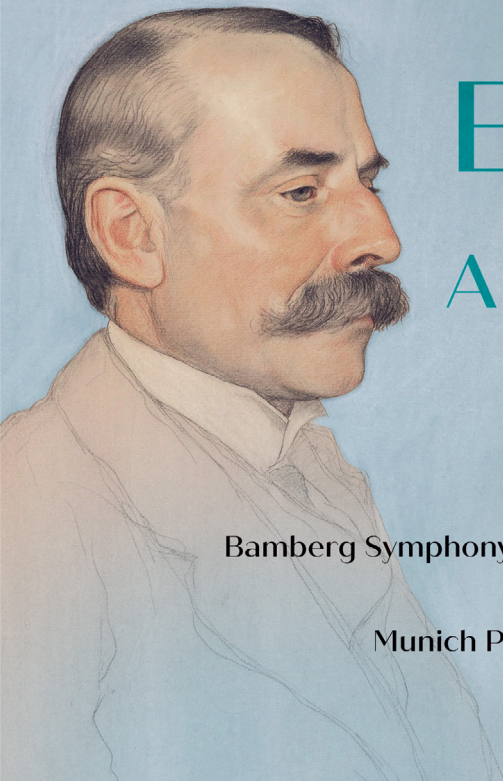


SOMM
RECORDINGS



ELGAR

from the
Archives vol.2

Violin Concerto
Cello Concerto

Tibor Varga
Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Jan Koetsier

André Navarra
Munich Philharmonic / Fritz Rieger

The **Elgar from the Archives** Series draws on the Elgar Archive of producer and restoration engineer Lani Spahr. His collection contains over 5,000 Elgar recordings, as well as a large collection of scores and books. His archive also served as the basis for the *Vaughan Williams Live Series*, which celebrated that composer's 150th anniversary, and is the source of numerous other historic titles on SOMM. This volume, as well as subsequent *Elgar from the Archives* releases, will feature both British artists and equally laudable performers from other countries.

Once Elgar had developed his mature style he wrote little for solo instruments other than for the piano or the violin – his instrument. As a player he developed a technique sufficiently good to lead the annual Three Choirs Festival Orchestra and sat in awe when playing for acknowledged masters such as Antonín Dvořák. His 12 days of study in London with Adolphe Pollitzer (1877) showed how good he was but it also proved that he would never reach the skill of a soloist such as Joachim or Wilhelmj. So it is we have a short Romance for bassoon (another of Elgar's instruments) and orchestra, finished almost simultaneously with the Violin Concerto (1910) and the Cello Concerto from 1918/19, which was composed alongside the masterly Violin Sonata.

Composed for and dedicated to the great Austrian-born American violinist Fritz Kreisler, Elgar's Concerto became, for a time, a substantial addition to the repertoire of great European virtuosos such as Sammons and Ysaÿe and, later, Menuhin and Haendel. Composed within a year of Elgar's First Symphony, the concerto was premiered by Kreisler at London's Queen's Hall on 10 November 1910 with the composer conducting, and it was the dedicatee who had urged Elgar to compose and, later, to complete the work. (Two years before that, Kreisler had confided to an English newspaper that he placed Elgar "on an equal footing with my idols, Beethoven and Brahms [...] And it is all pure, unaffected music. I wish Elgar would write something for the violin.") After Elgar had begun work on the piece, he turned to his violinist friend W.H. (Billy) Reed, the leader of the London Symphony Orchestra, to assist with some of the finer points of bowing and construction.

That the Violin Concerto largely dropped out of the consciousness of so many performers was owing to many factors, such as world wars, a lack of interest on the part of international conductors, wider programming, and its substantial demands on the soloist. Nevertheless, some violinists maintained their interest in the work, as is clear from this fine, committed performance by Tibor Varga, who may have discovered it when he was living in London. Furthermore, Varga is supported by a sympathetic conductor and an outstanding orchestra who seem at home with Elgar's demanding orchestration.

The concerto opens with a long passage for full orchestra laying out the main themes of the movement. This prepares the ground for the magical entrance of the violin, which emerges from the orchestra mid-phrase: the concluding half of the first subject of the movement. The soloist elaborates the theme, before the second subject calms the atmosphere in advance of the substantial development section. The movement ends positively. The Andante second movement begins with the statement of the main theme by the orchestra, the violin entering with a counter melody. This movement is at the heart of what makes Elgar: the critic Robin Legge recalled the tears pouring down Elgar's cheeks as he played the movement through with Kreisler. This controlled, passionate music moves "allargando" through "nobilmente", the violin first the virtuoso and then the introvert. As the movement concludes, orchestra and soloist commune together in music which Elgar described as "where two souls merge and melt into one another".

