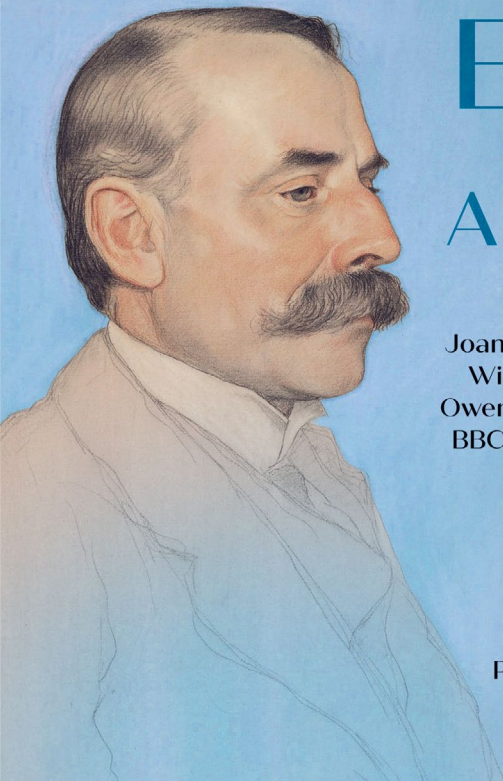


SOMM
RECORDINGS



ELGAR

from the Archives vol.5

The Apostles

Joan Hammond • Marjorie Thomas
William Herbert • John Cameron
Owen Brannigan • Richard Standen
BBC Chorus & BBC Choral Society
BBC Symphony Orchestra
(Elgar Centenary, 1957)
Sir MALCOLM SARGENT

Sea Pictures

Gladys Ripley
Philharmonia Orchestra (1946)
GEORGE WELDON
FIRST CD RELEASE

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.

The great choral conductor, Alan J. Kirby once observed that “In one town in England it has been customary to perform these works (*The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*) fairly frequently since 1920. At first, audiences were small, but as the years went on and the war period arrived, while other works drew moderate attendances, hundreds of people were turned away when *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* were performed.”¹ Kirby was referring to Croydon, and his long tenure there, but today it is *The Dream of Gerontius* that is the most widely performed of Elgar's three great choral compositions. As Kirby implied, the other large choral works are equally rewarding and thrilling for the listener. While conductors such as Sir Adrian Boult tend to consider *The Kingdom* the finest of the three compositions, it is *The Apostles* that includes some of Elgar's most striking and original orchestration and poses the most challenges to the performer and listener. Elgar not only covers the calling of the Apostles and the betrayal, crucifixion and ascension of Christ, but adds an additional dimension to the overall structure of his work with his original portrayal of the character of Judas Iscariot.

There is much originality in *The Apostles*, with Elgar using his large orchestra to its capacity. Scenes such as “The Dawn” and its use of the shofar (ram's horn), Judas's 30 pieces of silver, or “By the Sea of Galilee” demonstrate his virtuosity. Elgar also brings us face to face with the guilt and humiliation of St Peter after his denial of Christ, in an exquisite passage for

1 Alan J. Kirby, in: Ed. H.A. Chambers, *Edward Elgar Centenary Sketches* (London, Novello, 1957), 24.

female voices: “And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter”, the repetition of the word “wept” powerfully emphasising Peter’s remorse. In constructing his libretto Elgar used little-known texts to emphasise Judas’s misery, such as this passage from the Book of Job: “Sheol is naked before Thee, and Abaddon hath no covering”. Judas’s self-loathing and terror at what he has done are almost tangible in the portrayal by Owen Brannigan on this album. Elgar had developed a clear view as to why Judas betrayed Christ and had more than a passing sympathy for his action which, as he said, “... would force Christ to make some overwhelming demonstration in the world”, seizing power in line with Judas’s hopes and imagination.

It is the music, accompanying the words “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” (My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me?), that conveys Golgotha’s desolation before the brief scene “At the Sepulchre” offers hope to Christ’s followers, with the shofar returning to herald a new dawn. From there the music moves, in growing affirmation, towards the celebration of Christ’s apotheosis as He ascends to heaven. Alleluias echo across heaven before the listener is returned to earth and immersed in the radiant conclusion of this, Elgar’s largest composition.

