

Images of Elgar--Recordings and Photographs; Elgar conducts: 'Enigma' Variations, Symphonies 1 & 2, Falstaff, Violin Concerto (with Yehudi Menuhin), 'Cello Concerto (with Beatrice Harrison), and choral works recorded at the Hereford Festival, 1927, with Gerrold Northrup Moore's book, Elgar--A Life in Photographs, EMI RLS 708 (Box 70801--70805)(5 record set)

Box 70801: 'Enigma' Variations, op. 36 (Royal Albert Hall Orchestra); Civic Fanfare and "God Save the King" (Three Choirs Festival Chorus; London Symphony Orchestra); The Dream of Gerontius, op. 38, beginning at score numbers 28, 61, and 106 and just after number 124 (Margaret Balfour, alto; Tudor Davies, tenor; Horace Stevens, bass-baritone; Sir Herbert Brewer, organ; and chorus and orchestra as at Civic Fanfare); The Music Makers, op. 69, beginning at score numbers 10, 38, and 78 (As above at Civic Fanfare).

Box 70802: The Kingdom, op. 51 --Prelude (B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra; recorded in Studio No. 1, Abbey Road, London); Symphony no. 1, op. 55, A-flat major (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded in Kingsway Hall, London).

Box 70803: Concerto for violin and orchestra, op. 61, B minor (Yehudi Menuhin, violin; London Symphony Orchestra; recorded in Studio No. 1, Abbey Road, London); Transcription of Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in C minor, op. 86 (Royal Albert Hall Orchestra; recorded in Queen's Hall, London).

Box 70804: Symphony no. 2, op. 63, E-flat major (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded in Queen's Hall, London); rehearsal for portion of Symphony no. 2, op. 63, in E-flat major (recorded in Queen's Hall, London).

Box 70805: Falstaff--Symphonic Study, op. 68 (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded in Studio No. 1, Abbey Road, London); Concerto for 'cello and orchestra, op. 85, E minor (Beatrice Harrison, violoncello; New Symphony Orchestra; recorded in Kingsway Hall, London).

Elgar on Record; including all of Elgar's electrical recordings not previously issued on LP. With Gerrold Northrup Moore's book, Elgar on Record--The Composer and the Gramophone. EMI RLS713 (HLM 7056-7061)(6 record set).

HLM 7056: Cockaigne Overture, op. 40 (Royal Albert Hall Orchestra; recorded 27 April 1926 in Queen's Hall, London); Three Bavarian Dances, op. 27 (London Symphony Orchestra; No. 1 recorded 15 July 1927 in Queen's Hall, London; No. 2 recorded 15 July 1927 in Queen's Hall, London; No. 3 recorded 4 February 1932 at Abbey Road, London); Pomp and Circumstance Marches, op. 39 (No. 1 & 2, Royal Albert Hall Orchestra, recorded 27 April 1926 in Queen's Hall, London; No. 3, 4, & 5, London Symphony Orchestra, recorded 15 July 1927 in Queen's Hall, London); Two Chansons, op. 15 (No. 1, Royal Albert Hall Orchestra, recorded 27 April 1926 in Queen's Hall, London; No. 2, London Symphony Orchestra, recorded 1 April 1927 in Queen's Hall, London).

HLM 7057: The Dream of Gerontius, op. 38 (Margaret Balfour, contralto; Steuart Wilson, tenor; Herbert Heyner, baritone; Royal Choral Society; Royal Albert Hall Orchestra; recorded

- 26 February 1927 in Royal Albert Hall, London); The Light of Life, op. 29--Meditation (Royal Albert Hall Orchestra; recorded 30 August 1926 in Queen's Hall, London); Land of Hope and Glory (Margaret Balfour, contralto; Philharmonic Choir; London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 3 February 1928 in Queen's Hall, London); The Banner of St. George, op. 33 --Epilogue (Philharmonic Choir; London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 3 February 1928 in Queen's Hall, London); The National Anthem "God Save the King" (arr. Elgar)(Philharmonic Choir; London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 3 February 1928 in Queen's Hall, London); O God Our Help in Ages Past (Croft)(Philharmonic Choir; London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 3 February 1928 in Queen's Hall, London).
- HLM 7058: Beau Brummel--Minuet (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 20 December 1928 in Kingsway Hall, London); The Wand of Youth, Suite no. 1, op. 1a (London Symphony Orchestra, recorded 19 December 1928 in Kingsway Hall, London); The Wand of Youth, Suite no. 2, op. 1b (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 20 December 1928 in Kingsway Hall, London); Nursery Suite (Gordon Walker, flute; W. H. Reed, violin; London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 23 May and 4 June 1931 in Kingsway Hall, London).
- HLM 7059: Five Piano Improvisations by Elgar (Recorded 6 November 1929 in Small Queen's Hall, London); Serenade Lyrique, Beau Brummel--Minuet, Rosemary, May Song, Carissima, Minuet, op. 21, Salut d'amour, op. 12, Mazurka, op. 10, no. 1 (New Symphony Orchestra; recorded 7 and 8 November 1929 in Small Queen's Hall, London).
- HLM 7060: The Crown of India, op. 66--Suite (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 15 September and 22 November 1930 in Kingsway Hall, London); Severn Suite, op. 87 (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 14 April 1932 at Abbey Road, London); In the South--Overture, op. 50 (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 15 and 18 September 1930 in Kingsway Hall, London); Froissart Overture, op. 19 (London Philharmonic Orchestra; recorded 21 February 1933 at Abbey Road, London).
- HLM 7061: Cockaigne Overture, op. 40 (BBC Symphony Orchestra; recorded 11 April 1933 at Abbey Road, London); Contrasts, op. 10, no. 3 (London Philharmonic Orchestra; recorded 21 February 1933 at Abbey Road, London); Pomp and Circumstance Marches, op. 39 (No. 1: Berkeley Mason, organ; BBC Symphony Orchestra; recorded 7 October 1932 in Kingsway Hall, London)(No. 2: BBC Symphony Orchestra; recorded 11 April 1932 in Kingsway Hall, London)(No. 4: BBC Symphony Orchestra; recorded 11 April 1932 at Abbey Road, London); Serenade for Strings, op. 20 (London Philharmonic Orchestra; recorded 29 August 1933 in Kingsway Hall, London); Elegy, op. 58 (London Philharmonic Orchestra; recorded 29 August 1933 in Kingsway Hall, London); Caractacus, op. 35 (London Symphony Orchestra; Lawrence Collingswood, conductor; supervised by Elgar via telephone from Marl Bank, Worcester; recorded 22 January 1934 at Abbey Road, London); Sound-track of Pathé film: Elgar Speaking and Conducting

