CD Review Article

Elgar's Recordings

Elgar as conductor of his own music on record has been one of the principal agents whereby the study of recordings has become a respectable adjunct of musicology. The reasons are straightforward. For twenty years Elgar worked for The Gramophone Company (the full title was 'His Master's Voice' Gramophone Company) as both an advocate of his music and advocate of the gramophone. During this period, recording technology changed from the cramped conditions of the acoustic studio of 1914 to the specialized recording studio of Abbey Road using the electrical system of 1933, in which year Elgar conducted his last recordings, with the extraordinary appendix of Elgar supervising a recording by telephone connection from his death bed in 1934 (Elgar started making electrical recordings in 1926 and he formally consecrated Abbey Road in 1931 with the first recording of his *Falstaff*).[1] As a conductor of his own music – we cannot comment from direct experience on his success with the music of others, for nothing was recorded – he was as fine a conductor as Furtwängler in Wagner and Mengelberg in Brahms.[2] His ability as a conductor extends to every aspect of the art, from the purely technical quality of the playing he repeatedly drew from orchestras to the inexhaustible fascination of the interpretations themselves. Few who have heard, for example, his performance of the Prelude to *The Dream of Gerontius* are likely to be entirely satisfied with Barbirolli, Boult, Handley, Rattle or any other:[3] it is Elgar who brings us closest to the soul's agony and exultation at the heart of the oratorio.[4] Aware of the neglect by musicologists of recordings, and anxious to point out a strange anomaly in the self-styled 'authentic performance' movement, Robert Philip wrote a pioneering article for *Early Music* that drew upon Elgar's recordings for evidence that the gramophone had a great deal to tell musicologists about performance.[5]

As this is a review of the recordings, it is worth surveying the commercial scene before, of necessity, including in the discussion one or two recordings

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[1] The most extensive work devoted to Elgar's recordings, including a full listing of matrix and catalogue numbers alongside correspondence and company records, is Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar on Record* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). A wide-ranging and up-to-date study of the subject may be found in Timothy Day, 'Elgar and Recording', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, ed. Daniel Grimley and Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 184–94.

[2] For an account of Elgar as a conductor, supported by numerous eye-witness accounts, see Stephen Lloyd, 'Elgar as Conductor', in *An Elgar Companion*, ed. Christopher Redwood (Ashbourne, Derbys: Moorland/Sequoia, 1982): 291–306.

[3] Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London, with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra on 26 February 1927. Published from test pressings in 1982 and subsequently issued on CD in Volume 1 of *The Elgar Edition*, EMI CDS 7 54560 2 (currently unavailable). See Moore, *Elgar on Record*, 65.

[4] For an Elgar discography complete up to the early 1960s see Moore, *An Elgar Discography* (London: British Institute of Recorded Sound, 1963).

[5] 'The recordings of Edward Elgar (1857–1934). Authenticity and performance practice', *Early Music* 12/4 (1984): 481–9.

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that are not currently available. In total, Elgar's recorded output as conductor takes up fourteen CDs. The Pearl edition of the acoustic recordings was on five and EMI's edition of the electrical recordings appeared on nine well-filled CDs, divided into three boxes.[6] However, whilst these sets covered all the published material, they did not include all the unpublished sides that survived due (in many instances) to Elgar's reluctance to destroy the test pressings that The Gramophone Company sent him for comment and approval. Pearl included some rejected takes for *The Wand of Youth* Suites and EMI included an alternate side for the Second Symphony, plus unpublished sides of *Gerontius* and other material, but this is only a tiny part of what has survived: a full list is still not possible, for the records have been dispersed – there are 'alternate' sides for almost half of the Violin Concerto, much of the First Symphony, parts of the Cello Concerto, *Falstaff*, *The Wand of Youth*, and other works, all in their electrical incarnations.[7] For some years all the CD sets listed above were easily obtainable, but at the time of writing they are effectively deleted. The sad state of affairs the classical recording industry finds itself in was witnessed in a BBC Radio 3 comparative review of recordings of Elgar's Second Symphony by David Nice (broadcast on 15 October 2005 as part of the programme *CD Review*): he found that, whilst many of the most desirable recordings were on EMI (performances by Elgar, Boult and Barbirolli), none of the them was currently available on that label and most were not available at all. His list included two performances by Elgar (1924–25 and 1927) and Boult's first recording (1944). At the time of writing, the only available transfer of the 1944 Boult performance was on the small independent label Beulah (3PD15).[8] The only recordings by Elgar officially available from EMI are a single disc of the Violin Concerto and 'Enigma' Variations (electrical versions) in the often inappropriately named series Great Recordings of the Century. Naxos has released transfers of the 'Enigma' Variations with *Cockaigne* (1933), *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches Nos. 1–5 (1926–30), and a tantalizing 'two-channel' version of the last side of the *Cockaigne* set; the Violin Concerto (coupled with the Bruch First Violin Concerto), and the Second Symphony coupled with the Cello Concerto (all electrical recordings, on 8.111022, 8.110902 and 8.111260).

[6] Elgar's Complete Recordings 1914–25, GEMM CDS 9951–5; The Elgar Edition Volume 1, CDS 7 54560 2; Volume 2, CDS 7 54564 2; Volume 3, CDS 7 54568 2 (published 1992–93).

[7] 'Alternate' usually means 'rejected', but not always: occasionally a side that was not included in an original issue might turn up in a later one or, perhaps, in an overseas issue. Moore briefly discusses the alternate takes in *An Elgar Discography*: 5, 31, 34–5. Many of the records were once in Moore's private collection, and he transferred some to cassette tape (from whence they came to me), but the location of many of the originals now is unknown, apart from a small number of test discs of the Cello Concerto, which are held in the Yale Collection of Historic Sound Recordings. As this collection is largely uncatalogued it is possible that more may be found there. One hopes that the location of the test pressings will be made known so that new transfers might be attempted; the present ones are poor. I presented a paper at the Dublin International Conference on Music Analysis (June 2005) entitled 'The Vagaries and Vicissitudes of Recordings Adduced as Evidence of Performance Practice: A Revealing Case Study', which considered the implications of the existence of seven surviving test sides (that is, seven different sides out of the total of eleven required for the symphony) of the First Symphony for our understanding of Elgar as a conductor and his approach to recording. It is hoped to publish a revised version of this paper soon.

[8] It is coupled with the Prelude from *Dream of Gerontius* and *Sospiri*. The disc is most easily purchased from the company's website: www.eavb.co.uk/lp/indexcd.html.

