

THE VERY BEST OF
ELGAR



**NAXOS**

2 CDs

EDWARD ELGAR (1857–1934)

HIS LIFE

Edward Elgar was arguably the leading English composer of his generation and a significant figure among late Romantic European musicians. Born in Worcester in 1857, the son of a piano-tuner and owner of a music shop, he first earned his living as an organist, violinist and teacher in the Worcester area. After his marriage in 1889 he moved to London as a composer, but success eluded him. It only came later, after his return to the West of England, confirmed by the '*Enigma*' Variations, first performed in London in 1899. His inspiration was the culture and landscape of England, tempered by an awareness of continental styles. He wrote relatively little after the death of his wife in 1920.

HIS MUSIC

Orchestral Music

The '*Enigma*' Variations, with its portraits in each variation of one of the composer's friends and its unsolved musical puzzle, is one of the best of his works. More familiar, if less substantial, must be the *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*. The concert overture *Cockaigne* is an evocation of London, while the *Elegy*, the *Introduction and Allegro* and the *Serenade*, all for string orchestra, offer music of the highest quality. His *Cello Concerto*, written in 1919, enjoys great popularity, not yet matched by that of the earlier *Violin Concerto*, composed before World War I. Elgar's two completed symphonies are comparable to the work of other great symphonists of the period. He left sketches for a third symphony which has been conjecturally reconstructed.

Chamber Music

Elgar wrote a number of pieces for violin and piano during the earlier part of his life. Of the smaller pieces that survive, *Chanson de nuit* and *Chanson de matin* have considerable charm. Of much greater importance are the three chamber works of 1918: the *Violin Sonata in E minor*, *String Quartet* in the same key, and *Piano Quintet in A minor*.

Keyboard Music

Elgar wrote relatively little for the piano, but his *Salut d'amour* (Love's Greeting), written for his wife, has proved popular both in its original form and in a multitude of arrangements. As an organist himself, he wrote works for the instrument that include a sonata and some voluntaries. A second organ sonata was created, under his supervision, from his *Severn Suite*.

Vocal and Choral Music

Elgar wrote a number of oratorios and works for chorus and orchestra. These include *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom* and the cantata *Caractacus*. The most significant of all is *The Dream of Gerontius*, with words by Cardinal Newman, a remarkable study of a man on his deathbed. *Sea Pictures*, an anthology of songs for contralto and

orchestra, with texts related to the sea was written in 1899 and won contemporary success. His earlier compositions include music for the Catholic church in Worcester, where he followed his father as organist.

MUSIC NOTES

Pomp and Circumstance, Op. 39 *March No. 1* (CD 1, track 1)

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • James Judd

The first of Elgar's five *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* was written in 1901, the title taken from Shakespeare's *Othello*. He was particularly pleased with the trio melody of *March No. 1*, which in his own words was 'a tune that will knock 'em flat'. The famous melody has won further fame coupled with the words supplied by A.C. Benson: 'Land of hope and glory'.

Salut d'amour, Op. 12 (CD 1, track 2)

Takako Nishizaki, violin • Jenő Jandó, piano

Salut d'amour was originally a piano piece written in honour of his wife Alice. The piece, one of the most popular Elgar ever wrote, also appeared in an orchestral version, and in the present arrangement for violin and piano.

Cockaigne, 'In London Town', Op. 40 (CD 1, track 3)

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra • Adrian Leaper

The concert overture *Cockaigne* was written in 1901. *Cockaigne*, Elgar noted, was traditionally a land of all delights, but also was identified with London and its suburbs, the supposed origin of the word *Cockney* to describe a native Londoner. The principal theme came to him during a visit to the Guildhall in the City of London, and this theme provided the germ of the whole work.

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85 *I. Adagio–Moderato* (CD 1, track 4)

Maria Kliegel, cello • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Michael Halász

The *Cello Concerto* was written after the First World War. Elgar worked on the composition during the summer of 1918 with the collaboration of the cellist Felix Salmond. The first movement opens with a grandiose statement by the soloist, leading, in almost improvisatory style, to a lilting melody announced by the violas. This is repeated by the soloist, who continues to dominate the movement.