'Land of Hope and Glory' (London Symphony Orchestra; recorded 12 November 1931 at Abbey Road, London).

The Elgar Edition; the complete acoustical recordings. Pearl Records GEM 110/6. Produced by Pavilion Records, Ltd., 48 High St., Pembury, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 4NU, England. American distributor: Qualiton Records, Ltd., 65-37 Austin Street, Rego Park, New York 11374 (7 records, available separately).

Vol. 1: GEM 110 (The Symphony Orchestra) The Wand of Youth, op. 1a and 1b, and unissued variant takes (recorded 27 February 1917 and 22 May 1919 at the Gramophone Company's studio, Hayes); Pomp & Circumstance Marches 1 and 4 and Salut d'amour, op. 12 (recorded September or October 1914 at the Gramophone Company's studio, Hayes).

Vol. 2: GEM 111 (The Symphony Orchestra; recorded at the Gramophone Company's studio, Hayes): The Starlight Express, op. 78 (Agnes Nicholls, soprano; Charles Mott, baritone; recorded 19 February 1916); Cockaigne--Overture, op. 40 (abridged) (recorded 27 February 1917); The Dream of Gerontius, op. 38--Prelude and Angel's Farewell (abridged) (recorded 27 February 1917); Carissima (recorded 21 January 1914).

Vol. 3: GEM 112 (The Symphony Orchestra; recorded at the Gramophone Company's studio, Hayes): The Fringes of the Fleet (Charles Mott, Frederick Henry, Frederick Stewart, and Harry Barratt, baritones; recorded 4 and 14 July 1917); Violin concerto, op. 61, in B minor (Marie Hall, violin; recorded 13 and 16 December 1916); Carillon, op. 75 (Henry Ainley, speaker; recorded 29 January 1915).

Vol. 4: GEM 113 (Beatrice Harrison, violoncello; The Symphony Orchestra): Polonia--Symphonic prelude, op. 76; Three Bavarian Dances, op. 27; Cello concerto in E minor, op. 85; Chanson de Nuit, op. 15, no. 1.

Vol 5: GEM 114: King Olaf: A Little Bird in the Air; The Sanguine Fan: (Ballet) Selections; Enigma Variations, op. 36.

Vol 6: GEM 119: Sea Pictures, op. 37 (Leila Me-ane, contralto; The Symphony Orchestra); Overture in D minor (Handel-Elgar); In the South--Overture, op. 50; Fantasia and Fugue in C Minor, op. 86 (Bach-Elgar) (Royal Albert Hall Orchestra)

Vol 7: GEM 116--Not yet issued. Will contain: Symphony no. 2 and The Light of Life--Meditation.

EMI HLM 7005 (also issued in RLS 713 with different couplings): Pomp and Circumstance Marches, op. 39; Chanson de Matin, op. 15, no. 2; Chanson de Nuit, op. 15, no. 1; Three Bavarian Dances, op. 27; Salut d'amour, op. 12; Mazurka, op. 10, no. 1 (From Suite in D).

Four of the records from RLS 708 are available separately on the World Records label: number SH 139, 162, 163, and 175.

The Violin Concerto, with Yehudi Menuhin, is available separately on EMI ALP 1456, which was issued in 1957 for the Elgar centennial (see below for further commentary on this).

The above listed LP records reproduce all the recordings conducted by Sir Edward Elgar that had originally been issued on 78s⁴. In addition the following recordings, never issued on 78s, are included:

From May 22, 1919: Three variant takes from The Wand of Youth (GEM 110).

From Royal Albert Hall, February 26, 1927: Five record sides from The Dream of Gerontius (RLS 713).