The Apostles, Op.49 (1903)

Despite his dismay at what he considered to be failings at the premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius* during the 1900 Birmingham Triennial Festival, Elgar accepted a commission for the 1903 Festival, announcing that his new composition would be called *The Apostles*. It was to be an ambitious trilogy, covering the calling of the Apostles, the founding of the New Church and the Last Judgement. He decided to compile the libretto himself: a unique collection of Biblical verses from the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Apocrypha in the 1611 King James translation. This decision caused Elgar considerable difficulties and ate into his time for composition. Eventually, he abandoned the idea of a trilogy and completed *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* (for the 1906 Festival) as two separate works. In

its now shortened form, *The Apostles* was complete by the summer of 1903, in time for Elgar to conduct the premiere on 14 October.

Sir Malcolm Sargent (1895–1967) recorded *The Dream of Gerontius* twice, in 1945 and 1955. The former version has more than stood the test of time and is, justly, considered one of the finest performances on record. However, apart from recording an excerpt from *The Kingdom*², Sargent was not invited to make a commercial recording of any other Elgar choral work. He died shortly before Sir Adrian Boult recorded *The Kingdom* in 1968, and it was again Boult who went on to record *The Apostles* in 1973. It is clear from broadcast performances that have since become available, however, that Sargent identified with *The Apostles* and the drama of the story that culminates in Christ's ascension. The present recording, conducted by Sargent and released in the *Elgar from the Archives Series*, completes the recorded trilogy of the three conductors most associated with the promotion of Elgar's music in the years following World War II, which along with Sargent and Boult includes Sir John Barbirolli. This generality is not entirely fair, of course, but to deny these three great musicians their due would not be just either.

Sargent's renown as a choral conductor is based on his interpretation of major choral compositions such as Handel's *Messiah* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. He was appointed chief conductor of the Royal Choral Society in 1928 (a post he held until his death), and his dramatic realisations of Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* performed annually at London's Royal Albert Hall cemented his reputation. He conducted the triumphant premiere of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* at the Leeds Triennial Festival in 1931, which led to his additional appointment as chief conductor of the Huddersfield Choral Society.

2 In 1948 Sargent conducted the Philharmonia Orchestra and Scottish soprano Isobel Baillie in a performance of "The Sun Goeth Down" for the Columbia label.

Sargent's ability to control large choral forces, his immaculate appearance and the charm he extended to the amateur singers in his choirs certainly produced results, and it was Sir Thomas Beecham, not generally known for his generosity towards colleagues, who called Sargent "... the greatest choirmaster we have ever produced; he makes the buggers sing like blazes". In a December 1946 interview for *Gramophone* magazine it was reported of Sargent "that abroad he is repeatedly asked for recordings of Handel. But above all he wants to record Elgar's *The Kingdom* and *The Apostles*. These masterpieces, he thinks, should be much more widely known than they are." Later, in 1962, Sargent was interviewed again for *Gramophone* by Arthur Jacobs, who asked "... whether *The Creation* was of all large choral works the one he would most like to record. [Sargent] said no: he would most like to record Elgar's *The Kingdom* and *The Apostles*, works which he admires and of which he would like to leave his version for posterity, although he is quite aware of their lack of 'box-office' at present."

In 1957, as principal conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Sargent threw himself into celebrating the Elgar centenary.³ The composer was born on 2 June 1857, and a concert at the Royal Albert Hall one hundred years later included *The Music Makers*, performed by the Choral Societies with which Sargent was most closely associated. Later in the year, on 7 November, again at the Royal Albert Hall, the conductor led his second performance of *The Apostles* in 1957, with the Royal Choral Society. Stanley Bayliss wrote "... the closing pages are magnificent and give us something that cannot be found even in *Gerontius*. This was fully understood by Sir Malcolm Sargent, who was the hero of the evening."

In this earlier performance of *The Apostles*, which took place at London's Royal Festival Hall two weeks after Boult's conducting of *The Kingdom* (ARIADNE 5048-2), the BBC

3 Sargent's tenure at the BBCSO would end in 1957. He was replaced by Rudolf Schwarz (1905–1994), who took over the 1957–58 season.

Symphony Orchestra and tenor William Herbert (who continued his compelling portrait of St John) were the areas of commonality. However, after the prominent role given to Mary Magdalene (the excellent Marjorie Thomas) in Part One, the three characters that come to dominate *The Apostles* are Jesus, St Peter and Judas Iscariot. Sargent was well served with the warm tones of John Cameron as St Peter and even more so by the characterisation Owen Brannigan brought to the role of Judas.

[I have known this recording in what might be best described as execrable sound. Once more, Lani Spahr has rescued a valuable performance which can now be heard in comfort. I am also grateful to the Reverend John Knowles for his assistance, once again, in the compilation of the above notes.]



