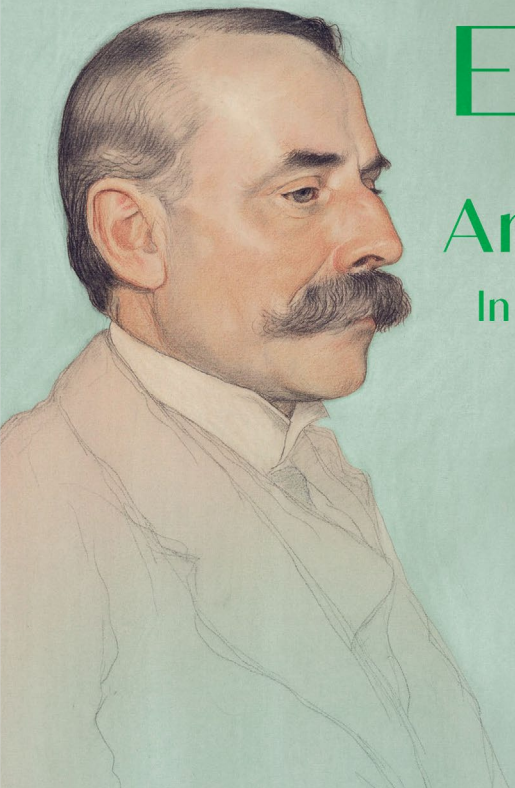


SOMM
RECORDINGS



ELGAR

from the
Archives vol.4

In the South (Alassio)

Symphony Orchestra
of Radio Leipzig
Gerhard Pflüger

Symphony No.1

The Hallé Orchestra
(Centenary Concert, 1958)
Sir John BARBIROLI

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.

Gerhard Pflüger (1907–1991) was born and educated in Dresden and had the misfortune to come to maturity during the years of National Socialism, the destruction of much of Germany in 1945 and the establishment of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949. Pflüger studied music with the composer Kurt Striegler (1886–1958) and conducting with Fritz Busch (1890–1951), moving to Tilsit in East Prussia¹ in 1927 to serve as kapellmeister there before moving on to Stralsund in 1930, Gotha in 1932, and eventually Meiningen in 1940, the year he joined the Nazi party. From 1946, as a member of the East German communist party, he accepted various musical posts, notably in Rostock on the Baltic Coast. Later he accepted the position of musical director of the Symphony Orchestra of Radio Leipzig (known today, having merged with the Radio Philharmonic in 1992, as the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra). He spent his last years in Weimar, where his appointments included conductor of the Staatskapelle and a professorship at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt. Weimar is also where Pflüger developed a reputation for conducting the music of contemporary composers, notable among them Paul Hindemith.

Clearly a survivor and a musician of some note, Pflüger was also quite the pioneer, as this recording of *In the South* demonstrates. Yes, it must be counted as something of a curiosity, but it is also important, for Pflüger and the fine musicians of the Symphony Orchestra of Radio Leipzig also recorded *Froissart*, making these the first commercial recordings of not one, but two of Elgar's concert overtures since the composer's own from 1930 and 1933.

1 Annexed by the Soviet Union in 1945, Tilsit is now Sovetsk.

(Receptive listeners can look forward to the release of Pflüger's interpretation of *Froissart* on a future instalment of the *Elgar from the Archives Series*.)

In a changed world, with Germany a destroyed and divided country, for an East German Orchestra and record company to issue two substantial orchestral pieces by a British composer was not only rare but courageous. If the name Elgar was familiar to some of the older orchestral musicians, they would likely not have heard it for more than 20 years: eclipsed during the Nazi years, he would have been ignored in the early years of the Soviet-dominated GDR. The recording of both pieces in 1953, while out of the ordinary, was perhaps a reflection of the easing of East–West tensions following the death of Stalin in early March that year. Coupled with Britten's *Soirées musicales* performed by the Symphony Orchestra of Radio Berlin under Rolf Kleinert, the works were released on the American Urania label in 1954 and quickly became available in the West.