From recording session on July 15, 1927: Portion of rehearsal for first side of third movement of Symphony no. 2 (RLS 708 & SH 163).

From Three Choirs Festival, Hereford, September 4, 1927: Civic Fanfare and National Anthem (RLS 708 & SH 175).

From recording session on February 3, 1928: Land of Hope and Glory, Epilogue from The Banner of St. George, "It comes from the misty ages" (RLS 713).

From recording session on November 6, 1929: Five Piano Improvisations (RLS 713).

From recording session on November 7, 1929: Beau Brummel: Minuet (with New Symphony Orchestra) (RLS 713).

From recording session on November 12, 1931: Sound track of Pathé news film (RLS 713).

The following commercially issued recording not listed in Jerrold Moore's An Elgar Discography is also included: Fantasia and Fugue in C minor (Bach-Elgar), recorded April 26, 1926, with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra (RLS 708).

Jerrold Northrop Moore's books, Elgar--A Life in Photographs and Elgar on Record are available separately in cloth-bound editions. They are published by the Oxford University Press.

These reissues come at a time when there is increasing interest in Sir Edward Elgar's major symphonic works, and the availability now of the composer's vigorous and eloquent accounts of his own music should do much to improve our understanding of it. They reproduce all the recordings made by Sir Edward Elgar that were originally published on 78rpm records. In addition, there exist "shells" and test pressings of previously unreleased recordings and of out-takes. Some of these have now been published for the first time.

These recordings are derived from a twenty years commitment on the part of The Gramophone Company to record the music of Elgar under the composer's own direction. Elgar made his first recording on January 20 or 21, 1914, and his last on January 22, 1934, this last one being a recording in which Elgar participated from his death bed via a special telephone hookup. The guiding personality behind this project through the years was Fred Gaisberg, who considered the Elgar recordings his most worthy accomplishment.

The Elgar project spans a historical period of technical development in sound recording as well as period of change in instrumental performance style. The first half, roughly, of the time span lies in the era of acoustical recording and the second half in the formative years of electrical recording. Throughout these twenty years there was a continuous improvement in the lateral disc recording process and art. Recordings had not reached their present state in which a

recent recording may not be as well achieved as one made ten or fifteen years ago.

Unlike most of his contemporary musicians, Elgar took not only an interest but actually a delight in recordings. He used to enjoy playing records for friends and visitors, although their enjoyment was not always as unalloyed as the composer's, especially in the era of acoustical recording.

Elgar was the most prestigious musician on the HMV roster, and HMV did their best whenever they recorded him. There are probably a number of "firsts", at least for HMV, in the twenty years' course of the project, but the most important of them all was that this marked the first long-term commitment by a recording company to a living composer's performances of his own music.

Elgar regarded his recordings as an important adjunct to the printed scores and, in at least one instance, as we shall see, as an alternative to publication. With his virtual retirement from composing after the completion of the 'Cello Concerto in 1919, Elgar channeled much of his musical interests and ambitions into the achievement of the recordings.

The guiding genius behind all these reissues undoubtedly is Jerrold Northrop Moore. Each of EMI's boxes includes a paperback book by Dr. Moore in addition to the records and the leaflet of notes, also written by Dr. Moore. He has also written the jacket the jacket notes for the GEM reissues.

Since the publication of An Elgar Discography² in 1963, Dr. Moore has gained access to the Elgar correspondence on file at EMI as well as their records of the disposition of the matrices of each of the Elgar recordings. He has also obtained access to Fred Gaisberg's diary, and the original tapescript of Gaisberg's Music on Record³. He has also discovered a considerable amount of correspondence with officials of The Gramophone Company at the Gloucestershire Record Office and the Elgar birthplace. In addition, Bernard Wratten, who was involved with the production of the Elgar recordings and who eventually became second-in-command to Fred Gaisberg in the International Artists' Department, has come forth with an extraordinary fund of inside information.

Thus, the 236 page book, Elgar on Record, elucidates much that was unknown or conjectural in the 48 page discography of 1963. Aside from this book's wealth of details regarding Elgar's recording activities, it is also a treasure of information about such matters as HMV's matrix numbering system, HMV's decision-making processes, and some aspects of the recording technology.

At this time of writing, GEM 116, containing Elgar's last two acoustical recordings (the Second Symphony and the Meditation from The Light of Life) has not yet been issued, although it is referred to in Elgar on Record. Presumably it will be issued after April 16, 1975 (these recordings having been concluded April 16, 1926), as those firms in England reissuing recordings originally belonging to

another company appear to be operating on the basis that any recording more than fifty years old is in the public domain. We could stand some similar rule here to goad the American firms into more reissue action!

The extent and significance of Elgar's recorded heritage seems to have been little recognized in the United States, possibly because only a relatively few of these recordings were issued here. For example, it is stated in the notes for Victor's "complete" Rachmaninoff reissues⁴ that "He (Rachmaninoff) once told a friend he was proud to be the first important composer to leave behind definitive recordings of his major works."

