

Elgar conducts Elgar Enigma Variations • Symphony No. 2

Dr. Francis Walker, in the later edition of his "History of Music in England" writes: "An altogether new Elgar has emerged since 1907, and in several respects his genius has markedly ripened. In orchestral music he has still, it is true, not surpassed in imaginative the Variations of 1899, but the later achievements in this field show in many ways an increased breadth of outlook with, occasionally, a touch of austerity seldom felt before." These words are a warning as well as a recommendation, and the man who is not prepared to take his music seriously will do well to leave this long-awaited recording of the Second Symphony severely alone. Shalley's words, "Rarely, rarely earnest thou, spirit of delight", with which the composer prefaces his score, suggest that the vision of beauty here struggling for expression is one that can only be glimpsed after long seeking by arduous and intricate ways, and so indeed it turns out to be. That the prize to be won is well worth the labour of the winning there can be no doubt whatever, but it is necessary to warn readers that their path at first may not be easy.

They may perhaps be consoled to reflect that others have solved problems even more difficult than theirs. Of the composer's task I need say nothing; but the work of the players and the recording department must certainly be discussed. Let me say at once that all of them deserve well at our hands. The work is long and the writing for all the instruments extremely elaborate, yet nowhere have I discovered anything to find fault with in the playing. As to interpretation, the conductor is Elgar himself, so instinctively the rendering may be accepted as authoritative and the partition of the work among the eleven sides as having the composer's sanction. There remains the recording, and here I can only say that my first impressions are very favourable. In so huge a score one does not expect that every instrument will be individually audible throughout; such clarity would be impossible, and perhaps undesirable too, even in the concert hall. What one does expect is a correct balance, a proper blending of the colours of the orchestral palette, with the important phrases standing out clearly, each with its own tone quality and with due regard for the proportions of the whole. And these things one gets. There may be details that are not beyond criticism; there are places, for instance, where the tone of the brass failed to satisfy me completely; but in a highly complex work occupying no less than eleven large sides.

P.P. - **The Gramophone, September 1925** (*review of Elgar's recording of Symphony No. 2 - excerpt*)

Transfer notes

Attempting to extract more musical information than is usually heard when listening to older recordings is one of the chief rationales behind XR remastering, where the restoration of an acoustic balance closer to reality than is often heard in vintage recordings can bring out all sorts of qualities previously lost to the listener. Attempting to achieve this with recordings made in the acoustic era, such as those here, is especially difficult. There are most certainly "hidden" sounds and frequencies that can only be discerned when played at the highest volume - but they share their pitches with, and are often buried in, a huge swathe of surface noise. Extracting the former from the latter is an incredibly difficult task which inevitably results in necessary compromises. What I can offer is perhaps greater depth, a more realistic sound, and a higher frequency extension than has been heard in these recordings before. At times you may also find more background noise, though I've struggled to keep this as unobtrusive as possible. Yet despite this, these recordings still have the power to astonish today as they must have done 90 years ago - and here's a chance to get closer to them than ever before. **AR**

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Elgar conducts

Enigma Variations, Op. 36 Symphony No. 2 in E flat, Op. 63

Acoustic Recordings, 1920 - 1925



The Royal Albert Hall Orchestra

conductor Sir Edward Elgar

Elgar Acoustic Recordings

ELGAR Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 36 "ENIGMA"

- 1 Theme (1:23)
- 2 Variation I (L'istesso tempo) 'C.A.E.' (1:52)
- 3 Variation II (Allegro) 'H.D.S.-P.' (0:41)
- 4 Variation III (Allegretto) 'R.B.T.' (1:17)
- 5 Variation IV (Allegro di molto) 'W.M.B.' (0:32)
- 6 Variation V (Moderato) 'R.P.A.' (1:59)
- 7 Variation VI (Andantino) 'Ysobel' (1:23)
- 8 Variation VII (Presto) 'Troyte' (0:59)
- 9 Variation VIII (Allegretto) 'W.N.' (1:32)
- 10 Variation IX (Adagio) 'Nimrod' (1:51)
- 11 Variation X (Intermezzo: Allegretto) 'Dorabella' (2:21)
- 12 Variation XI (Allegro di molto) 'G.R.S.' (0:50)
- 13 Variation XII (Andante) 'B.G.N.' (2:37)
- 14 Variation XIII (Romanza: Moderato) " " " (2:20)
- 15 Variation XIV (Finale: Allegro Presto) 'E.D.U.' (4:51)

ELGAR Symphony No. 2 in E flat, Op. 63

- 16 1st mvt. - Allegro vivace e nobilmente (13:24)
- 17 2nd mvt. - Larghetto (12:07)
- 18 3rd mvt. - Rondo (7:37)
- 19 4th mvt. - Moderato e maestoso (12:10)

The Royal Albert Hall Orchestra Sir Edward Elgar

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on
photographs of Sir Edward Elgar

Enigma Variations

Recorded at Hayes Room 1
24 February & 16 November 1920
11 April 1921
Issued as HMV D.578, 582, 596, 602

Symphony No. 2

Recorded at Hayes Rooms 1 & 2
5 and 20 March 1924, 16 April 1925
Issued as HMV D.1012-17

N.B. Orchestra originally credited as
"The Symphony Orchestra"

Total duration: 71:46

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