

While Sir Dan Godfrey (1868 –1939) is primarily associated with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra which he created, the present release (counting the tracks included in the download version) features all of his issued recordings credited to the London Symphony Orchestra, although his 1927 “Symphony Orchestra” recordings made in London, such as the Mozart “Jupiter” Symphony reissued on Pristine’s earlier Godfrey collection (PASC 534), were probably also made with the ensemble after it had signed an exclusive contract with HMV.

Godfrey was the son of a highly-esteemed bandmaster of the Grenadier Guards. When the elder Godfrey showed little interest in an offer to organize a series of summer concerts at the seaside resort town of Bournemouth in 1893, his son applied in his place and won the post. By that time, the 25-year-old Godfrey had already completed studies at the Royal College of Music, conducted the London Military Band for two years, and served as musical director of an opera company in South Africa. Over the following 41 years, he built the orchestra into one of Britain’s finest ensembles. His efforts to champion British music in particular led to his knighthood in 1922, following a campaign organized by composer Ethel Smyth.

Some of the reasons behind the high regard in which Godfrey was held in this repertoire are evident in his passionate, committed interpretation of Vaughan Williams’ *A London Symphony*. It was first recorded by Columbia on four sides in July, 1923. The labels referred to Parts 1 through 4, with nothing to indicate that the first disc featured the first movement (abridged by about a third) while the second featured the complete third movement. This première recording of the work is featured in the download version of this release.

In September, 1924, a further four sides were recorded, perhaps comprising abridged versions of the other two movements. However, these matrices were abandoned when a complete version of the symphony was undertaken in April and May of 1925. The score utilized was the 1920 version, which contained music that was later to be cut from Vaughan Williams’ final version of 1936 (including the “damp drizzle of rain” over the “Bloomsbury of a November twilight” that composer/conductor Bernard Hermann lamented was missing from the final version of the slow movement just after letter “K” in the score). However, Godfrey did cut 23 bars in the Epilogue in order to fit the recording onto twelve sides, an elision which the composer himself later adopted in his 1936 revision.

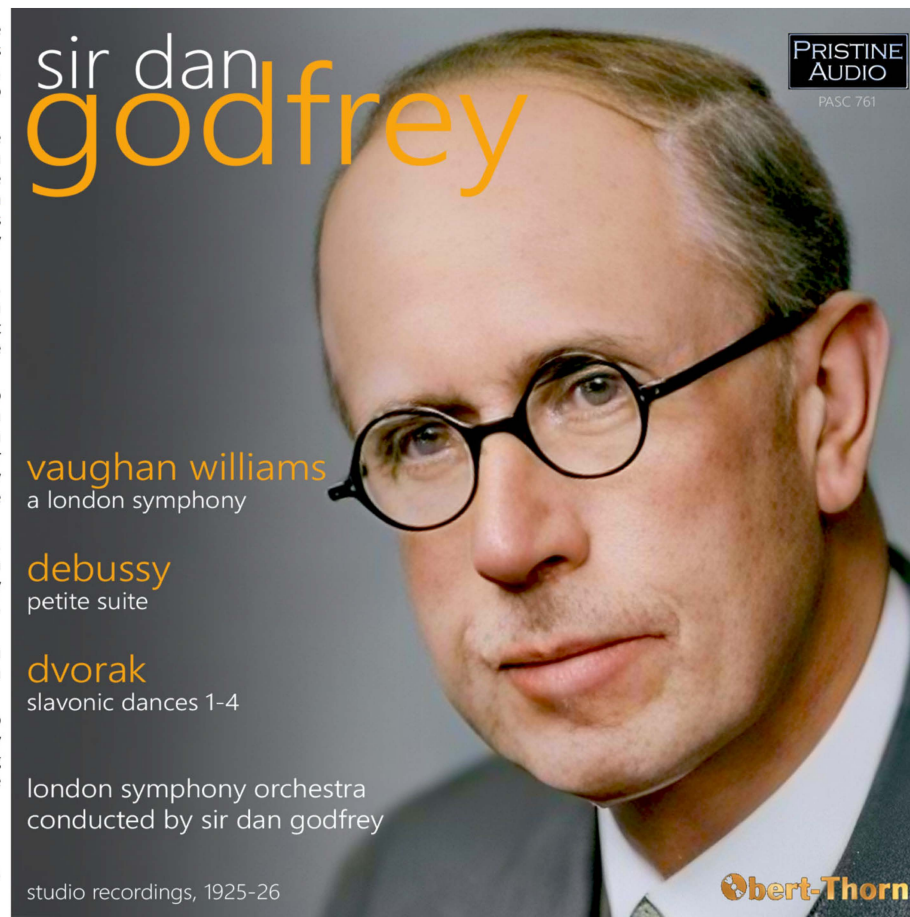
The timing of the sessions was unfortunate, however, as the recording was made at the very end of the acoustic era. (Columbia’s American affiliate had already been recording electrically for two months by this point). It was issued in April, 1926, a month after Weingartner’s pioneering electrical version of Berlioz’ *Symphonie Fantastique*, and only stayed in the catalog until July, 1929. Yet, the sound itself was the apotheosis of the acoustic recording method, featuring an impact, presence and detail that eclipsed even Godfrey’s effort of two years earlier.*