In recordings his music, Elgar had the composer's unique advantage: he did not have to concern himself about being authentic. Elgar made the most of it and, thus, no two performances are carbon copies. Michael Kennedy quotes Sir Adrian Boult as stating "that he noted Elgar's own treatment of certain passages in his works and would discover, when he went to another Elgar-conducted performances a year later that the treatment of the same passage had varied."⁵

In addition to Elgar's variability we have to consider to what extent the performance factors were influenced by the recording processes and environments and, also, to evaluate the role played by the development of orchestral performance style and standards during the twenty-year period of this project.

Elgar made most of his recordings with either the London Symphony Orchestra or the New Symphony Orchestra, which sometimes went under the name of The Royal Albert Hall Orchestra.⁶ Evidently there was a considerable community of membership between the two orchestras⁷

Elgar had been closely associated with the London Symphony Orchestra since its founding in 1904. Hans Richter conducted the Enigma Variations on the orchestra's first concert and Elgar was their conductor on their first tour of the provincial towns in 1909. He succeeded Richter as "principal conductor" for the season of 1911/12. The orchestra played a number of premieres under Elgar and from 1920 was the official orchestra of the Three Choirs Festival, which were the Elgar events par excellence. There must have been scarcely a year if, indeed, there was one, in which Elgar did not conduct the orchestra. Thus, Elgar had a long-term, continuing relationship with the London Symphony Orchestra such as no other major symphonic composer had enjoyed since the time of Haydn and the Esterházy Orchestra.

However, in 1932 and 1933, Elgar made some recordings with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra - the orchestras of Sir Adrian Boult and of Sir Thomas Beecham, respectively. It is fascinating to hear both these orchestras play for Elgar in the Elgar style which, in regard to the string playing, at least, was considerably different from the style called for by their regular conductors. The rehearsal excerpt in RLS 708 gives us a good idea of how Elgar accomplished this when he sings a phrase to the orchestra.

Elgar wrote that he liked his music to go "elastically and

by Fringes of the Fleet and Polonia.

Elgar's experience with The Starlight Express brought a further perspective to his view of recordings. This delightful play "for children of all ages" for which Elgar composed incidental music and songs, ran for only one month and the publisher, Elkin, would agree to print only three of the songs. Elgar turned to recording to preserve more of the score with the result that eight sides were recorded and published (1916) with a certain amount of fanfare in the form of a lunch for the music press at the Savoy attended by Elgar and the author of the play, Algernon Blackwood. The records were played for the guests and Elgar "expressed himself delighted with them."

The issuance by Columbia of an abridgement of the Violin Concerto performed by Albert Sammons and conducted by Sir Henry Wood¹¹ induced Elgar and the HMV forces to do one of their own.

It is very easy for us to view with horror today the abridgement of the concerto to four record sides, but it is much better that we have the opportunity to hear Marie Hall's extraordinary performance this way than not at all. Marie Hall was a pupil of Otakar Sevcík and this recording is, in this reviewer's estimation, a remarkable revelation of a style of violin playing that has vanished from the earth. Comparison with Yehudi Menuhin's playing of the concerto is fascinating as a study of the "generation gap" in violin playing that opened up after World War I. Also, Elgar's tolerance of such diverse styles of violin playing should serve as a useful corrective to dogmatism regarding the performance of his music.

We have, too, Jerrold Moore's documentation for what I had been surprised to observe in listening to the recording: Elgar employed a harp in rescoring the famous accompanied cadenza for this recording.

Once the war was concluded, recording sessions became more frequent. Such major works as the 'Cello Concerto, the Enigma Variations, In the South, and Sea Pictures were recorded, the first with considerable abridgement, the next two with slighter cuts, and the last complete but with some rearrangement of the order of the songs so that it all would fit neatly on four record sides.

One can hear improvements in recording almost from year to year and Elgar on Record documents Elgar's keen interest in and appreciation of each improvement. When In the South was issued the record labels, for the first time, bore the name of an orchestra: The Royal Albert Hall Orchestra. For this recording some fifty performers were crowded into the wood-paneled recording studio at Hayes. Imogen Holst's notes to the reissue of The Planets conducted by her father¹² gives us a graphic description of the conditions under which the musicians had to perform in these acoustical recording sessions of symphonic works: "The large orchestra was crowded into a comparatively small room; the string players were unable to draw their bows to the full length of a crescendo; and the superb solo horn player broke down thirteen times at the beginning of Venus from the sheer discomfort of not having enough air to breathe." Maybe things were a little more commodious in HMV's studio, as the drive of the acoustical

mystically."⁸ In some of his published scores, Elgar has tried to notate the fluidity of tempo that we hear in his own performances by using the letters R... (for ritardando) and L... (for largamente) followed by a series of dots indicating the phrase or portion of a phrase to which it applies. However, if one were to mark a score from Elgar's electrical recording of the Second Symphony, there would be additional R's, A's, and L's, some of them more drastic than those that the composer had notated.

As especially fascinating example of Elgar's elastic beat is the opening of the First Symphony. Just try to assign a metronome tempo to Elgar's conducting of the great motto theme!