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This situation should change, for EMI says that it will probably release a boxed set of the electricals. The outlook is bleaker for the acoustic recordings: there was a period when companies such as Pearl could risk maintaining a relatively esoteric set of this sort in the catalogue, but the market does not encourage or reward such enterprise any more, so there is no indication that the acoustics will reappear.[9]

Given that the acoustic recordings comprise over a third of the recorded legacy of Elgar and that they are the remotest in time, they cannot be glossed over or left to one side on the pretext that they were superseded by the electrical recordings (in any case, Elgar did not re-record all the works he had made for the acoustic gramophone[10]). There is a tendency to view acoustic recordings as a provisional stage in the evolution of recording, a harbinger of things to come, but a phenomenon that was in some ways invalidated by the electrical method of recording. This is the impression conveyed by Timothy Day in his chapter on Elgar and recording; he writes, 'all sounds were distorted to different extents'.[11] It is undeniable that the advent of electrical recordings in 1925 rendered acoustic recordings obsolete in the eyes of the record companies of the time, for a great deal of the old catalogue was withdrawn and many musicians remade recordings with the benefit of the microphone. Nevertheless, musicians had been making acoustic recordings for around a quarter of a century; the technology had constantly improved; the musicians had become proficient in the process; playback technology had found a highly refined system of reproduction that gave an extraordinarily vivid account of the activities of the musicians (one can hear this to some extent in Nimbus's recordings for CD of acoustic-gramophone reproductions of vocal recordings in its Prima Voce series). Up to 1925 hundreds of thousands of recordings were made acoustically and audiences were entertained by them, musicians satisfied. One even encounters complaints from some critics and home listeners when electrical recordings were first introduced: they disliked them, declaring them strident and unmusical. One may conclude that the performance of music in the home via a gramophone (or CD player) invariably entails a degree of adaptation to a reality that bears little or only an incomplete resemblance to the concert hall, and this adaptation is only partially dependent upon the relentless march of progress in the technique of recording and domestic playback. To assume that this progress is precisely in step with the

[9] An enquiry to Pavilion Records concerning their Pearl set of the acoustics elicited the following response from John Waite: 'The Elgar boxed set, 9951–5, is still nominally in the catalogue, but stocks of the "proper" boxed sets, with all attendant paper parts, has been out for some time, in the light of fading demand. The transfers were state of the art in their day and commercially it would certainly not be worth re-doing them. We could just possibly make up a few sets in an unorthodox way in that there would be the five discs and the one 16pp. booklet. But the discs would not be individually jewel-cased, with inlays, nor would there be the box.' Email, 13 March 2006. I will make original transfers of some acoustic and electrical sides available as part of the Trinity College Dublin website: www.tcd.ie/Music (any help in locating records in good condition would be gratefully received). A disc devoted to Siegfried Sassoon's poetry and prose read by the author includes all of the acoustic Violin Concerto, though the movements are spread around the disc. Memorial Tablet CD41–008.

[10] The list of works recorded only by the acoustic method includes *Carillon*, *Polonia*, *Sea Pictures*, *The Fringes of the Fleet*, extracts from *The Sanguine Fan* and *The Starlight Express*. See Moore, *Elgar on Record*.

[11] Day, 'Elgar and Recording', 185.

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listeners' reception of recorded media in the home is surely a mistake; acoustic recordings constituted a reality for countless listeners that was satisfying and self-contained.

In pursuit of this view, we may take some of Elgar's acoustic recordings not as feeble attempts at recording that were hopelessly compromised by the lack of a microphone, but as perfect rationalizations of the resources that were then available. If we would like an analogy with 'real' concert life, perhaps we might imagine a work played in a smallish theatre with only enough seats in the pit for a modest string section compared, say, with the same work in a well-appointed large concert hall. In the small theatre there are fewer strings, the upper frequencies are greatly dampened by the audience and upholstery, and the dynamic range is reduced; the venue may make the sound boxy, muffled, distant and so on; moreover, the listener's ability to separate divisions of the orchestra and place them in a spatial environment may be curtailed. Take the same work into a modern concert hall, where wood predominates, upholstery is kept to a minimum, and the work is given with a large complement of strings spread out with the other sections of the orchestra over a large stage, and the effect is entirely different; it is in some respects the opposite. Both venues are 'authentic' in that composers may have countenanced the performance of the same work in two such contrasted situations. Whilst it is a leap, and indeed not an entirely reasonable one, this imagined change of venue is not unlike the effect of going from an acoustic recording to an electrical one.

Elgar recorded the 'Enigma' Variations twice, first in 1920–21 and again in 1926. Elgar's view of the earlier recording may be deduced from comments in a letter relating specifically to it and to comments about recording in general made around the same time at the inaugural ceremony for The Gramophone Company's new premises at 363–7 Oxford Street on 20 July 1921. So far as the Variations were concerned, he felt that 'Some of the varns. come off very well but [Troyte's] drums are not possible'.[12] Nevertheless, in general terms he opined that the recording process had come a long way since his first recordings in 1914, at which time he likened the engineers and himself to 'anglers' who threw in such instruments as the 'pianoforte, harp and organ … in the hope that some resemblance at least to the orchestral tone might be captured. … Our position as early orchestra recorders was very much of the "Chuck and chance it" order.' By 1921, thanks to unspecified new processes adopted by His Master's Voice, 'records are put before the public which can be accurately described as artistic productions'.[13] Elgar's audience at this ceremony probably expected nothing less, and yet here we have a confident appraisal of the gramophone as it pertained in 1921.

In 1920 and 1921 the Variations were recorded over three sessions:

Hayes, 24 February 1920	Variations IX, X	matrix HO4275AF
Hayes, 16 November 1920	Variations III–VIII	matrices HO4609AF, HO4620AF
Hayes, 11 May 1921	Theme, Variations XI–XIV	matrices Cc140–43

[12] Moore, *Elgar on Record*, 36–7.
[13] Ibid., 39–40.