The listener is then taken in a very different direction as the virtuosic music of the third movement flies away at the hands of the soloist. Themes are introduced, hints of development appear and a conventional ending is pre-supposed. However, slowing down, Elgar moves into the most original part of the concerto, the *cadenza accompagnata*. The strings are instructed to play "pizzicato tremolando", to "thrum" with the soft part of the fingers over the strings while the soloist recalls themes from the first movement. Finally, the orchestra returns to join the soloist (*nobilmente*) – now embraced by horns and lower strings – in an optimistic conclusion.

The contribution to the Western musical canon by musicians born in the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire is exceptional and delightfully disproportionate. Even if “disguised” as Austrians or Germans, their flair, originality and brilliance transcended borders, enabling the music of Haydn, Liszt, Kodály and Bartók, to name but a few, to, at times, dominate orchestral programming. Eminent conductors such as Hans Richter, Arthur Nikisch and Georg Solti shaped the art of conducting either within Austro-Hungary or, from 1920, in the newly created Hungary.

Five years later, in May 1925, the Royal National Hungarian Academy of Music appointed Elgar Honorary Professor. The citation read, “of the most illustrious composer of our time and country”. That is some recognition! Was Hungary, only recently the enemy, trying to be noticed as it came to terms with itself as a small independent nation, or was there something more to it? This accolade was given after the end of World War I which meant that Elgar’s music had not died in the country of Bartók and Kodály after 1914. How sad it is then that, a century later, we must wonder and ask ourselves what happened to performances in Hungary of “the most illustrious composer of our time”? Another world war and the Soviet occupation of Hungary give us part of the answer, but the performance of Elgar’s Violin Concerto on this disc shows that the Elgar flame was not totally extinguished.

Nowadays probably more renowned as a pedagogue, “a violinists’ violinist”, Tibor Varga’s (1921–2003) reputation as performer is less well known. Nevertheless, he gave the German premiere of Schoenberg’s Violin Concerto as well as the premieres of those by Blacher and Krenek. Varga was born in Győr, a city roughly halfway between Budapest and Vienna, which was also the birthplace of Hans Richter, Joseph Joachim and Carl Flesch. Varga’s father, although a violinist by profession, had by then become a violin maker, a wartime injury having put paid to his career as a concert artist. Beginning violin lessons at the age of two, young Tibor was discovered by the violinist and conductor Jenő Hubay (1858–1937) and aged ten enrolled in the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest where he studied with

Carl Flesch (1873–1944) and Hubay. As a teenager he began touring as a concert violinist, but the Second World War interrupted this activity and led him to pursue other studies at Budapest University. Following the Soviet occupation of Hungary Varga escaped to Britain and began to forge a career there before being invited, in 1949, to assist in the formation of the music conservatoire in Detmold, Germany, where, together with André Navarra, he created the string department. Although by then a British citizen he eventually settled in the town of Sion in Switzerland where he founded a festival in 1964.

The Dutch composer and conductor Jan Koetsier (1911–2006) studied in Berlin before being appointed assistant conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1942. After the war he went back to Germany upon being appointed first principal conductor of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in 1950. In 1966 he joined the staff of the Hochschule für Musik in Munich where he taught conducting.

Elgar devoted himself to composition during the late summer of 1918 and into 1919, concentrating on three chamber works and his Cello Concerto. The concerto is an autumnal work infused with melancholy – with moments nonetheless of playfulness, notably in the second movement. The concerto begins strikingly, with the solo instrument playing a recitative-like phrase before giving way to the violas as they play the 9/8 melody that dominates the movement. The second subject (12/8) is also in the minor. The opening phrase, pizzicato, begins the second movement, a rapid scherzo which, if no “joke” (the literal meaning of scherzo), lightens the atmosphere in advance of the heartfelt Adagio. This masterly example of controlled emotion ends inconclusively before the finale’s Allegro, anticipated in the introduction of the movement, leaps away, exploring themes from earlier movements. The forward impetus is arrested and the cello enters a passage of self-reflection, almost communing with itself as it reflects on what has gone before. Pulling itself and the orchestra together, the cello restates the opening recitative, and the concerto ends, its length little more than that of the first movement of the Violin Concerto, but there is not one wasted note.

