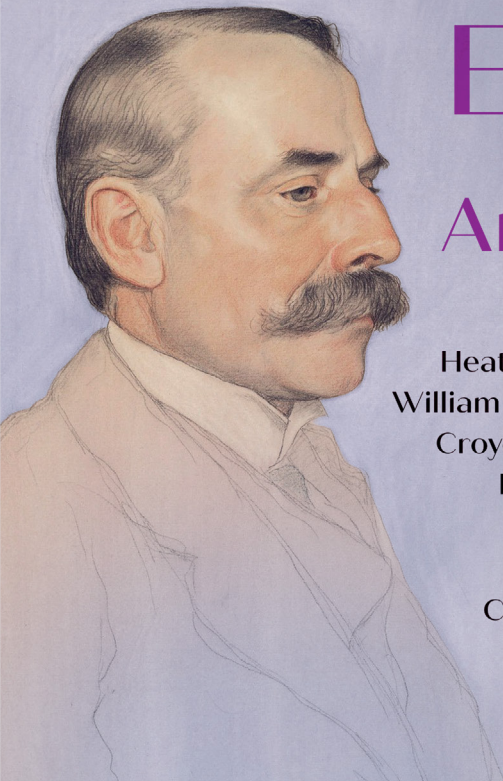


SOMM
RECORDINGS



ELGAR

from the
Archives vol.3

The Kingdom

Heather Harper • Helen Watts
William Herbert • Gordon Clinton
Croydon Philharmonic Society
BBC Symphony Orchestra

Enigma Variations

Concertgebouw Orchestra

Sir ADRIAN BOULT

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. The volumes in the *Elgar from the Archives* Series feature both British artists and equally laudable performers from other countries.

In his later years, by electing to say at home, Sir Adrian Boult's reputation as one of Britain's leading conductors perhaps unfairly came to rest on a few major works of the Austro-German classics and his conducting of British music. This does him an injustice for there were and are few more versatile conductors. Boult (1889–1983), although denied the opportunity to conduct in the opera house after World War II, was an exemplary conductor of opera and ballet, with one of the widest repertoire of orchestral music of any conductor. His time as director of music at the BBC and principal conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra gave him the opportunity to conduct many world and British premieres such as Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook Boult's commitment to British music, which ranged, on record, from the First Symphony of Humphrey Searle to the light music of Eric Coates, with Boult including Coates's *Dam Busters March* in the concert celebrating his 80th birthday. It is, however, the music of Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams with which he is most associated, recording the Vaughan Williams symphonic cycle twice and the Elgar symphonies several times. His mature understanding of works such as Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony and both Elgar symphonies still astonishes and moves listeners today. Many of Boult's last years were spent recording; a task which began in the acoustic age and ended in the digital.

For the centenary celebrations of Elgar's birth in 1957, the BBC broadcast live performances of all three of Elgar's major choral works, *The Dream of Gerontius* and the two oratorios,

The Apostles and *The Kingdom*. Sir Malcolm Sargent, then principal conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted *The Apostles* and Boult *The Kingdom*. Ten years later Boult made the first commercial recording of *The Kingdom* for EMI, the performance anchored on the contributions of John Shirley-Quirk as St Peter and Margaret Price as Mary, the Blessed Virgin. For those unfamiliar with the piece, the latter's singing of "The sun goeth down" from Part IV was revelatory. It still is.