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Issued on HMV D 578, D 582, D 596, D 602
Royal Albert Hall Orchestra

The orchestra employed for the last session comprised 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, drums, 6 first and 4 second violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos and double bass.[14] That the process was far from straightforward is suggested by abortive attempts at some of the variations, including part of one session that yielded no publishable sides at all. Compared to this, the electrical session for the Variations, his second with the microphone, was remarkably productive: the afternoon of 28 April 1926 produced usable sides for the whole work with the exception of one, which failed the wear test and had to be remade in August.[15] The orchestra was made up to the full ensemble notated in the score, so there were now 4 horns, an organ for the Finale, and 18 violins, 6 violas, 4 cellos and 3 double basses.[16]

Queen's Hall, 28 April 1926	matrices CR339–CD345, issued on HMV D 1154–7	Royal Albert Hall Orchestra
Queen's Hall, 30 August 1926	matrix CR341, issued on HMV D 1155	Royal Albert Hall Orchestra

The two recordings provide a useful basis on which to reflect upon these two distinct periods in Elgar's recording career. The project to make the acoustic set started with a single side of variations IX and X, Nimrod and Dorabella (attempted in 1919 but not made until 1920). At The Gramophone Company's conference on 1 April 1919 to decide what next to record with Elgar, only a single record of the Variations had been envisaged; the rest fell into place later and, rather than redo Nimrod complete, the full set was constructed around the record already recorded. This was typical of the piecemeal approach to recording then and the acceptance of incomplete versions of works. In view of the original conception it is not surprising, though somewhat shocking, to find a substantial cut in Nimrod. The other variations are uncut. So far as another objection to acoustic recordings is concerned, that Elgar had to speed up his performances to accommodate the music on fewer sides than was ideal (an economic consideration rather than a technical one), this is harder to quantify. Certainly Nimrod starts at a faster tempo in the acoustic version than in 1926 (crotchet = c. 45 as opposed to c. 40), but other sections offer another view. The Finale, for instance, is allowed to spread over two sides in the acoustic version. It plays for about 4:35; the electrical, on one side, plays for 4:30.

Many have castigated acoustic recordings for poor orchestral playing, invoking the sloppy rehearsal conditions for English orchestras, the cramped studio and so on, as an explanation for this. Day writes of 'an abbreviated ensemble, and a forlorn, unhappy and very warm body of men'.[17] The Variations offer little

[14] All information on the recordings is taken from Moore, *Elgar on Record* unless otherwise noted. Ibid., 32–6.

[15] The wear test involved repeated playings of a disc in order to assess its durability on a typical domestic system. Many fine recordings were thrown away as a result of this procedure and others had to be dubbed to a second matrix in order to tame sound (often with unpleasant results). See ibid., 59–60.

[16] Ibid., 59.

[17] Day, 'Elgar and Recording', 185.

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evidence that the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra was in any way fatally challenged by the music; neither is there much evidence that loose ensemble was accepted then as a stylistic norm: much of the playing is pretty tight. If there are a few lapses it is not remarkable, for not only were the conditions cramped but there was no patching; a side was either accepted or rejected in its entirety. The start of the Finale, a fine place to sample the virtuosity of the strings and the prowess of the brass, is thrilling in its unanimity. All the details that Philip and others have noted in these recordings are there: extensive portamento, woodwind with little or no vibrato, a tendency to accelerate through phrases, a fondness for abridging the duration of smaller notes of groups (such as quaver–semiquaver–semiquaver, where the last two notes might drop some of their value), and a general 'throwaway' lightness of articulation in the middle of phrases that eschews the modern tendency to nurture every detail.

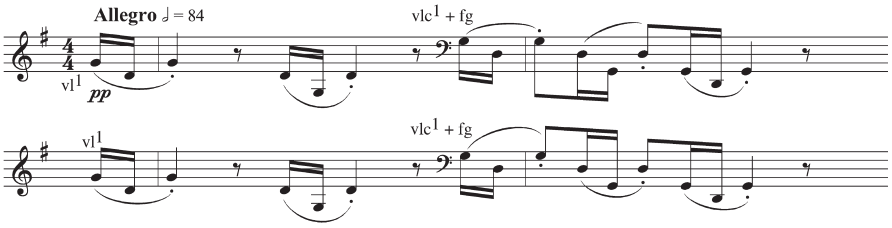
The more one listens to the acoustic version the less the obvious limitations seem to matter or disturb the listening experience. One's sense of scale is modified. The frame of reference is smaller, for there are fewer strings and the brass will never bellow, as they were soon to do for the microphone. The dynamic range is around 35 decibels compared with the electrical version, which goes beyond 45, and the frequency range has nothing to offer above 4 kHz compared with 6 kHz (and often more) in the electrical. There is not much sense of the wind emerging from behind a body of strings (the instruments are all huddled together); even so, there is a satisfying array of orchestral colour. Monotony has never been my experience of this recording. Within the reduced scale a remarkably full range of articulation comes across.

Turning to the electrical recording has the effect of all great changes of technology when experienced with hindsight. In the 1926 Variations we hear the same orchestra, now at full strength, on the stage of the Queen's Hall. The acoustic has become part of the recording and although the sound is mono, one can detect a surprising number of distance effects: the brass section, for example, is clearly further from us than the strings. These changes yield a different sense of scale. It would be gratifying to be able to draw a clear line from technology to performance decisions, but Elgar's intentions seem similar (though not identical) in both performances, and the different recording situations do not seem to have contracted or expanded his ambitions for expression or effect. At the start of the Finale, Elgar typically emphasizes hypermetric accents at the expense of detail in the semiquaver–semiquaver–crotchet figure that opens the movement.[18] Elgar

[18] This is a fertile area of theory. William Rothstein views this as taking place within a metrical scheme (see *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*, New York: Schirmer, 1989); others prefer to take alternative parameters into account, such as accent, motivic features, texture, and so on. In this article 'hypermeter' is taken to refer to groupings of bars such as phrases or sections of a work arising out of a combination of parameters such as phrase beginnings, accents, motivic features, and so on. The system is hierarchical so that at one level of a work there may be many hypermetric accents, but at the highest level there may only be two or three. At the level principally addressed here, hypermetric accents typically occur at the beginning of phrase groupings or sections, so this approach privileges just one of many potential levels. My use of 'accent' in the context of hypermeter generally refers to what Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff entitled 'phenomenal accent', meaning 'any event at the musical surface that gives emphasis or stress to that moment in the musical flow'. Given that the points under consideration are generally the beginnings of phrase groups or sections, it is not always easy to distinguish between phenomenal accents and metrical accents. There is, however, within the Lerdahl–Jackendorf system a flexibility that

de-emphasizes these figures in bars 544 (last quaver) and 545 (Ex. 1), in spite of the maintenance of the *pianissimo* dynamic and reinforcement by bassoons: he lowers the dynamic slightly and accelerates.