André Navarra was born in Biarritz in 1911. He studied the cello privately from the age of seven before enrolling at the Toulouse Conservatory where he was awarded first prize at the age of 13. He continued his studies at the Paris Conservatoire where he was subsequently appointed professor of the cello. Navarra spent a number of years as a member of the Krettly Quartet and, in 1931, gave his first public concert as soloist in Lalo's Concerto in D minor. In 1937 he won first prize at the Vienna International Competition. Abandoning his instrument for much of World War II, Navarra joined the French Army, only resuming his playing career in 1949. Navarra gave his first public performance in Britain at the 1950 Cheltenham Festival, where he performed the Elgar Concerto under Barbirolli, with whom he later recorded the work in 1957.

Other teaching appointments came Navarra's way, and he formed a connection with Tibor Varga when he accepted a professorship at Detmold. One of many distinguished French cellists to embrace the Elgar Concerto, Navarra died in Siena in 1988.

Fritz Rieger was born in the small town of Horní Staré Město (Oberaltstadt), in what is now the Czech Republic, in 1910. At the Prague Academy of Music he studied conducting with George Szell. Initially working in Czechoslovakia he was appointed director of Bremen Opera in 1941 assuming the role of director of the local Philharmonic Orchestra in 1944. His membership of the Nazi party would have been crucial to his obtaining such appointments.

Controversially, in 1949 he was appointed chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra replacing the "modernist" Hans Rosbaud, an American appointment. Apparently Rieger promised not to perform "modernist" music in the hope that traditional audiences would be attracted to concerts once more. He continued to lead the Munich Orchestra until 1966 and subsequently accepted the position of chief conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in 1966. Riegler died in Bonn in 1978.

LANI SPAHR – audio restoration engineer, producer and annotator – has garnered critical praise from *Gramophone* (“There are historic releases that make the grade because they are just that – ‘historic’ – and there are releases that make history because they are musically overwhelming. This set is both.”), *BBC Radio 3*, *BBC Music Magazine*, *Fanfare*, *The Sunday Times*, *MusicWeb International*, *Diapason*, *Classical Source*, *International Record Review*, and many others.



In 2016, BBC Radio 3 presented an hour-long documentary about his stereo reconstructions for *Elgar Remastered* (SOMMCD 261-4). In addition to his close collaboration with SOMM, which has produced several critically acclaimed recordings, his work can be heard on Music & Arts, West Hill Radio Archive, Naxos, Boston Records, and Oboe Classics, and he has worked for Sony/France on historic restorations of the recordings of George Szell. In 2020, he was awarded an Honorary Membership of the Elgar Society for his work on the recorded legacy of Sir Edward Elgar.

He has served on the faculties of Colorado College, Phillips Exeter Academy (New Hampshire), and the University of New Hampshire Chamber Music Institute. He has toured throughout North America, Europe, and the Far East on period and modern oboes and has recorded for Telarc, Linn, Koch, Naxos, Vox, MusicMasters, L'Oiseau-Lyre, and Musica Omnia.

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MONO

EDWARD ELGAR 1857–1934

from the Archives vol.2

^a André Navarra *cello*
Munich Philharmonic
Fritz Rieger *conductor*

^b Tibor Varga *violin*
Bamberg Symphony Orchestra
Jan Koetsier *conductor*

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op.85 ^a [25:46]

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | Adagio – Moderato | 7:13 |
| 2 | Lento – Allegro molto | 4:21 |
| 3 | Adagio | 4:33 |
| 4 | Allegro – Moderato – Allegro, ma non-troppo –
Poco più lento – Adagio | 9:38 |

Violin Concerto in B minor, Op.61 ^b [46:52]

- | | | |
|---|---------------|-------|
| 5 | Allegro | 17:31 |
| 6 | Andante | 11:22 |
| 7 | Allegro molto | 17:58 |

Total duration: **72:43**

^a Recording of a live radio broadcast
from Herkules-Saal, Residenz, Munich, 29 November 1956 (BR aircheck)

^b Recording of a live radio broadcast pre-recorded in a closed session
at Kulturraum, Bamberg, 19 December 1957 (BR aircheck)

Executive Producer: **Siva Oke** · Producer, Sound Restoration and Remastering: **Lani Spahr**

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