgar, of Malvern Concert Club, which is today well into its second century of existence.

VIII *W.N.* The gracious elegance of Sherridge, an 18th-century house near Malvern, and home to Winifred Norbury, is evoked here. The movement comes to a hanging end, leading into

IX *Nimrod* Distorted perhaps by being taken out of context and used for commemorative ceremonial occasions, this most famous of the variations recalls an evening when A.J. Jaeger, who worked for Elgar's publisher, Novello (and whose name is the German for 'hunter', hence Nimrod, the 'mighty hunter' from the Old Testament), brought the composer out of a characteristic depression by discussing the slow movements of Beethoven. And this variation in fact bears a strong similarity to the slow movement of Beethoven's *Pathétique* sonata.

X *Dorabella* Subtitled 'Intermezzo', this piece of charming light relief is a portrait of young Dora Penny, daughter of a Wolverhampton vicar, and a young lady who was fond of dancing, with the hint of a stammer. Her pet-name obviously derives from Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*.

XI *G.R.S.* This is as much a portrait of Dan, a jovial bulldog, as it is of his master, George Robertson Sinclair, organist of Hereford Cathedral. The busy bass-line could either be paying homage to Sinclair's pedalling technique or to Dan paddling in the River Wye in pursuit of a stick.

XII *B.G.N.* Another *Nimrod*-like tribute, this time to Basil G. Nevinston, the cellist chamber-music partner of HDS-P (pianist) and Elgar (violinist). It leads into

XIII \*\*\* Subtitled *Romanza*, this miniature tone-poem quotes Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* Overture, and evokes the throbbing of a ship's engines, with the help of swaying, divided strings and an ominous roll on the timpani (usually done with a couple of coins held between the musician's fingers). The anonymity of the dedication is ambiguous. It was generally thought to be intended for Lady Mary Lygon, who left Madresfield Court in order to join her brother in Australia, but more recently it has been suggested that it is in memory of Helen Weaver, Elgar's first love, who emigrated from Worcester to New Zealand for the sake of her health.

XIV *E.D.U.* This bold, vigorous finale is a portrait of Elgar himself ("Edu" was Alice's pet-name for him). During its course he recalls the variations for Alice and *Nimrod*, paying tribute to their support of him. After the triumphant première at St. James's Hall in London on June 19 1899, the conductor Hans Richter persuaded the composer to extend the conclusion, and the work now ends with an uncanny prophecy of Elgar's First Symphony, exultant with that masterpiece's "massive hope for the future".

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#### George Weldon – a remembrance by Brian B. Culverhouse.

(Brian Culverhouse was EMI Recording Producer from 1951 to 1972. He was responsible for most of the recordings made by George Weldon during his 'Hallé' years, 1951-1963).

I first met George Weldon at about 6 pm on the 7th March 1953 at Abbey Road Studio No. 1, prior to a recording session that evening with The Philharmonia Orchestra. He was to record Liszt's 'Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2' and Suppé's 'Light Cavalry Overture'. Walter Legge had been scheduled to produce this, but, at the last moment was unable to do so. David Bicknell, the HMV A & R Manager, was not available, so I was requested to take over.

I did not wish to produce 'just another recording' of these compositions. I had many of George Weldon's earlier recordings in my collection (when I met him he had already made a large number of recordings – all produced by Walter Legge – with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra of which he was the Principal Conductor) and I wanted this to be quite different – a demonstration of a new technical quality. I explained to George what I aimed to do in terms of orchestral lay-out and microphone placement. He was amenable to this. The result was successful. George was very impressed. From then on, I was determined to promote him as a recording artist for EMI.

We became close friends. I used to visit him regularly at his St. John's Wood home and we often lunched in the public house opposite Lord's Cricket Ground. I visited him the day before he was due to fly out for his second Cape Town tour. His doctor was present, so we had only a short conversation. It turned out to be our last. He died shortly afterwards in South Africa.