In 1957 Boult was no less fortunate in having a fine cast (all with immaculate diction) for this live performance. Heather Harper (1930–2019) gives another glorious performance of "The sun goeth down", anchoring the second half of the performance. Boult's other soloists are equally good, with Gordon Clinton (1912–1988) an imperious St Peter, and Helen Watts (1927–2009) and the Australian William Herbert (1920–1975) making much of the subsidiary roles of Mary Magdalene and St John. Then there is the Croydon Philharmonic Society. Formed in 1914 by Alan Kirby (1889–1959), a businessman as well as a musician, it became under his direction one of the finest choirs in Britain. At times it was conducted by Elgar – who admired it greatly – as well as by Boult. It was Boult who wrote of Kirby in 1954: "Especially in the works of Elgar his word is final, and I look to him (as does the composer's daughter) as the true inheritor of the right style and tradition, coupled with the rare power of transmitting the spirit of this music, which those who heard Elgar's own conducting can never forget".¹

Owing to poor health, Kirby stepped- down in 1956, but his legacy shines through in this performance, which he was able to enjoy, seated in the Hall's Royal Box. The chorus is alive to the many changes in dynamics and tempos, and the way Elgar divides his singers. Those gathered in the Festival Hall on 29 May were fortunate indeed. The performance had

1 Adrian Boult, foreword to Henry A. Sharp: *Croydon Philharmonic Society: Forty Years of Singing 1914–1954* (Croydon: Croydon Philharmonic Society, 1954), 4.

already been heard in Croydon with the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) and there is a freshness about the later evening that shines throughout what we hear. Boult's pacing and observation of dynamics show his complete understanding of and identification with *The Kingdom*, a piece he admired above all the other major choral works of Elgar. Reunited with their former principal conductor, the quality of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's playing for Boult is heart-warming. His timings roughly match those of his commercial recording, although he takes nearly a minute longer over the Prelude in this performance. However, it does not feel like it. As Boult lets the music off its leash, there is an immediate sense of forward movement, of engaging with the drama to come and, as it unfolds, the tension never relaxes.

For *The Kingdom* Elgar created his own libretto (as in *The Apostles*) largely from the Old and New Testaments (mostly the *Acts of the Apostles*) and the early Christian document *The Didache*.² Through *The Kingdom* Elgar tells of the moment the Christian Church was formed: those early fragile, febrile days in Jerusalem as the Disciples and the Holy Women recover from the experience of Christ's Ascension and the earlier shock of Judas's betrayal. They await God's promise of Pentecost. The orchestral **Prelude** hurls the listener into the excitement of the times, betraying a mixture of certainty and frailty. As A.J. Jaeger wrote: "The Gospel and the Church of Christ are established facts; the apostles are preaching the Kingdom of God by the Lord's command".³ The music looks back over its shoulder at the mysticism of *The Apostles* oratorio before, dramatically, looking forward, as the so-called "new faith" theme is introduced on the strings, the "leitmotif" of the work of the Apostles to come. The Prelude concludes, mirroring the prayerful end of the earlier oratorio, with an augmentation of the "new faith" theme quietly reminding the Apostles of their task ahead.

2 *The Didache* is an early Christian summary of the teaching of the Apostles and was not discovered until the 1880s. It is a testament to Elgar's enquiring mind and his exhaustive research for the librettos to *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* that he should have made use of this text.

3 From A.J. Jaeger's *Book of Words with Analytical and Descriptive Notes*, published by Novello and Company Limited.

I. In the Upper Room

Without a break we enter the Upper Room where St Peter reminds those present of Jesus's teaching: "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them". A hint of the plainsong *O sacrum convivium* is a reminder of the Last Supper before Matthias (the replacement for Judas Iscariot) is chosen by lots.

II. At the Beautiful Gate

It is the morning of Pentecost and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene hearing Psalms sung in the Temple, see a lame man carried to the Beautiful Gate. They are reminded of Jesus's compassionate ministry and teaching.

III. Pentecost

Back in the Upper Room the Apostles anticipate Jesus's promise. A mystic chorus reminds them of that prophecy and the mezzo-soprano then narrates what transpires. The Disciples recount the experience in the thrilling chorus "He Who walketh upon the wings of the wind", subtly swung by Boult in this performance. The scene shifts to "**Solomon's Porch**" where Jesus had once taught. Visitors from all corners of Rome's Empire are astonished, proclaiming "And how hear we, every man in our tongue" and "What meaneth this": are they inebriated? However, the Apostles also speak "the words of His Holiness"; the confusion being conveyed vividly by Elgar.