Among the recording sessions, certain extremities of mood become apparent. Thus, the first electrical recording session found Elgar in an unusually exuberant mood. The two Pomp and Circumstance Marches recorded therein have a Toscanini-like drive. On the other end of the emotional scale is the recording of the Violin Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin which lingers very lovingly on the beauties of the score. It has been suggested that Sir Henry Wood's conducting in the electrical recording with Albert Sammons⁹ is closer to the way that Elgar usually conducted the work, save that Wood eschews portamento playing in his strings.

At the time of his first recording session, Elgar had recently completed Falstaff, the last but one of those compositions that are generally acknowledge as his major works. He had also just completed a melodious minor work, Carissima, and this is what was recorded at the first session, the recording session actually constituting the performance premiere of the work.

Dr. Moore's documentation gives us a fascinating picture of Elgar's involvement in re-scoring, abridging, and re-arranging his music in order to render it suitable for recording by the acoustical process and also in order to accommodate it to the time limitations of the record side.

This information is supplemented by fascinating photographs. We have one taken at the conclusion of the first recording session. Since so few music stands are in evidence in the picture, one presumes that this was a posed photo rather than one of the musicians at work. However, it does make clear the manner in which the instrumentalists were crowded into the studio and, also, as our ears bear testimony, it shows no Stroh instruments in the hands of the string players.¹⁰

The next recording session was in June, and among the works recorded was Pomp and Circumstance no. 1. The great trio tune, which was so soon to become a second national anthem, was performed at an unusually stately tempo, with much expressive use of portamento by the strings. It would almost seem to be prophetic of what was to come in less than two months. In order to fit it on one record side, the opening section and its return were drastically abridged.

With the next recording session, January 29, 1915, we have the first of Elgar's wartime works, Carillon, to be followed eventually

recording of In the South comes almost as a shock to one who has gotten to know the work of Elgar's expansively performed electrical recording.

Finally, in March 1924 the high point of Elgar's acoustical recording career occurred when an uncut recording of the Second Symphony was made. This recording was to be of short duration in the catalogue, however, as electrical recording was introduced the following year and the Second Symphony was re-recorded by the electrical process in 1927.

Elgar's first electrical recording sessions were in Queen's Hall, 1926. Again, HMV gave their technical best. Electrical recording made it possible to record a great pipe organ and HMV was quick to put this resource at Elgar's service. They scheduled for recording three works that call for organ ad libitum in the scoring: the Cockaigne Overture, Enigma Variations, and Pomp and Circumstance, no. 1. The pedal notes of the Queen's Hall organ are well brought out in Anthony Griffith's transfers. In fact, the overall sound quality of these 1926 recordings is astonishing.

One of the great hopes for electrical recording was the making and issuing of actual performance recordings. But the rosy dreams ended up mostly in legal and engineering nightmares. Fred Gaisberg and Joe Bratten have both written about the trials and tribulations of this business.¹³ More recently, some articles about the subject in The Gramophone by Jerrold Moore elicited a letter from Bernard Wratten¹⁴ who, as already mentioned, has turned out to be a gold mine of information.

In 1927 attempts were made to record The Dream of Gerontius at public performances conducted by the composer. From a performance of February 26, 1927, in the Royal Albert Hall six sections were recorded on thirteen sides. Only four sides were deemed acceptable for publication. Five of the unpublished sides were discovered in Elgar's collection, and these have been reproduced in RLS 713 along with the four previously published ones. In September, at the Three Choirs Festival, seven more sides were cut, of which four were published. Three of the five sides of The Music Makers, also recorded at the Three Choirs Festival, were published. The recordings from the Three Choirs Festival are included in RLS 708 and SH 175.

These recordings, in particular, bring up the question of improvement of dynamics in reprocessing old recordings. The dynamic range that could be acceptable for a published recording was less than it is now and, to make matters even more difficult, whatever adjustments were made had to be done on the spot in "real time." There were no tape recorders available for copying and reprocessing of masters. Nor were there any sophisticated electronic devices available subtly to modify the dynamics such as we have today.

Conductors accommodated by modifying the dynamics of their performances in recording sessions and, also, dial turning was resorted to by the engineers. In recording sessions this was accomplished

with enough finesse that the listener normally is not very aware of it.

An excellent example of how a recording of this period, made under well controlled conditions, can fail to document the composer's intention occurs in the third movement of Elgar's Second Symphony. In the section about cue 121, where there is a great clamor in the orchestra, Bernard Shore quotes Elgar as saying to the BBC Orchestra in rehearsal: "I want you to imagine that this hammering is like that terrible throbbing in the head during some fever. It seems gradually to blot out every atom of thought in your brain, and nearly drives you mad. Tympani and percussion! You must steadily increase your power until you come to the triple forte. Then don't worry about us! See if you can completely overwhelm everything --- that is what I want."¹⁵ Well, this is not what Elgar got in the recording. If it had been recorded that way the record would not have passed the wear test. In fact, most record players of the time would not have been able to track the groove. Elgar obviously altered his customary interpretation of this passage to accommodate the requirements of recording. The engineers probably arranged the orchestral seating and microphone placements so that the percussion were not picked up with too much authority, anyhow. The only recording that I have heard in which Elgar's express wishes have been properly achieved is Daniel Barenboim's.¹⁶