In some ways, *In the South* is a performance of two halves, suggesting that – despite the admirable quality of the playing – the orchestra may have been feeling its way into the music without the luxury of extensive rehearsal. There is a marked contrast between the cautious opening and the recapitulation at Cue 40, for example. This sense is further emphasised by the surprising slowing at Cue 3, before Pflüger propels his players forward as they and he regain their confidence. At times, microphone placement creates strange balance issues in the sound, such as an overly prominent harp.

Only ever issued on LP, the recording has provided audio restoration engineer Lani Spahr with another challenge in how to extract and manage sounds that were produced over 70 years ago and pressed on lesser-quality material. Even if the listener has quibbles with the performance, what one can now hear is a recording with genuine qualities in the finest possible sound directed by a conductor largely forgotten outside the former East Germany. Pflüger was clearly a trailblazer who attempted to widen his orchestra's repertoire in what

must have felt like an original – and, one hopes, exciting – way. Once again, we should be grateful to Lani Spahr for enabling us to hear this recording in a sound that would, I believe, astonish the production team behind the original LP.

Volume three of this series celebrated the conducting of one of the great advocates of Elgar's music, Sir Adrian Boult. Here we turn to another great Elgar conductor, Sir John Barbirolli, with a live performance of Elgar's First Symphony. On the surface, Barbirolli (1899–1970) and Boult seemed to conform to stereotypes. One tall and elegant, the image of a reserved Englishman, and the other short, Italian and emotional. However, Boult's occasional displays of passionate anger belied his image, and Barbirolli's disciplined management of the music he loved, such as this symphony, shows that his emotionalism was always deployed in service of the music. Barbirolli was ten years younger than Boult, but each admired the other, and when their paths crossed, they got on well. Although both conductors met Elgar, it was Boult who got to know him first, meeting the composer in December 1904, when he was only 15. Nevertheless, it is perhaps Barbirolli who was more emotionally "in tune" with Elgar's character. Michael Kennedy, biographer of both conductors, and of Elgar, recalled a moment after a 1964 Hallé performance of Elgar's First Symphony conducted by Barbirolli: Kennedy was chatting with Evelyn, Lady Barbirolli, with Sir John nearby, who "sat exhausted, obviously profoundly moved, and hardly able to speak. [...] Suddenly he gripped Evelyn's forearm with one hand, and mine with the other, tears filled his eyes, and he said with frightening intensity: 'God, I love that music.' His body was shaking as though swept by forces he could not control."²

On the evening of 30 January 1958, the City of Manchester celebrated the centenary of the Hallé Orchestra. Graced by Royalty, the concert was not only broadcast but televised, the necessary lights creating additional heat and discomfort for the players. Despite those issues, this was a great occasion, as Kennedy made clear: "... this concert still managed

2 Michael Kennedy, *Barbirolli Conductor Laureate* (Uttoxeter, The Barbirolli Society, 2003), 256.

to retain the authentic Hallé tradition. This was evident from the roar of welcome which greeted Sir John Barbirolli's arrival on the platform, when the whole audience rose to greet the man in whom the tradition of a century's music-making was on that evening centred.³ [...] Finally, in Elgar's symphony, the spirit of Richter lived again, and this mighty music, tranquil in beauty and triumphant in peroration, matched perfectly the character and mood of the concert. Every phrase, every nuance, was movingly and devoutly re-created. In their finest hour, the Hallé and its conductor found the best in each other to do honour to their own traditions."⁴

In this performance, reproduced here, we can hear Barbirolli's profound connection to Elgar's music and how his relationship with the orchestra further enhanced and sustained the *beauty* and *triumph* of Elgar's symphony. In 1957 Barbirolli took the Hallé north for the opening concert of the Edinburgh Festival. This was an all-Elgar concert "which pleased all the critics; after the ovation for the First Symphony he held the score aloft and kissed it"⁵. So it was that Barbirolli celebrated the centenary of Elgar's birth (June 1957) with this great symphony and, through the same piece, the Hallé's centenary seven months later. Echoing Kennedy, the critic from the *Manchester Guardian*, Colin Mason, wrote of the performance that it was "not four movements but a single symphonic poem haunted all through by the tempo and mood of the opening march theme. It may be doubted whether Richter himself did better for the work than this."