We now reach the heart of *The Kingdom* where St Peter tells the crowd what it all means: "Ye men of Judaea... give ear unto my words". As he sings of God's promise that "I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all flesh", the new faith theme is heard softly in C major before it is transformed into E flat when he exalts the words "whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved". The Apostles, led by St Peter, the two Marys and the people, now celebrate the new faith ("in the name of Jesus Christ") and what it means in a chorus of

increasing complexity and power as Elgar uses all his resources to conclude the third part of *The Kingdom*.

IV. The Sign of Healing (At the Beautiful Gate)

The Apostles are now on the move, teaching those they meet and, at the Beautiful Gate, St Peter tells the lame man to “rise up and walk”. The astonished crowd marvels as St Peter explains how faith “made this man strong”. Before long the priests and Sadducees arrange for **The Arrest** of St Peter and St John, here described by the alto. This leads into the great quasi-operatic scena “The sun goeth down” in which Mary, Christ’s mother, reflects on all that she has experienced.

V. The Upper Room (In Fellowship)

Despite concerns at their potential apostasy, no charges were laid against St Peter and St John who describe their experience to the other Disciples. The chorus sings of its joy and quietly gives thanks for the Cup and the Broken Bread, before finally sharing The Lord’s Prayer. The quiet but positive conclusion reminds the listener of music first heard in the Prelude as *The Kingdom* comes to its own end.



In February 1940, at the height of the Phoney War, Boult flew to Amsterdam and “had two or three wonderful days in a neutral city with amazing food and no black-out”.⁴ On the 29th Boult conducted the Concertgebouw Orchestra in a concert broadcast from Hilversum by the Dutch public broadcasting association (AVRO). The concert included Arthur Bliss’s *Music for Strings* and concluded with Elgar’s *Enigma Variations*. This would be Boult’s last visit to the European continent for more than five years (Nazi forces invaded the Netherlands on 10 May that year). He returned to Belgium and the Netherlands in the autumn of 1945.

4 Sir Adrian Boult ch: *My Own Trumpet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1973), 125.

This 1940 performance of the *Variations* is one of Boult's finest interpretations of the work with one of the few continental orchestras that was familiar with the piece, having performed it nearly 30 times since Willem Mengelberg, principal conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra from 1895 to 1945, introduced Elgar's score in 1902. This great body of players responded to Boult brilliantly (as can be heard) and gave him a performance which has more than stood the test of its 86 years. Although Boult's timings here are similar to those of his last commercial recording of the *Variations*, made with the LSO in 1970, there is a tautness in this Concertgebouw performance which is both compelling and very much in the spirit of Elgar's own interpretations (which Boult, of course, knew well).

"Dedicated to my friends pictured within", Elgar's *Enigma Variations* represented a varied collection of intimates and how they might have interpreted Elgar's theme. Most of them were part of the society Alice Elgar enjoyed before her marriage. Those from Elgar's circle were few: Troyte, Nimrod and G.R. Sinclair. These, with "Dorabella", whose stammer he gently parodied, maintained a relationship with the Elgars after the *Variations* had become a staple of the repertoire. Some years after the composition of his *Variations*, Elgar provided a description of each portrait. The following is an abbreviated version of this.

First the Theme is stated in two sections, leading directly into Elgar's portrait of his wife, Caroline Alice, **C.A.E.**. Hew David Steuart-Powell [**H.D.S-P.**] was a well-known amateur pianist. His characteristic (diatonic) run over the keys before beginning to play is here humorously travestied in the semiquaver passages. Richard Baxter Townshend (**R.B.T.**). The Variation refers to R.B.T.'s presentation of an old man in some amateur theatricals – the low voice flying off occasionally into "soprano" timbre. **W.M.B.** (William Meath Baker) is a country squire. This variation was written after [our] host had, with a slip of paper in his hand, *forcibly* read out the arrangements for the day & hurriedly left the music-room with an inadvertent bang of the door. **R.P.A.** (Richard Penrose Arnold, son of poet Matthew Arnold).