In actual performance recording the modification of the dynamics had to be completely in the hands of the engineers and, thus, if we listen attentively to these recordings, we can detect, at times, some rather drastic dial manipulation. The most obvious effect of this is that a performance may lose its impact: crescendos are cut back midway in their swell, pianos are turned up, fortes are turned down, and, sometimes, the entire dynamic scheme can be turned almost topsy turvey. Shortly after the start of two sides of the published Royal Albert Hall recordings there is some panicky turning down of a choral crescendo and the reproduction suddenly drops to a mezzo forte level. Nowadays, by means of tape recording, one can copy while turning the dials in the opposite direction to that of the original engineer and, after numerous trials, come up with a more convincing and musical result. The impact of the choral singing can be restored. This has been accomplished in the case of these two drastic spots¹⁷ in the Royal Albert Hall recordings so smoothly that no one unacquainted with the original 78s would have any inkling that anything had to be done. That's one of the frustrations of audio engineering: much of one's finest work proves its excellence by being totally unnoticed by the listener!

The dial turning in the Three Choirs Festival recordings does not present such obvious problems but, especially in The Music Makers, there is appreciable modification of the dynamics. The re-recording of these appears to be faithful to the 78s and no attempt appears to have been made to be more faithful to the performance than were the 78s. Anyone with a tape recorder, a score, and a copy of the reissue can easily spend a busy, instructive, and humbling evening attempting to do it for himself.

One interesting point about the improvement of the dynamics is that,

to the extent that it improves the total dynamic range of the recording, it decreases the apparent surface noise. One might add, to conclude this topic, that Elgar was wont to do a goodly amount of dial turning while playing records.

The discouraging results of the 1927 choral recordings must have been a keen disappointment to Elgar, who had been urging HMV to record Gerontius since 1916. One recording session with the Philharmonic Choir was undertaken in February 1928 but only two of the four works recorded were deemed successful enough for publication. The other two have now been issued for the first time in RLS 713 from Elgar's test pressings. The vigor and swing of the performances of It comes from the misty ages completely overshadows the performance that HMV did publish by this same choir under its director, Charles Kennedy Scott.¹⁸ After this attempt, no more choral recordings were scheduled for Elgar.

The year 1927 also brought the Elgar rehearsal record. The disc seems to have been forgotten until it was discovered among some of Elgar's effects by Jerrold Moore, although it was alluded to in an article by W. R. Anderson in The Gramophone of April 1934, which has now been reprinted in The Gramophone Jubilee Book.¹⁹ The disc is somewhat the worse for wear, but here is Elgar directing the orchestra and getting the music to "seeth and churn" as he wanted it. Anderson described Elgar in recording sessions as being "the easy master of every detail...he knew exactly what he wanted, and wasted no words, going back several times if necessary but never without a clear purpose, which a few words explained." The rehearsal disc bears this out. Elgar on record has a transcription of as much of what Elgar says in the rehearsal as has been deciphered. The transcription differs in a number of details from that printed in the booklet for RLS 708 and on the back of SH 163. I presume that it represents a revision based on further listening. This record appears to be the earliest rehearsal recording extant.

We also have the sound track and some still photos from a Pathé news film in which Elgar talks and conducts. This was a staged affair and is not as interesting and instructive as the rehearsal record, which was made without Elgar's foreknowledge. However, it seems to be the only other recording of Elgar speaking and one is grateful for its inclusion in RLS 713. It also gives us one more rendition of The Land of Hope and Glory tune in yet one more tempo.

In the Cello Concerto, which Elgar recorded acoustically with Beatrice Harrison as soloist and then electrically nine years later, again with Miss Harrison, it is interesting to compare the vividness of the reproduction of the soloist's vibrato in the two recordings. In comparing some of the same long held notes in the two recordings, the vibrato sounds more vivid in the electrical recording. Vibrato achieves changes in pitch, intensity, and tone color, and it is this reviewer's theory that the superlative fidelity of the electrical recording reproduces the changes in tone color much better, and thus makes the vibrato sound more vivid.

The portamento, or audible shifting from note to note, in string

playing is normally very pronounced in recordings from the acoustical era and in this respect Elgar's acoustical recordings are typical of their time. Orchestral players and conductors were in the process of phasing out the portamento after World War I. However, Elgar never abandoned it and the electrical recordings give persuasive testimony to the unique expressive power of portamento when tastefully applied and skillfully executed. When performers become as scrupulous about correct performance style in romantic music as they are nowadays about the music of Bach, string players are going to have to go back and master a now-discredited style of playing.

One of the most striking uses of the portamento for expressive purposes in these recording takes place in the coda of the Cello Concerto. In the passage in descending semitones²⁰ on both her recordings, Beatrice Harrison slides downward and intensifies the expression of anguish beyond that in any other performance that I have heard.