Barbirolli made two commercial recordings of the symphony. The first, with the Hallé Orchestra in 1954, demonstrated the achievement attained by Barbirolli and his players

3 The concert began with Weber's Overture to *Der Freischütz* and continued with a performance of the B flat Piano Concerto by Brahms with Clifford Curzon as soloist.

4 Michael Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), 384–385. (Hans Richter conducted the premiere of the piece at a Hallé concert in December 1908.)

5 Kennedy, *Barbirolli Conductor Laureate*, 262.

through their creation of such a fine instrument in the years since his appointment as principal conductor in 1943. Nevertheless, the freedom afforded to Barbirolli by a live concert generated – in addition to a sense of occasion – a performance of greater tautness and momentum, as is evident in this broadcast from 1958. The rendition here is a good two minutes quicker than either of his studio recordings – something replicated in Barbirolli's last concert, in King's Lynn in 1970, when this symphony proved to be his farewell to the concert platform, days before his death.

Andrew Neill © 2026



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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.

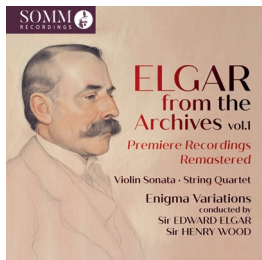
In 2016, BBC Radio 3 presented an hour-long documentary about his stereo reconstructions for *Elgar Remastered* (SOMMCD 261-4). In addition to his close collaboration with SOMM, which has produced several critically acclaimed recordings, his work can be heard on Music & Arts, West Hill Radio Archive, 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.

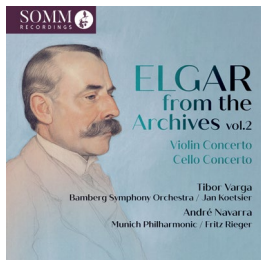
Also a modern oboist, he was the principal oboist of the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra, the Colorado Opera Festival, the American Chamber Winds, and the Maine Chamber Ensemble and made his European solo debut in 1999 playing John McCabe's Oboe Concerto with the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra in England.

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.

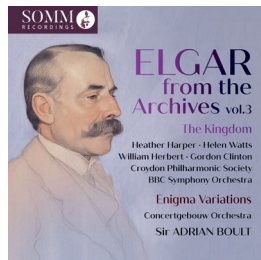
The **Elgar from the Archives** series on **SOMM Recordings**



ARIADNE 5046



ARIADNE 5047



ARIADNE 5048

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MONO

EDWARD ELGAR 1857–1934

from the Archives vol.4

- ^a **Symphony Orchestra of Radio Leipzig**
Gerhard Pflüger *conductor*
- ^b **The Hallé Orchestra**
Sir John Barbirolli *conductor*

1	In the South (Alassio), Op.50 ^a	20:11
	Concert Overture	
	Symphony No.1 in A flat major, Op.55 ^b	[49:41]
2	I. Andante. Nobilmente e semplice – Allegro	20:04
3	II. Allegro molto	6:40
4	III. Adagio	11:35
5	IV. Lento – Allegro	11:20
	Total duration:	70:00

^a First Release: [Urania] URLP 7136 (matrix: XTV 21788), 1954
Recording: “Springerstraße” Broadcasting House, Leipzig, c.1953

^b Recording of a live radio broadcast from Free Trade Hall, Manchester,
“Hallé Centenary Day Concert”, 30 January 1958 (BBC Home Service aircheck)

Executive Producer: **Siva Oke**

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

Front Cover: *Sir Edward Elgar* (July 1911) by William Strang (1859–1921)

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Design: **WLP London Ltd** · Editorial: **Ray Granlund**

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