He loved and had a great understanding of English music, particularly Elgar, his favourite composer and this avenue of recording I explored whenever possible. He was not constrained by this preference, being a fine conductor and exponent of a wide range of music. In addition to music he loved fast cars. These two passions came together when he brought his recently acquired 'E-type' Jaguar to London and was photographed with it before the Royal Albert Hall. We had just made the recording 'British Light Music of the 20th Century'. The photograph was used on the sleeve of that LP.

I attended his memorial service. The only music he gave instructions to play was Elgar's 'Nimrod'. In view of this, and his particular love of Elgar's music, I decided to digitally re-master the recordings on this disc as a tribute to a remarkable conductor and a fine friend.

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## Sea Pictures, Op. 37

### [2] 1. Sea Slumber Song

Sea-birds are asleep,  
The world forgets to weep,  
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song  
On the shadowy sand  
Of this elfin land;

I, the Mother mild,  
Hush thee, oh my child,  
forget the voices wild!  
Hush thee, oh my child,  
Hush thee.

Isles in elfin light  
Dream, the rocks and caves,  
Lulled by whispering waves,  
Veil their marbles  
    Veil their marbles bright.  
Foam glimmers faintly  
    faintly white  
Upon the shelly sand  
Of this elfin land;

Sea-bound, like violins,  
To slumber woos and wins,  
I murmur my soft slumber-song,  
    my slumber song  
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.

Ocean's shadowy might  
Breathes good night,

Goodnight...  
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.  
Good night... Good night...  
Good night....

*R.B.W. Noel (1834-1894)*

### [3] 2. In Haven (Capri)

Closely let me hold thy hand,  
    Storms are sweeping sea and land;  
Love alone will stand.

Closely cling, for waves beat fast,  
    Foam-flakes cloud the hurrying blast;  
Love alone will last.

Kiss my lips, and softly say:  
    Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;  
Love alone will stay.

*C.A. Elgar (1848 - 1920)*

### [4] 3. Sabbath Morning at Sea

The ship went on with solemn face;  
To meet the darkness on the deep,  
The solemn ship went onward.  
I bowed down weary in the place;  
for parting tears and present sleep  
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!  
The waters around me, turbulent,

The skies, impassive o'er me,  
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,  
As glorified by even the intent  
Of holding the day glory!

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day.  
The sea sings round me while ye roll afar  
The hymn unaltered,  
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,  
And bless me deeper in your soul  
Because your voice has faltered.

And though this sabbath comes to me  
Without the stoled minister,  
And chanting congregation,  
God's Spirit shall give comfort.  
He who brooded soft on waters drear,  
Creator on creation.

He shall assist me to look higher,  
    He shall assist me to look higher,  
Where keep the saints, with harp and song,  
An endless endless sabbath morning,  
    An endless sabbath morning,  
And on that sea commixed with fire,  
    On that sea commixed with fire,  
Oft drop their eyelids raised too long  
To the full Godhead's burning.  
    The full Godhead's burning.

*Elizabeth Barret Browning (1806-1861)*

### [5] Where Corals Lie

The deeps have music soft and low  
When winds awake the airy spry,

It lures me, lures me on to go  
And see the land where corals lie.  
    The land, the land where corals lie.

By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,  
When night is deep, and moon is high,  
That music seeks and finds me still,  
And tells me where the corals lie.  
    And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,  
    Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,  
But far the rapid fancies fly  
The rolling worlds of wave and shell,  
And all the lands where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,  
Thy smile is like a morning sky,  
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go  
And see the land where corals lie.  
    The land, the land where corals lie.

*R. Garnett (1835-1906)*

### [6] The Swimmer

With short, sharp violent lights made vivid,  
To southward far as the sight can roam,  
Only the swirl of the surges livid,  
The seas that climb and the surfs that  
comb.

Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,  
The rocks receding, and reefs ?ung forward,