Ex. 1 Elgar, Variations on an Original Theme ('Enigma') Op. 36, bars 544–7



The effect of this is to throw the emphasis firmly onto the beginning of the phrase rather than its continuation. That Elgar goes for the same effect in both recordings is symptomatic of the fact that within the confined scale of the acoustic studio his ambitions for interpretation were not markedly different in the electrical remake. As Moore comments in connection with the 1923 recording of *In the South*, 'If this was not yet the equal of music in the concert hall, it had the vitality and the truth of essential music making'.[19]

Whereas the acoustic recording of the Variations cannot easily be purchased on CD at present and its only LP incarnation was Pearl GEM 114, the electrical version has a long history on LP and CD. After the demise of the 78 in the 1950s, the 1926 Variations first surfaced on LP in 1957 to mark the centenary of Elgar's death. It was clearly a major event, for EMI took out full-page advertisements in the June edition of *The Gramophone* plus the magazine's cover (on which it also advertised in those days) to advertise three releases of Elgar's recorded legacy (in addition to the Variations, they released *Cockaigne* and the Serenade on ALP 1464, *Falstaff* on BLP 1090, and the Violin Concerto on ALP 1456); no acoustic recordings were included in the edition. The sound quality of the Variations is remarkably good. Compared to EMI's most recent CD issue the upper frequencies sound a little reticent ('boxy' springs to mind), but the strings have a realism that is often hard to attain in transfers of 78s, a quality noted by Andrew Porter in his review of these records: 'The string tone, even in the oldest recording – the *Enigmas* – sounds often more full-bodied and musical than we get to-day.'[20]

Moreover, there is an integrated feel to the sound that gives every department of the orchestra its full weight within the global picture. It is a compelling 'performance' or re-creation ('performance' seems to be a fair way to describe the imaginative and often personal approach to reproducing 78s by transfer engineers) of the 78s. The absence of digital technology to remove the scratch is a drawback, but the materials for the transfers were in such good condition

is of great value in the study of performance, namely their recognition that 'Phenomenal accent functions as a *perceptual unit* to metrical accent – that is, the moments of musical stress in the raw signal serve as "cues" from which the listener attempts to extrapolate a regular pattern of metrical accents'. See Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, 'On the Theory of Grouping and Meter', *Musical Quarterly* 67/4 (1981): 485.

19 Notes accompanying The Elgar Edition, GEMM CDS 9951–5.

20 *The Gramophone* 35 (July 1957): 72.

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that this is rarely a distraction; played with a CEDAR module for removing the clicks and crackle, the LP sound is even more impressive. In the 1970s EMI returned to Elgar to issue most of the electrical recordings in two substantial box sets plus individual LPs of some works.[21] The transfer of the Variations by Anthony Griffith is superior to the 1957 version. There is a greater feeling of openness in the treble, and the dynamics open out more. It seems this opening out of the dynamics, and so re-creation of some of what the earlier engineers had been obliged to curb, was part of Griffith's brief, but it is done with such artistry that there is little evidence of unnecessary tampering. For CD release EMI cooperated with the Elgar Society in an ambitious programme that was eventually to encompass all available recordings made by or involving Elgar in the period 1926 to 1934 (with the exceptions noted above). This resulted in nine CDs (published c. 1992–93), the extent and detail of which owed a great deal to the inexhaustible efforts of Moore. Sadly, in some ways the technical quality fell short of the 1970s LPs (accepting the relativities of the different medium and greater opportunities of the digital revolution). The timing was wrong. CEDAR modules and other noise-reducing systems,[22] mostly used as software in workstations, were newly available, and it was possible not just to remove the scratch but also to reduce the extensive broadband noise with which 78s are usually afflicted. It was easy to apply these systems too aggressively and the various CEDAR modules were to improve greatly over the next few years. The price for over-ambitious interventions in the noise content of the 78s is arguably unacceptable to anyone with sensitive hearing: there are various artefacts, such as an ice-skating effect, a strange phase-shifting quality, 'underwater' strings, and so on. As a performance of the originals, the LPs were superior. It is surprising that more commentators did not draw attention to these failings at the time, but the critical response to EMI's three CD sets was usually positive (relief at the removal of so much of the scratch may have been the dominant response, and there were some spectacular successes, especially in the rehabilitation of Elgar's test discs, which had been frequently played and with heavy metal needles). Perhaps the most interesting and revealing commentary on them is EMI's later remastering of the Variations and Violin Concerto for the Great Recordings of the Century series, which is more open, cleaner, less prone to artefacts caused by various denoising procedures (but not free from their presence), and constitutes a generally compelling performance of the 78s (EMI 5 66979 2, 1999).

The Violin Concerto performance with Yehudi Menuhin has been the most often reissued and discussed of all of Elgar's recordings. It has almost totally eclipsed the acoustic set with Marie Hall, which used a drastically cut score to fit the work onto just four sides (as opposed to the twelve of the electrical recording).

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[21] RLS 708 (c. 1972) included the Variations, symphonies and other major works; RLS 713 (c. 1975) mopped up most of Elgar's other electrical recordings. Richard Osborne's lengthy and insightful review of RLS 713 appears in *The Gramophone* 52 (February 1975): 1480–91.

[22] CEDAR Audio Limited has developed a number of tools for removing noise from various types of media. As the systems have developed so the level of refinement possible in the various denoising procedures has risen. For more information see www.cedar-audio.com.

Abbey Road Studio No. 1, 14–15 July 1932
matrices 2B2968–2B2979, catalogue numbers DB 1751–6
Yehudi Menuhin (violin), London Symphony Orchestra

For much of its latest transfer of the concerto to CD EMI had access to original metal masters, which usually yield vinyl pressings that are quieter than the commercial shellac 78s. In 1957 the Violin Concerto had also been transferred from metal parts, hence the quiet surfaces. These parts were then, it seems, scrapped as part of the company's policy of freeing up space (the BBC Symphony Orchestra–Toscanini metals suffered the same fate). When Griffith made his transfer for the HMV Treasury LP and boxed set he had to rely on shellacs, so when EMI came round to its first CD release of the Concerto in the late 1980s (an earlier version of the Great Recordings of the Century series), it used the 1957 LP master tape.[23] By the time of the Elgar Edition, EMI became aware of the survival of some metals in America owned by the original sister company RCA Victor. These were used for the transfer but had to be supplemented by excellent Victor Z pressings owned by Ward Marston (a transfer engineer who has worked for Biddulph, Naxos, RCA and his own label, among others). Parts of the same Victor Z set were used by Mark Obert-Thorn for his exemplary Naxos transfer.[24]

For all the enthusiasm with which the very young Menuhin's performance has been greeted, it has never been a unanimous response: some regard the set as inferior to the earlier Albert Sammons performance with Henry Wood (1929), which has more of the volatility and energy usually associated with Elgar's conducting than Menuhin's playing.[25] Elgar, it is argued, was star struck, and indulged and accommodated the young prodigy rather more than was desirable for the artistic outcome. Moore, responding to EMI's LP remastering of the Sammons recording (HMV Treasury HLM 7011), writes thus of the Menuhin-Elgar partnership:

> The result was a performance not quite like anything else of Elgar's conducting as it emerges from his recordings. Again and again his solicitude for the young Menuhin leads him to understate, to defer – almost at times to hesitate. In the end it all has almost too much introspection about it.[26]

He evidently preferred Sammons:

> it seems difficult to imagine a more eloquent and ultimately more satisfying account of this wonderful music.[27]

We may at least hear in the Menuhin performance a confrontation between the old and the new in performance styles: Menuhin was strongly akin to a new generation of violin virtuosos, unlike Hall, who harked back to the nineteenth century in her rhythmic style, heavy use of portamento and sparing vibrato. More generally speaking, Menuhin speaks of a tendency in much Elgar performance (and the point extends to much music by others) to move the Allegro into the

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23 CDH 7 69789 (1989).