The sonic difference due to the arrival of electrical recording can be heard in the following two groups of sides made in a single session in March, 1926. Greater high-frequency information reveals a more detailed, realistic sound, although the mid-range in the small studio is a bit edgy.

After his Mozart symphony album of the following year, Godfrey would no longer record any extended works. He also began to make records only with his Bournemouth ensemble; and the repertoire Columbia allotted to him was mainly of the light Classical or “pops” variety (overtures, dances, xylophone-solo encores and the like). It would be interesting to speculate on what his position in the pantheon of British conductors would be today had he been given the chance to display his skills on disc in more repertoire like the Vaughan Williams presented here.

Mark Obert-Thorn

*Godfrey and the LSO also recorded an acoustic version of Vaughan Williams’ Overture to *The Wasps* in November, 1923. It was allotted the catalog number L 1534, but never released.



PRISTINE AUDIO
PASC 761

sir dan
godfrey

vaughan williams
a london symphony

debussy
petite suite

dvorak
slavonic dances 1-4

london symphony orchestra
conducted by sir dan godfrey

studio recordings, 1925-26

Obert-Thorn

sir dan godfrey



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS A London Symphony (Symphony No. 2, 1920 version)

1. 1st mvt. - Lento - Allegro risoluto (13:37)
2. 2nd mvt. - Lento (12:00)
3. 3rd mvt. - Scherzo (Nocturne) (7:11)
4. 4th mvt. - Finale. Andante con moto - Maestoso alla marcia - Allegro - Lento - Epilogue (11:52)

Recorded 24 April and 1 May 1925 in the Columbia Clerkenwell Road Studios, London
Matrices: AX 1020-1, 1021-2, 1022-1, 1023-2, 1024-2, 1025-1, 1026-1, 1027-2, 1029-2, 1030-2, 1031-2 & 1032-2
First issued on Columbia L 1717/22

DEBUSSY (*orch. Büsser*) Petite Suite L65

5. En bateau (3:50)
6. Cortège (3:05)
7. Menuet (2:57)
8. Ballet (3:04)

Recorded 12 March 1926 in the Columbia Petty France Studio, London - Matrices: WAX 1344-1, 1345-2, 1346-1 & 1347-1
First issued on Columbia L 1786/7

DVOŘÁK Slavonic Dances Op. 46

9. No. 1 in C major (3:25)
10. No. 2 in E minor (4:01)
11. No. 3 in A-flat major (3:45)
12. No. 4 in F major (3:44)

Recorded 12 March 1926 in the Columbia Petty France Studio, London - Matrices: WAX 1340-2, 1341-2, 1342-2 & 1343-2
First issued on Columbia L 1830/1

London Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Sir Dan Godfrey

Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of
Sir Dan Godfrey

Total duration: 72:31



© 2025 Pristine Audio