Beyond the portamento effects, I would like to remark on a few other spots of special interest in the string playing:

The sound of the violins con sordino in the middle section of Fairy Pipers in Wand of Youth, no. 1 (electrical) is open, straight, and white in contrast with the elegant, covered tone in such a modern recording as Sir Adrian Boult's. The difference in microphoning accents the dissimilarity, as the violins are quite forward in the Elgar recording, whereas in Boult's they are back and better blended with the rest of the orchestra. A violinist friend ventured the opinion that in the Boult recording the strings are playing with light bow pressure and long strokes, whereas in the Elgar recording there is more "digging in" and shorter strokes.²¹

On the other hand listen to the string sound that Elgar gets from the BBC Orchestra for the "New Faith" theme in the Prelude to The Kingdom.²² Here, Elgar achieves an effect that I do not recall hearing in any other of his recordings: a rather wide vibrato which produces a beautiful shimmer. The music is marked dolce e solenne at this point. I do not want to seem to be picking on Sir Adrian Boult, who has given us the greatest treasury of Elgar performances since the composer's own. However, the comparison with Boult (whose performance is very beautiful) shows us that Boult's way of achieving dolce e solenne is different from Elgar's.

Elgar on Record specifies the source of each of the LP transfers. Most of the previously published electrical recordings have been reprocessed from "mothers" or special vinyl pressings made from the "shells" that were still in EMI's archives. This process is described by A. C. Griffith in a magazine article.²³ Mr. Griffith is the engineer in charge of transcribing old recordings for EMI and his name on the record jacket of reissues has become a cachet of excellence in a field that badly needs it. The remainder of the previously issued records were reprocessed from commercial pressings.

In the EMI reissues the clarity of sound and the quality of the

reproductions is such that anyone possessing both the reissues and the 78s is unlikely ever again to turn to the 78s to hear these performances.

With the exception of the Five Piano Improvisations, Mr. Griffith had to reproduce the previously unpublished records from the only extant copies: those that had been preserved in Elgar's record collection. These had been pressed on the fairly noisy English HMV material of that era and, in addition, show some signs of wear. It is reasonable to accept that what we hear on the LPs probably represents the best that anyone is likely to do with them.

The reproduction of the Five Piano Improvisations, however, could have benefited by more meticulous de-ticking. Some swishes could have been further suppressed, too.

Like all great conductors Elgar creates an individual orchestral sonority and it comes across magnificently in the orchestral recordings. Sir Adrian Boult wrote: "His nervous, electric beat unflinchingly added a tension and a lustre which produced a tone quality one came to recognize as highly personal."⁵

Frequently, the articulation of details is superior to that of some of the modern recordings. No one knowledgeable about the recording processes of the 78 era can have anything other than admiration for all concerned in the creation of these recordings.

In the reissues, I do feel that the reproduction of the Second Symphony could better have matched in sound that of the First Symphony. It plays more impressively with quite different settings of my octave equalizer than those employed for most of the other recordings. Also, the Minuet, op. 21, would have benefited by some extra processing to make it sound less shrill and thin. We learn for the first time in Elgar on Record that the untypically bad sound of the 78 pressing of this is due to the fact that it was processed from a dubbing.

The transfer of the Violin Concerto for RLS 708 is a different one than that on ALP 1456. Elgar on Record informs us that ALP 1456 was a transfer from the shells and the transfer in RLS 708 was from a commercial pressing.

Why they should have gone to all the work of making a new transfer is a mystery to me, especially since they had to use a commercial pressing. ALP 1456 has less surface noise and the difference in sound quality between the two issues is slight and easily adjusted with an equalizer.

The process of recording extended works one side at a time seemed to suit Elgar well. It is one more demonstration of Elgar's great capacities as a musician that these works show, when spliced to a continuous performance, an unflagging continuity unmarred by any awkward tempo changes at the side joins. Even when one knows where the side joins come, one can only delight in the deftness with which these have been effected by the EMI engineers.

The Pearl Records reissues of the acousticals are hardly on the

same plane of engineering accomplishment as EMI's reissues of the electrics. Admittedly, those concerned with reproducing these were faced with a much more difficult and much less congenial task. In some cases they did not even have good copies from which to work. We must, however, realize that some of these recordings are of extreme rarity in any condition.

The reproduction from the Pearl Records pretty much sounds like what you would get if you were to play the originals on your record player, provided that you play these LPs with the same equalization that you would use for the 78s. If, in addition, however, one employs an equalizer, the sound can be much further broadened and brightened, but one then also discovers many ticks from the vinyl added to the clicks and clacks of the originals. When I broadcast the 1914 recording of Pomp and Circumstance, no. 4, equalized and de-ticked, someone called up the radio station expressing amazement that a 1914 recording could sound so well! So, there is a lot on those old acousticals if you are willing to do the work to get it out!

Pearl seems to have done little or no de-ticking, and the Violin Concerto, for one, in consequence, is rather rough listening if you equalize it. However, you are likely to be a long time finding a better copy! Some of the reissues, such as Pomp and Circumstance, no. 4, and Carillon are from very fine copies, indeed.

One also sometimes encounters in the Pearl transfers, near the beginning or end of a record, a foreign thumping noise at a low but noticeable level, with better low frequency fidelity than acoustical recording provides. Comparison with a few originals shows that this noise has been introduced in the transfer process -- sounds a bit like microphone pickup of a footstep.