24 I am indebted to Mark Obert-Thorn for this information.

25 Recorded 18 March and 16 April 1929, matrices WAX4785–9/4, 4846–7, Columbia L2346–51.

26 *The Gramophone* 50 (July 1972): 243.

27 Ibid.

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sphere of the slow movement. A similar point was made in a recent BBC Radio 3 CD review of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony when the reviewer (Stephen Johnson) noted how many modern performances make little differentiation between the first and second movements in terms of pulse.[28] In the Violin Concerto's first movement, Menuhin pulls back the tempo of almost every melodic statement, only allowing Elgar's original pulse to creep back in the bravura passages where no melodic statement is involved. Elgar starts the Concerto a little under crotchet = 114 and soon exceeds that tempo; he pulls the second subject (bar 35) back to crotchet = 78, but within a few bars has accelerated to crotchet = 108 (bar 43); shortly before Menuhin's entry he has regained his original crotchet = 114 and overshot it to c. 120 by bar 64. From Menuhin's entry the pulse fluctuates wildly, but does not exceed crotchet = 102 until around bar 163, when bravura figuration finally enables Elgar's original pulse to be reinstated. Through both the solo first-subject and second-subject groups up to bar 163 the average tempo, which is more in the gift of the soloist than the conductor, is around crochet = 75 (the fluctuations are so extreme that it is hard to be firm in these matters). The tutti preceding the recapitulation (bars 187–222) is taken at a blistering pace by Elgar, reaching crotchet = 132 just before bar 211, almost as if the composer were relieved finally to have control of his creation again. The evidence of Hall's performance is problematic in reinforcing or qualifying our reading of the interaction of Elgar and Menuhin, for we only hear most of the material once, so drastic is the cutting, but there is certainly less lingering on the soloist's part; indeed, the quick-witted raciness of Elgar's tuttis in the electrical version seems to be reflected in the solo passages.

In another area there also seems to be conflict: the manner in which phrases and phrase groupings are accentuated and brought out at the expense of some of the detail they harbour. What has emerged from study of many of Elgar's recordings is that his fast tempi, his apparent tendency to skirt over some of the more arresting expressive detail and so on, are due to a desire to convey the architecture of the larger hypermetric groupings. Many modern conductors are prone to live in the moment, relishing passing detail, but infrequently securing a sense of the music's flow from one major hypermetric accent to the next. As we move up the hierarchy from the phrase structure of the main second-subject theme to the next rhythmic level, we detect a hypermetric accent at bar 35, which arches over to the next at bar 47 in the opening tutti (Ex. 2).

Elgar's conducting seems designed to convey an unambiguous sense of the musical topography by refraining from extraneous detailing of deviations within the hypermetric span (which is not to say that the music-making is not, at times, highly expressive, or that Elgar doesn't draw out inner voices, for example – he simply found a way to do it that did not detract from the sense of the larger rhythmic structure). Its first phrase is played by solo clarinet with string echoes, beginning at the hypermetric accent at bar 35. Through the first and second phrases of the theme (bars 35–37 and bars 37–40) Elgar maintains the flow by consistent accentuation and parallel expressive inflections; the legato and detached playing is matched from phrase to phrase; for example, in the middle part of each phrase there is a slight ritardando, but the tempo is soon reinstated. By maintaining consistency in the expression here, Elgar ensures that the passage glides by; the opposite of this would be to use different expressive devices in the second phrase, which, even without an adjustment of tempo, would impede

[28] Broadcast 4 March 2006 as part of BBC Radio 3's programme *CD Review*.

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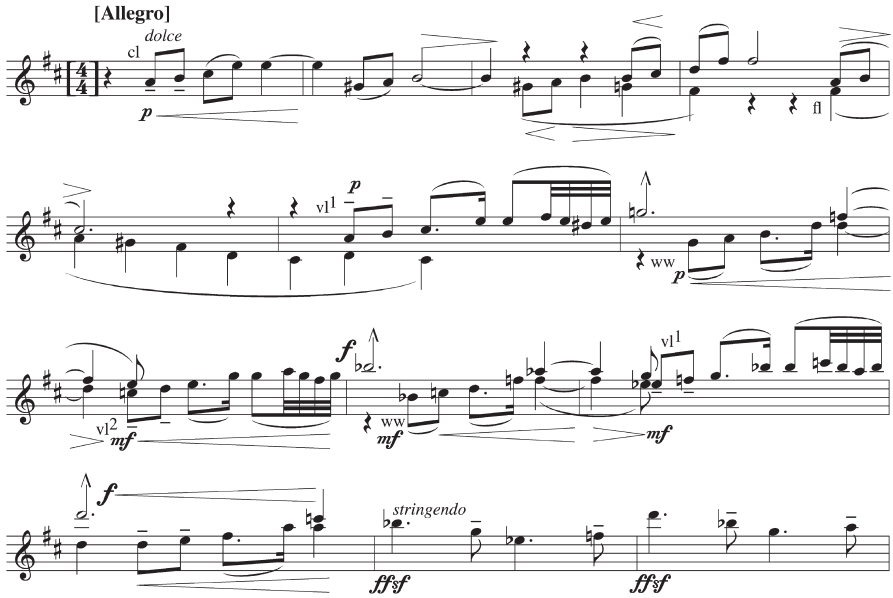
Ex. 2 Elgar, Violin Concerto in B minor Op. 61, bars 35–47 (cue 4 + 5)



rhythmic momentum, for the listener's attention would be diverted. From bar 40 Elgar uses a characteristic accelerando to bring us to the next hypermetric accent: the theme accelerates to its cumulative point at bar 47. The pulse has gone from crotchet = 78 at the beginning to crotchet = 108 at the end of this section.