His serious conversation was continually broken up by whimsical & witty remarks. The theme is given by the basses & there is much badinage among the wind instruments. **Ysobel.** A Malvern lady [Isabel Fitton] who is learning the viola [taught by E.E.]; it may be noticed that the opening bar, a phrase made use of throughout the variation, is an “exercise” for crossing the strings – a difficulty for beginners. **Troyte:** A well-known architect [Arthur Troyte Griffith] in Malvern. The boisterous mood is mere banter. The uncouth rhythm of the drums, etc. was really suggested by some madroit essays to play the pianoforte; later the strong rhythm suggests the attempts of the instructor (E.E.) to make something like order out of chaos. **W.N.** Really a suggestion of an 18th-century household of two sisters, the gracious personalities of the ladies are sedately shown. [Winifred Norbury] was more connected with music than any others of the family, so her initials head the movement.

Nimrod. The name is my substitute for Jaeger (Jäger: German for hunter. Nimrod: “the mighty hunter before the Lord”). During an evening walk Nimrod discoursed eloquently on the slow movements of Beethoven. It will be noticed that the opening bars are made to suggest the slow movement of the Eighth Sonata (Pathétique). **Dorabella** (Dora Powell). Intermezzo. The pseudonym is adopted from Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*. The movement suggests a dance of fairy-like lightness. **G.R.S.** [George Robertson Sinclair]: late organist of Hereford Cathedral. The variation, however, has nothing to do with organs or cathedrals, or, except remotely, with G.R.S. The first few bars were suggested by his great bull-dog Dan (a well-known character) falling down the steep bank into the river, his paddling upstream to find a landing place & his rejoicing bark on landing. G.R.S. said, “Set that to music” – Here it is. **B.G.N.** Basil Nevinson, an amateur cello player of some distinction; a serious & devoted friend. The asterisks * * * take the place of the name of Lady Mary Lygon, who was, at the time of the composition, on a sea voyage [to New South Wales]. The drums suggest the distant throb of the engines of a liner, over which the clarinet quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn’s *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. **E.D.U.** Finale; bold and vigorous

in general style. Written at a time when my friends were dubious and generally discouraging as to my musical future, this “variation” is merely to show what “E.D.U.” (a “paraphrase” of a fond name for the writer) intended to do. References are made to a characteristic whistle, to C.A.E. and to Nimrod, which are entirely fitting to the intention of the piece.



I have known these magnificent performances for many years, and it is thrilling to hear how Lani Spahr has managed to bring both to life once more. This performance of Boult's *Kingdom* was always special, and it is a delight to hear how Spahr has been able to delineate the sections of the choir, soloists and orchestra in ways I had not imagined possible. He even finds the elusive organ! For the performance with the Concertgebouw Boult is given an orchestra in the finest form and one can almost feel him relishing their quality. In return the players respond brilliantly to Boult's conducting which could not have been in greater contrast to that of their principal conductor, Willem Mengelberg who was, to say the least, something of a martinet. These are not modern recordings but remain essential listening for those who admire Sir Adrian Boult, these two great orchestras, the soloists, Alan Kirby's choir and, of course, Elgar's music. Their gratitude for Lani Spahr's achievement should be limitless.

(I am grateful to the Reverend John Knowles for his advice regarding the above notes and on The Kingdom in particular).

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LANI SPAHR – audio restoration engineer, producer, lecturer 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.