George Weldon (1908–1963) was born with a withered right leg, which gave him a pass for most sports and allowed him to devote himself to music during his education at Sherborne School before entering the Royal College of Music. There his studies included conducting (Malcolm Sargent was one of his teachers), and he later became assistant to Julius Harrison, conductor of the Hastings Municipal Orchestra. Weldon gained further experience conducting major London orchestras, as well as ballet and opera. In 1943 he succeeded Leslie Heward as principal conductor of the City of Birmingham Orchestra (the word Symphony was added to its title during his tenure). Weldon was a talented musician, whose early promise was cut short by his unexpected death at the age of 55.

Weldon had a love of fast cars, competing in hill climbs and sports car races, and on one occasion terrifying the pianist Denis Matthews when he drove him to London for a concert with the CBO! He attracted a substantial young female following and in 1950 lost his appointment in Birmingham through a rumoured affair with the composer Ruth Gipps.

Appalled at his treatment, Sir John Barbiroli offered Weldon the position of associate conductor of the Hallé Orchestra in 1952. This gave him considerable freedom and allowed him to work with many other British orchestras. He made several pioneer concerto recordings for the Columbia label and died during a conducting tour in South Africa.

The music of Elgar was one of Weldon's great loves and, in addition to the two recordings of *Sea Pictures* he made for the Columbia label⁴, his pioneer recordings of *In the South* (the first recorded in Britain since Elgar's own in 1930) and of Elgar's orchestration of Handel's *Overture in D minor* are also distinguished. The early post-war recording of *Sea Pictures* featured on this album made with the then recently formed Philharmonia Orchestra, is also notable for being the first made after the 1927 recording with Muriel Brunskill.

The contralto Gladys Ripley (1908–1955) began her professional career in her late teens. Being largely self-taught but with a fine ear and an ability to learn quickly, she became much in demand, appearing at the Royal Albert Hall for the first time at the age of 16. As her voice developed into a powerful instrument, she sang at Covent Garden for six seasons before the start of World War II. During the conflict she became a widely travelled entertainer for the troops in North Africa and Europe and made a number of recordings of operatic excerpts. As an HMV artist she was chosen to sing the part of the Angel in the first recording of *The Dream of Gerontius*, made in Liverpool in 1945, her Roman Catholic education aiding her understanding of the role.

⁴ Weldon's second recording of *Sea Pictures* was made in 1954, again with Gladys Ripley, this time with the LSO. This performance can be heard on SOMMCD 073, which also includes the concert overture *In the South (Alassio)* and the *Enigma Variations* recorded with the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1953.

Ripley's and Weldon's qualities are evident in this 1946 recording of *Sea Pictures*. We can hear how Weldon moulds the newly formed orchestra (then the finest in Europe), the double basses in the first song to vividly convey the swell of the sea. Ripley, as if beginning a conversation, subtly takes the listener with her into this imaginary world. The recording demonstrates her admired tone, her breath control and her ability to throw herself into giving a genuine performance notwithstanding the stop-starts in the 78rpm recording process. Weldon's sensitive accompaniment is clear in all five songs, notably in "Sabbath Morning at Sea" where the louder passages embrace Ripley's voice. Furthermore, with her flexible, light contralto voice she covers the climaxes with no sense of strain. This performance, in Lani Spahr's restoration, must rank as one of the finest performances of Elgar's cycle of songs on record.

Sea Pictures, Op.37 (1899)

There are few examples of orchestral song cycles appearing as such, fully orchestrated, without a piano version preceding them. If not unique, Elgar's *Sea Pictures* is a rare example, for even those by Berlioz and Mahler (which Elgar could not have known) appeared first in versions for piano accompaniment. Time has tempered the originality of *Sea Pictures*, a work completed within a month of the premiere and associated success of the *Enigma Variations*. Commissioned by the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Festival of 1899, *Sea Pictures* was premiered to great acclaim by the renowned contralto Clara Butt, "dressed like a mermaid", at St Andrew's Hall, Norwich on 5 October. None of the five poems, related through their nautical themes, can be considered great poetry, but it is Elgar's music and his orchestration that immediately command attention as the restless swell of the sea opens the "Sea Slumber Song" by then popular poet Roden Noel.

The composer's wife, Alice, amended the text of one of her poems to fit the theme of the cycle; thus her "Lute Song" became "In Haven (Capri)". In C major throughout, Elgar's

transparent orchestration matches the intimacy of this miniature within the set. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "Sabbath Morning at Sea", with its mystical religiosity, begins in C major – the key in which it also ends, *Grandioso*, after traversing the keys of E and D flat major. "Where Corals Lie", in D major, is an interlude between the two "big" settings. The poet, Richard Garnett, imagines a land where his "rapid fancies [might] fly".