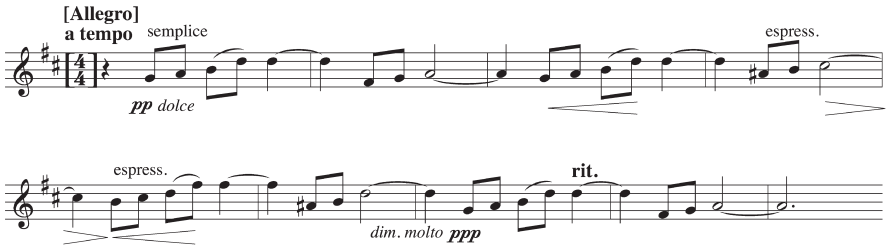
When Elgar presents the solo version of the second-subject theme at bar 131 its evenness is emphasized by score markings such as *semplice* and the idea, clearly not much in the mind of conductor or soloist, is that it should be *a tempo*, that is in the main tempo of the movement. In fact it is played at around crotchet = 63, quite a lot slower than the orchestral version, and Menuhin characteristically diverts attention away from the simple flow of the melody, which is inherent in the parallel articulative markings, dynamics, and so on given in the score, by varying several attributes of his playing within the passage, including

- bowing;
- the level of detachment between unslurred notes;
- the level of legato between slurred notes;
- level of vibrato;
- portamento; and
- dynamic levels.

In addition, Menuhin's colouring of the first long D is quite distinct from the parallel second D in bars 133–4; a contributory factor to the gliding, flowing quality of the theme, which might have been placed at the disposal of drawing us from the hypermetric accent at bar 131 to the next principal accent at bar 152, is denied. In a rejected take of the Concerto's second side (2B2969-1), which starts at bar 100, Menuhin's articulation is different and there is no colouring of the D in bars 131–132; perhaps the colouring was unintentional, as on the published

side he elongates the tied crotchets and tied crotchet-minims by up to a crotchet, further impeding the flow (Ex. 3).

Ex. 3 Elgar, Violin Concerto in B minor Op. 61, bars 131–139 (cue 16)



This rejected take, which is of excellent quality in many ways, confirms that Menuhin's playing was firmly in the moment, for his musical goals at either end of the section seem flexible compared with his desire to indulge detail. Perhaps this is what Raymond Ericson is referring to when he speaks of Menuhin's 'overtly romantic, vivid phrasing' (and he cites an unnamed critic who believed the tone suggested a 'sexually mature executant', which Ericson endorses in his description of it as 'dark, throbbingly rich to the point of voluptuousness'[29]). Hall's performance of the subsidiary theme is hardly much faster than Menuhin's, but the articulative detail of the parallel repetitions of the main motive is more consistent, which allows for a greater sense of directed motion after the composer's manner of conducting.

Menuhin is typical of the modern Elgar interpreter from the perspective of the soloist and of the conductor. Both are often seduced by the voluptuous expressive detail in which the scores abound, and both often fail to provide a clear idea of the larger structure of the work. To varying degrees they rework the first movement as a slow movement. It is perhaps for this reason that Elgar, who had many second thoughts about his markings, and often failed to follow them himself, felt that few performers really got the point of his music. His comments to Menuhin are revealing:

> 'Beethoven and Brahms', [Elgar] said, 'wrote practically nothing but *allegro* and *andante*, and there seems to be no difficulty. I've done all I can to help players, but my efforts appear only to confuse them.'[30]

So far as the composer's recorded legacy is concerned, the electrical version of the Violin Concerto will continue to divide listeners, but few will doubt the beauty of Menuhin's playing, his obvious devotion to the piece, and the composer's inspired direction. It is futile to linger long on what might have been: of the three obvious alternatives, all seem more appealing to me than what was preserved: a complete recording with Hall, a complete recording with Sammons and the composer rather than the somewhat detached Wood, and perhaps best of all a recording with Fritz Kreisler, the concerto's dedicatee and a regular recording artist with HMV at the time of the Menuhin recording (Fred Gaisberg made

29 *New York Times* (11 December 1966): D32.
30 Moore, *Elgar on Record*, 173.

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many efforts to persuade Kreisler to record the concerto; Kreisler, it seems, did not like the work). As to the idea that there was a conflicted relationship between Elgar and Menuhin, this is not meant literally; it is presented here as a symbol of the old and new worlds of performance that appeals at this analytical level. It is not to deny that Elgar spent at least a little time preparing and agreeing the performance with Menuhin, and no amount of argument here can alter the fact that Elgar was devoted to Menuhin and enthusiastic about the recording. With the benefit of having all of Elgar's recordings to hand, time to deliberate on what makes them special, and familiarity with performance styles that came later, we may draw such conclusions.[31] (Menuhin's performance for the second EMI recording, 1965–66,[32] amplifies characteristics of the 1932 recording; that Adrian Boult does not allow the orchestral tuttis to drag is witnessed in the timing of the first movement, which is 17:39, just 14 seconds longer than in 1932.)

My final example of Elgar's performance style is the first movement of the Second Symphony. Elgar recorded this work twice, with just three years separating the recordings:

Acoustic recording

Room No. 1, Hayes, 5 March 1924	matrices Cc4307, 4309–11, 4395–4400, issued on HMV D 1012–17
Room No. 1, Hayes, 16 April 1925	matrix Cc4308, issued on HMV D 1012 (side 2)

Royal Albert Hall Orchestra

Electrical recording

Queen's Hall, 1 April 1927	matrices CR1268–79, issued on HMV D 1230–36
Queen's Hall, 15 July 1927*	matrix CR1275, issued on HMV D 1233

London Symphony Orchestra

* Although the recording made in April was issued in time for Elgar's birthday, ensemble had been flawed between cues 92 and 93 of the Scherzo, so the side was remade in July. Some time was allowed for rehearsal of this difficult passage and, unbeknownst to Elgar, a short passage from this rehearsal was recorded and the resulting disc subsequently given to Elgar. Both the alternative take and the rehearsal sequence, perhaps the first such recording in gramophone history, were issued at part of EMI's The Elgar Edition, Volume 1, CDS 7 54560 2. See Moore, *Elgar on Record*, 67–71.

The first movement, marked *Allegro vivace e nobilimente*, offers an excellent example of the tendency of modern interpreters to endow Elgar's fast music with the character of a slow movement. In this instance the slow movement they create is book-ended by fairly fast music, but the core of the movement – by far

[31] This discussion has not addressed the question of whether the evidence of the score, genre and other evidence might allow a rhythmic distinction between the solo and orchestral parts, the one being more introspective than the other. It would also be of interest to study the two recordings of the Cello Concerto with Beatrice Harrison, a performer clearly attuned to Elgar's conducting (superficial impressions tend to the view that, while Menuhin was indeed remote from the Elgar style, Harrison was not).

[32] EMI 7 64725 2.