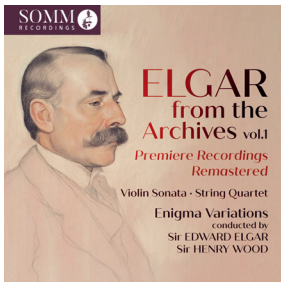
Formerly a leading performer on period oboes in the US, he was a member of Boston Baroque and the Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra of Boston. In addition, he has appeared with many of North America’s leading period instrument orchestras, including Tafelmusik, Philharmonia Baroque, Tempesta di Mare, Apollo’s Fire, Washington Bach Consort, the American Classical Orchestra, Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, Mercury Baroque and many others.

Also a modern oboist, he was the principal oboist of the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra, the Colorado Opera Festival, the American Chamber Winds, and the Maine

Chamber Ensemble and made his European solo debut in 1999 playing John McCabe's Oboe Concerto with the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra in England.

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.

The **Elgar from the Archives** series on **SOMM Recordings**



ARIADNE 5046: Elgar from the Archives vol.1

Enigma Variations (1920/1)

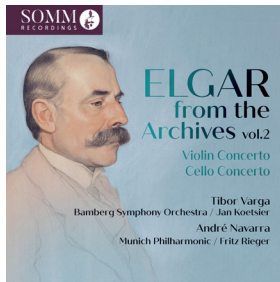
Royal Albert Hall Orchestra / Edward Elgar

Violin Sonata (1919, Marjorie Hayward, Una Bourne)

String Quartet (1921, The London String Quartet)

Enigma Variations (1924)

New Queen's Hall Orchestra / Henry Wood



ARIADNE 5047: Elgar from the Archives vol.2

Violin Concerto (1957, Tibor Varga)

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Jan Koetsier

Cello Concerto (1956, André Navarra)

Munich Philharmonic / Fritz Rieger

EDWARD ELGAR 1857–1934

from the Archives vol.3

ARIADNE 5048-2

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MONO

- ^a The Blessed Virgin: **Heather Harper** *soprano* · Mary Magdalene: **Helen Watts** *contralto*
St John: **William Herbert** *tenor* · St Peter: **Gordon Clinton** *baritone*
Croydon Philharmonic Society (*director Alan J. Kirby*)
BBC Symphony Orchestra (*leader Paul Beard*), **Sir Adrian Boult** *conductor*
- ^b **Concertgebouw Orchestra, Sir Adrian Boult** *conductor*

The Kingdom, Op.51 ^a

[1:37:11]

CD 1	
①	Prelude 8:34
②	I. In the Upper Room 18:26
③	II. At the Beautiful Gate (The Morn of Pentecost) 5:38
④	III. Pentecost (In the Upper Room) 7:23
⑤	In Solomon's Porch 17:35

Total duration: 57:38

CD 2	
①	IV. The Sign of Healing (At the Beautiful Gate) 9:38
②	The Arrest 10:45
③	V. The Upper Room (In Fellowship) 19:08

Sung texts available by scanning the below QR code:

somm-recordings.com/5048libretto

Variations on an Original Theme

"Enigma", Op.36 ^b

[29:45]

④	Theme 1:15
⑤	I. (C.A.E.) 1:48
⑥	II. (H.D.S-P.) 0:44
⑦	III. (R.B.T.) 1:27
⑧	IV. (W.M.B.) 0:26
⑨	V. (R.P.A.) 1:51
⑩	VI. (Ysobel) 1:14
⑪	VII. (Troyte) 0:54
⑫	VIII. (W.N.) 1:47
⑬	IX. (Nimrod) 4:12
⑭	X. (Dorabella) Intermezzo 2:36
⑮	XI. (G.R.S.) 0:53
⑯	XII. (B.G.N.) 2:17
⑰	XIII. (***) Romanza 2:40
⑱	XIV. (E.D.U.) Finale 5:37

Total duration:

60:09

- ^b Recording (LIVE): Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, 29 February 1940
- ^a Recording (LIVE): Royal Festival Hall, London, 29 May 1957 (Elgar Centenary Celebrations)

Executive Producer: **Siva Oke**

Producer, Sound Restoration and Remastering: **Lani Spahr**

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