For his final setting, Elgar chose "The Swimmer" by the ill-fated British-Australian poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, whose bust graces Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. In D major throughout, with a brief change to C major on the words "The skies were fairer", Gordon's imagery and Elgar's music become more and more passionate as the poet, once a horse-breaker and equestrian steeplechaser, mixes his metaphors towards the poem's climax, which Elgar matches without sentimentality.

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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.

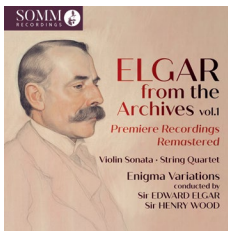
In 2016, BBC Radio 3 presented an hour-long documentary about his stereo reconstructions for *Elgar Remastered* (SOMMCD 261-4). In addition to his close collaboration with SOMM, which has produced several critically acclaimed recordings, his work can be heard on Music & Arts, West Hill Radio Archive,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

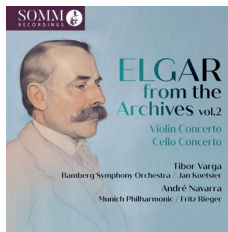
Also a modern oboist, he was the principal oboist of the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra, the Colorado Opera Festival, the American Chamber Winds, and the Maine Chamber Ensemble and made his European solo debut in 1999 playing John McCabe's Oboe Concerto with the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra in England.

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.

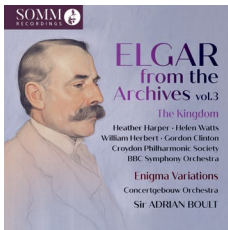
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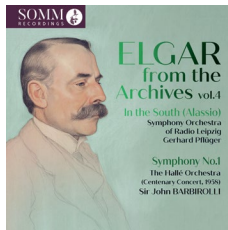
ARIADNE 5046



ARIADNE 5047



ARIADNE 5048-2
(2 CD)



ARIADNE 5049

EDWARD ELGAR 1857–1934

from the Archives vol.5

ARIADNE 5050-2

ARIADNE

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MONO

- ^a The Blessed Virgin / The Angel: **Joan Hammond** *soprano*
 Mary Magdalene: **Marjorie Thomas** *contralto*
 St John: **William Herbert** *tenor* · St Peter: **John Cameron** *baritone*
 Judas: **Owen Brannigan** *bass* · Jesus: **Richard Standen** *bass-baritone*
BBC Chorus & BBC Choral Society (*chorus master Leslie Woodgate*)
BBC Symphony Orchestra (*leader Paul Beard*), **Sir Malcolm Sargent** *conductor*
- ^b Gladys Ripley *contralto* · **Philharmonia Orchestra**, **George Weldon** *conductor*

The Apostles, Op.49 ^a

[1:56:19]

CD 1

67:53

Part I

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| ① | Prologue | 6:53 |
| ② | I. The Calling of the Apostles | 21:25 |
| ③ | II. By the Wayside | 7:23 |
| ④ | III. By the Sea of Galilee | 32:12 |

CD 2

70:34

Part II

[48:25]

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------|
| ① | Introduction | 3:38 |
| ② | IV. The Betrayal | 21:57 |
| ③ | V. Golgotha | 4:03 |
| ④ | VI. At the Sepulchre | 4:25 |
| ⑤ | VII. The Ascension | 14:21 |

Sea Pictures, Op.37 * ^b

[22:01]

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|
| ⑥ | I. Sea Slumber Song | <i>Roden Noel</i> | 5:00 |
| ⑦ | II. In Haven | (Capri) <i>Alice Elgar</i> | 1:48 |
| ⑧ | III. Sabbath Morning at Sea | <i>Elizabeth Barrett Browning</i> | 6:43 |
| ⑨ | IV. Where Corals Lie | <i>Richard Garnett</i> | 2:58 |
| ⑩ | V. The Swimmer | <i>Adam Lindsay Gordon</i> | 5:30 |

**First CD release of the complete 1946 recording*

Sung texts available

on scanning the below QR code:

somm-recordings.com/ariadne5050texts

- ^b Recording: Studio No.1, Abbey Road Studios, London, 28 May 1946
 First Release: HMV C.3498–C.3500 [2EA.11018–2EA.11022]

- ^a Recording (LIVE): Elgar Centenary, Royal Festival Hall, London,
 12 June 1957 (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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