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its largest part – is treated as slow music. The timings of various conductors testify to this practice:

Sinopoli (1988)	20:44
Haitink (1984)	20:32
Barbirolli (1964)	19:35
Tate (1990)	19:17
Andrew Davis (1992)	19:02
Barenboim (1972)	18:51
Colin Davis (2001)	18:23
Loughran (1993)	18:14
Handley (1980)	17:39
Boult (1975–76)	17:35
Slatkin (1989)	17:20
Menuhin (1988)	16:57
Boult (1944)	16:32
Solti (1975)	15:33
Elgar (1927)	14:36
Elgar (1924–25)	13:15

Boult's 1944 recording is close to Elgar's in character and tempo, but it too departs from Elgar in certain key respects. Solti's is even closer in tempo due to a deliberate attempt on his part to follow the composer's electrical recording. Reports suggest that he kept a metronome at the recording sessions to check his tempi, presumably against the composer's.[33] In many other respects Solti is remote from the composer. So far as the difference between Elgar and Elgar is concerned, it seems unlikely that Elgar would have been constrained to rush his performance in order to reduce the number of sides used. The side breaks in the Finale, for instance, occur at the same points in both recordings and the timings are similar too (12:10 and 12:33). For the first movement he was given three sides in 1924 and four in 1927. Both sets were issued on six double-sided records, but for the 1924 recording there was room for a filler, which was made at a separate session on 16 April 1925 at Hayes (along with a remake of the second side of the symphony): Meditation from *The Light of Life*. This surely suggests that, had Elgar wanted more room for the first movement, it would have been his for the asking; his view of the first movement changed slightly, though not in essentials.

Table 1 compares the pulse in four recordings of the symphony.[34] Given the volatile nature of pulse in most performances, these are, at best, highly approximate readings and might not be confirmed by a more rigorous method of measurement (such as timing the music between each cue and calculating the pulse from the number of beats in the passage). These readings were made by tapping the pulse on a computer and using various software applications to

[33] A session report by Edward Greenfield for the First Symphony recording describes Solti checking the tempo of the Scherzo with a pocket metronome. His main pulse is identical to Elgar's in this movement. *The Gramophone* (August 1972): 334.

[34] As bar numbers are not provided in published editions of this symphony, I have used cue numbers.

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calculate it. The values represent a roughly estimated average pulse for each section after the cue number.[35]

Table 1 Tempo modification in four recordings of Elgar, Symphony No. 2 in E♭, Op. 63, movement 1 (square brackets around tempo markings indicate that they occur before or after the cue marking in the score)

	Cue	*Elgar 1924*	*Elgar 1927*	*Boult*	*Slatkin*
Allegro vivace e nobilimente		114	106	102	95
(dotted crotchet = 104)	1	114	106	102	95
	2	114	106	102	98
(con anima)	3	114	106	100	104
(poco più sostenuto)	4	118	108	100	104
a tempo (crotchet = 84) *transition*	5	128	108	90	96
[(dotted crotchet = 100) (sempre animato)]	6	124	108	98	102
Tempo primo	7	114	108	104	85
(in tempo, dotted crotchet = 100) *second-subject group I*	8	98	100	86	92
	9	104	102	82	92
	10	108	104	90	94
(in tempo dotted crotchet = 92) *second-subject group II (cello theme)*	11	96	88	76	78
	12	104	88	72	78
second-subject group III	13	114	100	88	92
poco animato	14	114	98	88	92
animato (dotted crotchet = 92) *second-subject group IV*	15	120	120	108	108
Impetuoso (dotted crotchet = 104)	16	126	126	120	108
Tempo primo (dotted crotchet = 100)	17	128	126	98	96
stringendo [(vivace)]	18	128	132	110	100
(accel.)	19	136	132	110	116
a tempo (dotted crotchet = 100) (maestoso)	20	114	102	94	94
[allargando]	21	86	94	76	88
development	22	120	106	78	88
	23	118	106	78	88
poco meno mosso	24	108	98	64	68
	25	106	98	64	72
	26	106	98	60	68

continued overleaf

[35] I am most grateful to my research student Daniel Shanahan for his assistance in analysing tempo modification in the first movement.

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Table 1 continued

	Cue	*Elgar 1924*	*Elgar 1927*	*Boult*	*Slatkin*
	27	96	100	60	60
Più lento (dotted crotchet = 76)	28	88	82	70	60
	29	88	72	68	55
	30	82	78	68	40
Tranquillo	31	65	70	50	30
Tranquillo	32	60	60	40	40
a tempo (dotted crotchet = 72)	33	88	76	74	60
	34	84	76	74	60
a tempo (dotted crotchet = 84) *retransition*	35	104	106	90	100
	36	120	106	102	100
(dotted crotchet = 92) (animandosi)	37	120	108	112	106
Animato (dotted crotchet = 100)	38	130	120	120	108
(dotted crotchet = 104) (accel.)	39	122	124	126	114
strepitoso	40	137	124	130	114
	41	98	88	110	90
Lento [accelerando al Tempo primo (dotted crotchet = 100)] *recapitulation*	42	108	112	108	104
	43	114	112	108	104
con anima	44	122	112	110	104
Tempo primo	45	120	114	106	90
subsidiary theme	46	108	96	88	88
	47	110	102	88	88
	48	110	106	92	102
	49	110	86	88	98
Tempo primo *cello theme*	50	106	86	78	80
	51	107	88	78	80
a tempo, poco a poco animato	52	116	104	94	96
	53	124	108	102	96
animato	54	128	108	114	96
Impetuoso	55	128	122	130	106
Tempo primo (dotted crotchet = 100)	56	130	106	96	90
stringendo [(vivace)]	57	132	120	112	114
	58	134	114	114	110
a tempo (maestoso)	59	126	104	100	88
	60	120	104	94	88
coda	61	120	104	88	84
	62	118	98	88	84
	63	114	88	80	74

continued

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Table 1 concluded

	Cue	Elgar 1924	Elgar 1927	Boult	Slatkin
	64	122	92	104	100
	65	118	92	108	102
[allargando] a tempo, accelerando al fine	66	114	94	94	102