Piano Quintet in A minor, Op. 84 *III. Andante–Allegro* (CD 1, track 5)

Maggini String Quartet • Peter Donohoe, piano

The cyclical nature of the work is characterized in the last movement by references to the first movement introduction. A purposeful *Allegro* is heard on unison strings and the A major conclusion strikes a different mood than the ghostly first movement.

Sospiri, Op. 70 (CD 1, track 6)

Northern Sinfonia • David Lloyd-Jones

Sospiri (Sighs) was written on the eve of World War I and captures something of the impending tragedy to

come with its dark colours, bolstered by harp and organ. The work is dedicated to the composer's friend and confidante, the violinist W.H. Reed, a founder-member of the newly formed London Symphony Orchestra that had inspired the more expansive *Introduction and Allegro* (see **CD 2, track 9**).

Violin Sonata, Op. 82 I. Allegro (CD 1, track 7)

Simone Lamsma, violin • Yurie Miura, piano

Elgar's only surviving sonata for violin and piano, the *Violin Sonata in E minor*, Op. 82, was written in 1918, the year before the *Cello Concerto* (see **CD 1, track 4**). It opens with a strongly stated romantic theme, followed by a more lyrical second theme. There is a mysterious passage accompanied by violin arpeggios and further development of the thematic material, before the return of the first theme, and the final dramatic climax.

Ave verum corpus, Op. 2, No. 1 (CD 1, track 8)

Choir of St. John's College, Cambridge, Christopher Robinson • Jonathan Vaughn, organ

Elgar's first setting of 'Ave verum corpus' from 1902 is for choir and organ and is in a simple traditional style. This is a revision of an earlier work, 'Pie Jesu', that Elgar wrote in memory of William Allen, the Worcester lawyer for whom he had briefly worked as a fifteen-year-old. The composer arranged the work for publication in 1902 with solo and choral verses in alternation.

Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61 II. Andante (CD 1, track 9)

Dong-Suk Kang, violin • Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Adrian Leaper

The work received its première, a triumphant first performance, at the Queen's Hall in November 1910. It was dedicated to and performed by Fritz Kreisler. The slow movement begins with an ingenious first theme in the orchestra before the solo violin enters, adding its own element before moving to the second theme with music of wonderful lyricism.

The Wand of Youth - Suite No. 2, Op. 1b VI. The Wild Bears (CD 1, track 10)

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • James Judd

It was in 1907 that Elgar turned his attention to compositions on which he had worked in childhood, notably music for a children's play to be performed in the family with his brothers and sisters. The play contrasted age and youth, with the latter trying to persuade the two adults that fairyland offered more than the conventional world in which they lived. From this early material he drew two suites. The *Second Suite* was performed at the Worcester Festival in September 1908, conducted by the composer. The *Suite* concludes with *The Wild Bears* and this piece is often performed separately from the rest of the work as a popular encore.

Imperial March, Op. 32 (CD 2, track 1)

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra • George Hurst

Elgar wrote the *Imperial March*, Op. 32, for the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. The *March*, first performed at the Crystal Palace under the direction of Sir August Manns, proved popular to the general public, as it reflected the spirit of the age and of the occasion that it marked.

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 83 I. Allegro moderato (CD 2, track 2)

Maggini String Quartet

The first movement of Elgar's *String Quartet* of 1918 begins with a theme characterized by an ascending, questioning motif, followed by a descending passage. The second theme finds a more settled mood, but the general feeling is of unrest and uncertainty, ending enigmatically with the first half of the first theme seemingly hanging in the air.

Symphony No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 63 III. Rondo (CD 2, track 3)

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra • Edward Downes

Completed in 1911, Elgar's *Second Symphony* was dedicated to the late king, Edward VII, and had, at the head of the score, the words of Shelley: *Rarely, rarely comest thou, / Spirit of Delight*. The third movement is organized around a repeating theme and the mood is light and playful.

Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op. 36 Variation IX. Nimrod (CD 2, track 4)

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra • George Hurst

The '*Enigma*' Variations started out life as something of a humorous exercise, with Elgar picturing his friends in music. At first, some of them were only known by their initials in the score, but the owners' names were soon discovered. Elgar suggested that there was a hidden theme, unheard, but one that goes with the theme on which the variations are overtly based. The identity of this hidden theme has been the object of continued speculation, but in the end remains an enigma. Certainly much of the work's attraction comes in the virtuosity of the score, the short sections contrasting the mercurial with slow pictures of great beauty. *Nimrod*, one of the long slow sections, has become a work in its own right.

