

On the morning of Tuesday, April 27th 1926, Sir Edward Elgar stood before the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra in Queen's Hall for his first recording session utilizing the new electrical process. He was already a veteran recording artist with a sizable catalog of acoustic discs going back to 1914, enough to later fill a four-CD reissue. Now, he was to begin re-recording some of his most important works and adding others which had not seen a previous disc release. Only this time, the recordings would not feature reduced forces playing in a small, airless studio, and captured in sound with a vastly limited frequency range; they would be done in large concert halls, in much more realistic sonics that would stand as a testament for the ages. It was perhaps with this in mind that the composer would later write that electrical recording was "the greatest discovery made up to that time in the history of the gramophone."

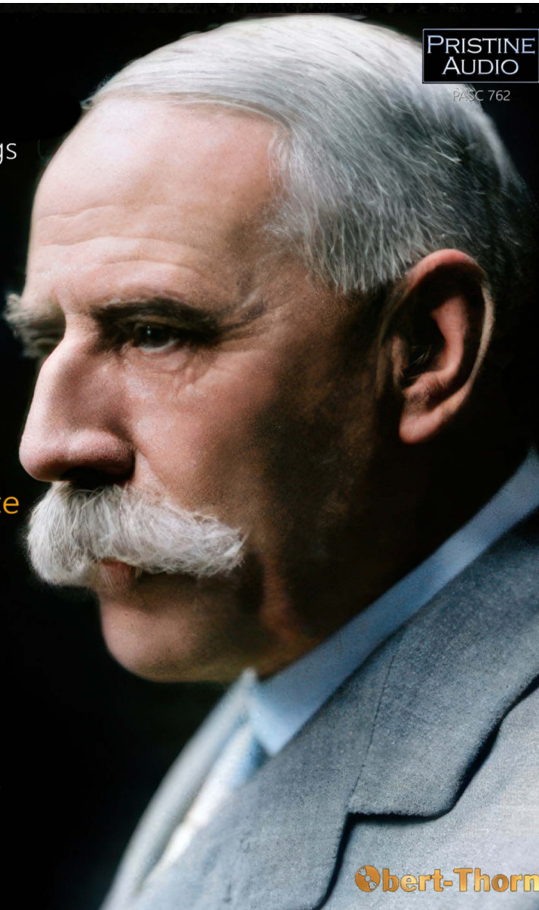
At least one convention of the old acoustic process was continued by HMV even into early 1927: the substitution of tubas for string basses for a more solid low-frequency response, which can clearly be heard toward the beginning of the twelfth *Enigma* variation but is also present elsewhere in these recordings. This was seen by the Gramophone Company as necessary at the time, since most listeners were still using acoustic players for their discs. Indeed, HMV utilized such a machine with its heavy pickup to subject records to the "wear test", identifying which sides would easily wear out in louder passages and need to be re-recorded. After the initial two days of recording in April, Elgar had to come back for a make-up session in August both to remake rejected sides and add new repertoire.

Looking back at the events of the week in a letter written April 29th, Elgar reflected: "It is curious that I do not tire now—3 hours solid rehearsal Sunday; - the like Monday & the concert; early on Tuesday 3 hours H.M.V. (large orchestra) Wedy afternoon also Dinner on Tuesday & Theatre last night & I am 69!!" Some of that boundless energy leaps out of the grooves of these discs, the sum of his recording activities in 1926. *Cockaigne* is liberally spread out over four 12-inch sides here, so the fast tempi are not a result of trying to speed up to get everything on the limits of a disc. The Bach transcription, recorded nearly a year before Stokowski's famous first version of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor, was oddly issued only in France and Italy. (There is a bit of scrappiness in the Fugue that might account for HMV's reluctance to release the disc in the UK, and they ultimately re-recorded it with Albert Coates two years later.)

The matrix for the other half of Elgar's Op. 15, the *Chanson de matin*, was recorded at the August session but rejected as "too weak in tone". It was remade the following year with the LSO, which accounts for why this disc features two different ensembles. (Only the *Chanson de nuit* with the RAHO is featured here.) The two Pomp and Circumstance marches were recorded without the small cuts Elgar took in his 1932 remakes with the BBC Orchestra, while the "Meditation" from *The Light of Life* had only first been set down the previous year as a filler to the composer's acoustic version of his Second Symphony.

While the two Pomp and Circumstance Marches were well-recorded to begin with, the *Enigma* Variations certainly would have benefitted from a remake with superior sound. Side 5 with the tenth and eleventh variations is dim and under-recorded, while the following side's matrix originally had annoying repeating mechanical noises, particularly in the thirteenth variation, which have been painstakingly removed manually for the first time in this transfer. Nevertheless, the set enshrines the composer's affectionate portraits in a most authentic and heartfelt manner, culminating in a brilliant finale.

Mark Obert-Thorn



**elgar**  
his first electric recordings

PRISTINE AUDIO  
PASC 762

enigma variations  
cockaigne overture  
pomp and circumstance  
marches 1 & 2  
bach-elgar fantasia  
and fugue

royal albert hall orchestra  
conducted by sir edward elgar

studio recordings, 1926

Obert-Thorn

# elgar

 his first electric recordings

1. ELGAR Cockaigne (In London Town) - Concert Overture, Op. 40 (12:59)  
Recorded 27 April 1926 - Matrices: CR 332-1A, 333-2, 334-1A and 335-1A - First issued on HMV D 1110/1

**BACH-ELGAR Fantasia and Fugue in C minor (Elgar Op. 86 after Bach BWV 537)**

2. Fantasia (4:36)

3. Fugue (3:04)

Recorded 28 April and 30 August 1926 - Matrices: CR 346-2A and 347-1A - First issued on Disque Gramophone W 749

4. ELGAR Chanson de nuit, Op. 15, No. 1 (4:30)

Recorded 27 April 1926 - Matrix: CR 338-1 - First issued on HMV D 1236

**ELGAR Pomp and Circumstance - Military Marches, Op. 39**

5. No. 1 in D (4:25)

6. No. 2 in A minor (4:03)

Recorded 27 April 1926 - Matrices: CR 336-2A & 337-1A - First issued on HMV D 1102

7. ELGAR Meditation from *The Light of Life*, Op. 29 (4:42)

Recorded 30 August 1926 - Matrix: CR 649-2 - First issued on HMV D 1157

**ELGAR Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma'), Op. 36**

8. Theme (1:42)

9. C.A.E. (the composer's wife) (1:54)

10. H.D.S.-P. (Hew David Steuart-Powell) (0:44)

11. R.B.T. (Richard Baxter Townshend) (1:26)

12. W.M.B. (William Meath Baker) (0:29)

13. R.P.A. (Richard Penrose Arnold) (1:54)

14. Ysobel (Isabel Fitton) (1:23)

15. Troyte (Troyte Griffith) (0:53)

16. W.N. (Winifred Norbury) (1:41)

17. Nimrod (A. J. Jaeger) (2:49)

18. Intermezzo : Dorabella (Dora Penny) (2:28)

19. G.R.S. (George Robertson Sinclair) (0:48)

20. B.G.N. (Basil G. Nevinson) (2:15)

21. Romanza: \*\*\* (Lady Mary Lygon) (2:03)

22. Finale : E.D.U. (the composer) (4:37)

Recorded 28 April and 30 August 1926 - Matrices: CR 339-1A, 340-1A, 341-3, 342-1A, 343-1, 344-1A & 345-2A  
First issued on HMV D 1154/7

Royal Albert Hall Orchestra  
conducted by Sir Edward Elgar

Producer and Audio Restoration  
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

All recordings made in  
Queen's Hall, London

Total duration: 65:25