The reissues of the electrics seem to be pitched to a 440 A. The acoustical reissues seem to be pretty close to my 436 A pitchpipe. This probably represents a better approximation to the pitch used in England in the era of acoustical recordings than would a 440 A. This entire subject of pitch in the historical recordings era is in much need of research, as there seems to be little solid information available.

We can recommend the EMI transfers both for the recordings that they offer and for the quality of the reproduction. The Pearl Records transfers can be characterized as technically honest in a rather primitive way, but are to be highly recommended for the sake of the rare and important recordings they make available.

Elgar's zest and conviction speak forth with eloquence from almost everything that he recorded. He copies nobly and uniquely, with the performance challenges of his own music. One carries from these performances unforgettable memories of the exaltation of the Finale of the First Symphony, the inspired climaxes in the Gerontius recordings, the profound beauty of the Prelude of The Kingdom, the anguish in the Finale of the Cello Concerto, and the rambunctiousness of Falstaff and Cockaigne and the sheer élan of everything.

To quote Sir Adrian Boult once more: "Musicians who heard Elgar conduct are getting fewer in number, but I think they will all agree that if they could make a list of the finest performances that they had ever heard of Elgar's works, nearly, if not all of them, would turn out to have been conducted by Elgar himself."⁵

FOOTNOTES:

1. To be exact, it must be acknowledged that one record side that enjoyed a brief publication is not reproduced on any of these LPs. This one side is the first take of the first side of the third movement of the Second Symphony (CR 1275-1), which was used for two or three months only until it could be replaced by a retake (CR 1275-2). See Elgar on Record: 68-71.
2. Moore, Jerrold Northrop: An Elgar Discography IN: Journal of the British Institute of Recorded Sound (January 1963). Also available as a cloth bound reprint from the B.I.R.S.
3. Gaisberg, Fred: Music on Record (published in the U.S. as The Music Goes Round). New York; Macmillan, 1942.
4. The Complete Rachmaninoff [Sound recording]. RCA ARM 3-0260, ARM 3-0261, ARC 3-0294, ARM 3-0295, and ARM 3-0296; [1973].
5. Boult, SIR Adrian C.: Composer as Conductor IN: Elgar Centenary Sketches. London; Novello, 1957.
6. The New Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1905. Sir Thomas Beecham was conductor-in-chief initially and was succeeded by Sir Landon Ronald, a friend of Elgar and enthusiast of his music. In 1915 the orchestra took the name The Royal Albert Hall Orchestra whenever it performed in that hall, and from 1920 to about 1927 it was allowed to use that name also when not performing in the R.A.H. In the Elgar records from 1928 on the orchestra had to revert to its original name.
7. "We always tried to get together much the same contingent of orchestral players from the London Symphony Orchestra and the New Symphony Orchestra and we almost invariably had Willy Reed at the first desk." From a letter by Bernard Wratten to J. N. Moore: Elgar on Record, p. 58.
8. From a letter to A. J. Jaeger, July 1, 1903, quoted in Michael Kennedy: Portrait of Elgar. London; Oxford University Press, 1968: 145.
9. Recorded by Columbia Records, 1929, on Col. 2346/51. Reissued on LP EMI HLM 7071. This recording makes a valuable companion to the Elgar conducted reissues. Wood took the Concerto on tour with Fritz Kreisler after the premiere performance (which was conducted by Elgar). Sammons was said to have performed the

Concerto ten times for every time that any other violinist performed it. Some of these performances were with Elgar. As Sammons was under contract with Columbia Records, he was ineligible to record the work with Elgar for HMV.

10. The Stroh violins and violas had horns replacing the sound-box so as to produce a greater volume of tone. They are frequently to be seen in photographs of orchestras making acoustical recordings.
11. Columbia L 1271/2 was recorded late in 1915 or early 1916.
12. The electrical recording has been reissued on LP (EMI HLM 7014). In the jacket notes Imogen Holst talks about the acoustical recording made in 1923.
13. Gaisberg, Fred: The Music Goes Round. New York; Macmillan, 1942: 176-177.
14. The Gramophone, 1972: August: 321; October: 669; November: 1038; December: 1127.
15. Shore, Bernard: Sixteen symphonies. London; Longmans, Green, 1950: 279.
16. Elgar, Sir Edward: Symphony, no. 2; London Philharmonic Orchestra; Daniel Barenboim, conductor. Columbia M31997.
17. CR 1203 on the word "name", 2 measures after cue 72 (Part I).
CR 1206 on the word "praise" at cue 74 (Part II).
18. HMV D 1875, recorded c. May 1930.
19. Anderson, W. R.: On Elgar IN: The Gramophone Jubilee Book Harrow; General Gramophone Publications, Ltd., 1974: 130.
20. più tranquillo, dolcissimo, starting at cue 71
21. The first take of the acoustical recording of this on GEM 110 has bowing that is much more like that in Boult's recording, save for the portamenti.
22. Andante, cue 6.
23. Griffith, A. R.: Historical Transcriptions IN: Hi-Fi News and Record Review, 1972 (December): 2411.

As the producer of Overtone Records, Richard C. Burns has been responsible for the creation of some historical recordings himself. He is currently Audio Engineer of the School of Music, Syracuse University, where he also teaches courses in historical sound recordings.