The Apostles The Spirit of the Lord is upon me (CD 2, track 5)

Choir of St. John's College Cambridge, Christopher Robinson • Jonathan Vaughn, organ

Elgar had long had the idea of writing a work dealing with the calling of the apostles and his oratorio, *The Apostles*, fulfilled that. It was completed and first performed in 1903. *The Spirit of the Lord* is the prologue to the work and is often performed separately as an anthem. It introduces motifs taken up later in the work and the words are taken from Isaiah.

Symphony No. 1 in A flat major, Op. 55 II. Allegro molto (CD 2, track 6)

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra • George Hurst

Elgar's *Symphony No. 1 in A flat major* was written between the summer of 1907 and autumn 1908. At its première in Manchester by the Hallé Orchestra under Hans Richter in December 1908, the symphony was a great success with audiences and critics and was performed widely both in England and abroad. The second movement begins with a rapid and nervous violin theme interrupted by a sinister march. The solo violin reappears after the return of the first theme to introduce the final section of the movement.

Serenade, Op. 20 I. Allegro piacevole (CD 2, track 7)

Capella Istropolitana • Adrian Leaper

The *Serenade* was written in 1892, shortly after Elgar's marriage, when he had returned to the provinces. The first professional performance took place in 1899 under the composer's direction. A work of characteristically sweet melancholy, the *Serenade* opens with the pulsating rhythm of the viola.

The Dream of Gerontius, Op. 38 Part II. But Hark! A Grand Mysterious Harmony (CD 2, track 8)

William Kendall, tenor • Sarah Fryer, mezzo-soprano • Bournemouth Symphony Chorus • Wayneflete Singers
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, David Hill

The Dream of Gerontius is the greatest and most frequently performed choral masterpiece of English twentieth-century music, and its completion in 1900 heralded the dawn of a new era in British life. It is the story of Gerontius' journey from life to death. Gerontius' passage to heaven is in the hands of the Angel, sung by a mezzo-soprano. The journey is not easy, with the chilling chorus of Demons a reminder of the alternative to eternal peace. A bass takes the part of the Priest and the Angel of Agony, and those chilling words "Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!" are one of the work's finest moments.

Introduction and Allegro, Op. 47 (CD 2, track 9)

Capella Istropolitana • Adrian Leaper

Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* contrasts a small group, a string quartet, with the main body of the orchestra, a form suggested by the Baroque *concerto grosso*. The romantic texture is enriched by the characteristic sweep of the composer's writing for strings. The *Introduction* suggests the themes that are to follow in the *Allegro*. The work moves forward to a brilliantly worked contrapuntal section that leads back to the first theme, followed by the second theme, and a final triumphant reference to the *Introduction*.

Sea Pictures IV. Where corals lie (CD 2, track 10)

Sarah Connolly, mezzo-soprano • Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Simon Wright

Sea Pictures was written in 1899, shortly after Elgar had completed the 'Enigma' Variations. It was first sung at the Norwich Festival by the famous contralto Clara Butt, then near the beginning of her career and dressed, as Elgar remarked, like a mermaid. 'Where corals lie', based on the poem by Richard Garnett, is a setting of evocative verses that explore, in dreams, the colourful depths of the ocean, with a masterly orchestral score that raises the text to a higher level.

Pomp and Circumstance, Op. 39 March No. 4 (CD 2, track 11)

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • James Judd

The *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 4*, in G major, was finished in 1907 and dedicated to the Hereford Cathedral organist George Robertson Sinclair, who also features, with his dog Dan, in the 'Enigma' Variations. This march comes only second in popularity to *March No. 1* (see **CD 1, track 1**), with the trio section again seeming to demand words to be sung with it.

For further explorations into the world of Elgar, we suggest:

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Symphony No. 1 / Imperial March	8.550634
Symphony No. 2	8.550635
'Enigma' Variations / In the South / Coronation March	8.553564
Falstaff / The Sanguine Fan	8.553879
English String Miniatures, Vol. 2	8.555068
Wand of Youth / Nursery Suite	8.557166
Marches	8.557273

CONCERTOS

Cello Concerto / Introduction and Allegro / Serenade	8.554409
Violin Concerto / Cockaigne Overture	8.550489

CHAMBER MUSIC

Salut d'amour	8.550306
String Quartet in E major / Piano Quintet in A minor	8.553737
Sonata for Violin and Piano	8.557984

KEYBOARD MUSIC

Organ Sonata No. 1	8.550582
Severn Suite: Organ Sonata No. 2 / Cantique	8.550773

VOCAL/CHORAL MUSIC

The Dream of Gerontius	8.553885-86
Ave Maria / Give unto the Lord / Te Deum and Benedictus	8.557288
Sea Pictures	8.557710

THE VERY BEST OF ELGAR

CD1

1	Pomp and Circumstance, Op. 39 March No. 1	6:12
2	Salut d'amour, Op. 12	3:01
3	Cockaigne, 'In London Town', Op. 40	15:21
4	Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85 I. Adagio-Moderato	9:02
5	Piano Quintet in A minor, Op. 84 III. Andante-Allegro	10:12
6	Sospiri, Op. 70	4:32
7	Violin Sonata, Op. 82 I. Allegro	7:57
8	Ave verum corpus, Op. 2, No. 1	2:40
9	Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61 II. Andante	11:06
10	The Wand of Youth – Suite No. 2, Op. 1b VI. The Wild Bears	2:19
	Total Timing	72:48

CD2

1	Imperial March, Op. 32	4:22
2	String Quartet in E minor, Op. 83 I. Allegro moderato	8:10
3	Symphony No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 63 III. Rondo	8:09
4	Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op. 36 Variation IX: Nimrod	3:31
5	The Apostles The Spirit of the Lord is upon me	6:50
6	Symphony No. 1 in A flat major, Op. 55 II. Allegro molto	7:28
7	Serenade, Op. 20 I. Allegro piacevole	3:14
8	The Dream of Gerontius, Op. 38 Part II: But Hark! A Grand Mysterious Harmony	8:59
9	Introduction and Allegro, Op. 47	14:47
10	Sea Pictures IV. Where corals lie	3:35
11	Pomp and Circumstance, Op. 39 March No. 4	5:17
	Total Timing	75:01



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THE VERY BEST OF ELGAR

"This man's music ... has something to say and he knows how to say it."

(Hubert Parry on Elgar)

From raucous marches to private enigmas, the music of Elgar represents, for many, the ultimate symbol of England in the early 20th century, contrasting royal ceremonies with intimate family gatherings. This 2-CD set features Elgar's most frequently performed and recorded works, including selections from the *'Enigma' Variations*, *Pomp and Circumstance Marches No. 1 and No. 4*, and the Cello and Violin Concertos.

Compact Disc 1

- 1** *Pomp and Circumstance, Op. 39* March No. 1 **2** *Salut d'amour, Op. 12* **3** *Cockaigne, 'In London Town', Op. 40*
4 *Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85* I. Adagio–Moderato **5** *Piano Quintet in A minor, Op. 84* III. Andante–Allegro
6 *Sospiri, Op. 70* **7** *Violin Sonata, Op. 82* I. Allegro **8** *Ave verum corpus, Op. 2, No. 1* **9** *Violin Concerto in B minor, Op. 61* II. Andante **10** *The Wand of Youth – Suite No. 2, Op. 1b* VI. The Wild Bears

Compact Disc 2

- 1** *Imperial March, Op. 32* **2** *String Quartet in E minor, Op. 83* I. Allegro moderato **3** *Symphony No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 63* III. Rondo **4** *Variations on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op. 36* Variation IX: Nimrod
5 *The Apostles* The Spirit of the Lord is upon me **6** *Symphony No. 1 in A flat major, Op. 55* II. Allegro molto **7** *Serenade, Op. 20* I. Allegro piacevole
8 *The Dream of Gerontius, Op. 38* Part II: But Hark! A Grand Mysterious Harmony
9 *Introduction and Allegro, Op. 47* **10** *Sea Pictures* IV. Where corals lie
11 *Pomp and Circumstance, Op. 39* March No. 4



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