Apart from Solti, whose performance eschewed traditional approaches to the symphony in favour of a modelling on Elgar's recording, Elgar's recordings of his Second Symphony failed to create a tradition of performance in their own right. Indeed, the majority of recordings ignore Elgar's in many ways, including the overall pacing of the work (it is hard to explain this, but the pattern is changing as historical recordings become more highly valued as evidence of past performance practice). The performance tradition for this work has developed a set of characteristics that is different to both Elgar's practice and to the notation of the score. Underlying this is an inclination to indulge detail in Elgar's music with the concomitant result that the opening movement becomes slow music with fast music around the edges. The two versions not by Elgar in Table 1 show how momentum starts to be lost in the second-subject group. The group falls into four parts (cues 8–11, 11–13, 13–15, 15–22), the second of which is a Lisztian cello theme,[36] which brings all performances to their slowest point in the exposition, and the fourth part is a long concluding section much closer in character to the first-subject group. Most conductors regain their opening momentum at this point (Elgar marks it *animato* and reinstates the opening tempo of crotchet = 92; the ambiguity of Elgar's tempo indications is amply demonstrated by the marking at cue 17 of *Tempo primo* accompanied by the metronome marking crotchet = 100!) and even accelerate beyond it, as the score signals they should. It is at the end of the exposition and the beginning of the development that Elgar in performance provides crucial qualifiers to the *Allargando* marking after cue 21. From this point most recorded performances after Elgar's become ever slower, often falling well below the tempo chosen for the slow movement. Elgar in performance is unambiguous: he reinstates his main tempo (or close to his main tempo in 1924–25) with the B♭–F bass figure at cue 22–2. This immediately frames the development section's opening as fast music directly related in pulse to the first-subject group, from which it is then allowed gradually to slow down at the *tranquillo* (cues 31–2) to around crotchet = 60; at the beginning of what we might call the retransition at cue 35 (also marked *a tempo*, but at crotchet = 84), Elgar rapidly restores his opening tempo in a brisk acceleration to the recapitulation. The point for modern conductors is that they view the *allargando* marking as continuing through until the *poco a poco rall.* at cue 22 +4, which means that by the time they reach the mysterious octave-and-thirds motive of cue 24 the tempo has become very slow and the development up to cue 35 is settled as slow music.

With the haunting textures and mysterious sonorities of the development section, latter-day performances develop a complex code of responses, many of

[36] In his rough notes on the music Elgar stated that this 'was to be considered (& labelled) as the principal theme'. Symphony No. 2, Elgar Complete Edition, ed. Robert Anderson and Jerrold Northrop Moore (Borough Green: Novello, 1984): vii.

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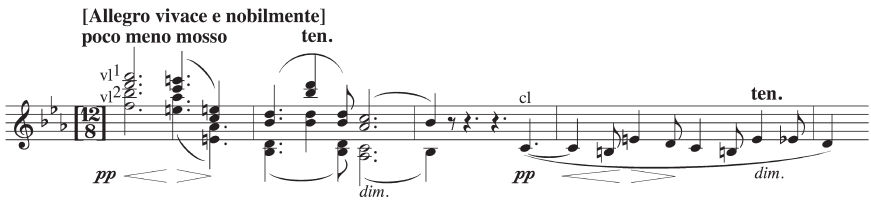
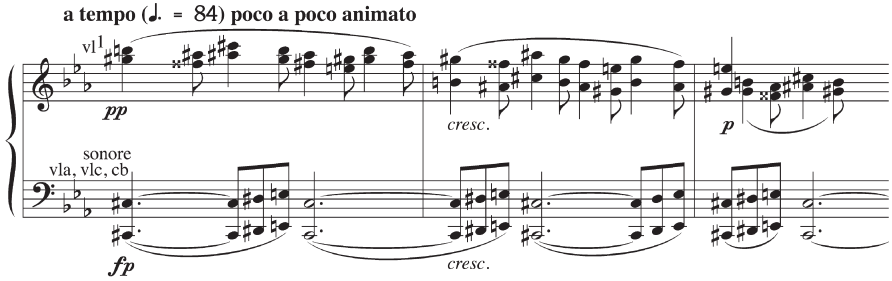
which obscure phrase motion in favour of immediate sensory experience. With a conductor like Jeffrey Tate, the result can be fascinating but ultimately frustrating as he fails to relate this stage in the symphony's continuous symphonic narrative to its earliest phases. Elgar's strategy here is once again to uphold clarity in the marking of hypermetric points. From cue 24, Elgar in 1924–25 clearly follows a nineteenth-century ethos of distinguishing different motives, no matter how short, through different tempi: the mysterious octave-and-thirds motive is played more slowly than the previous material (crotchet = 108), but the crotchet-quaver motive, which was one of the principal driving agents in the first-subject group, is played more quickly, at around crotchet = 114 (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4 Elgar, Symphony No. 2 in E♭ major Op. 63, cue 24



This creates a distinction that renders the two motivic elements hierarchical – the one holding back and the other pulling away to lead to a return of the octave-and-thirds motive. As a general ritardando begins after cue 26, so the crotchet-quaver motive is also slowed down. Nevertheless, Elgar has privileged the crotchet-quaver motive as possessing a fast, connecting function in contrast to the octave-and-thirds motive, which is more inert. Thus there is the satisfaction of connection with the figure in the exposition and continuity when the crotchet-quaver motive is used to start the transition to the recapitulation at cue 35, where Elgar starts only a little under his main pulse and soon accelerates back to his main tempo for the movement. The importance of this hypermetric accent at cue 35 is marked by strictly observing the *fp* sonore in the lower strings, thus providing additional articulation to support a key moment (Ex. 5).

Ex. 5 Elgar, Symphony No. 2 in E♭ major Op. 63, cue 35



Very few later performances seem to offer such clarity at this point. In both Elgar performances the composer now follows his favourite strategy of accelerating beyond the main tempo in order to drive the music towards the next major hypermetric accent, the start of the recapitulation.

The end of the development and start of the Coda use the same material as the end of the exposition and start of the development: Elgar's tempo decisions are parallel here, but most modern conductors resume the slow-movement agenda at cue 61. Curiously, there is no *Allargando* to qualify the previous *a tempo*, so Elgar appears simply to be complying with the score (as well as being consistent in a parallel passage). Modern conductors prefer to overlook the score at this point in favour of consistency with interpretative decisions made earlier: they slow down just before the Coda and then through a significant part of the Coda itself.

There are striking differences between Elgar in the acoustic and electrical versions at the end of the exposition and first part of the development. The electrical version maintains a more consistent pulse from cue 22, so the two motives are less contrasted. The overall bias of the 1927 recording seems to be to maintain momentum through the development section, at least in its first part; there is less rubato and the strings use less portamento. Since so little time separates these recordings part of the explanation must be the different approaches of the two orchestras: the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra consistently seems to be more conservative than the London Symphony in matters such as phrasing, portamento, rubato and so on, and, although one assumes Elgar could control at least aspects of phrasing and rubato, his instinct seems to have been to let the orchestral musicians do what they do best, hence the often quite marked differences.

Comparison with Boult's acclaimed 1944 recording is salutary here, for although in spirit it may be closest to Elgar, and it was the recommended library version in David Nice's comparative survey, the development is played as an extended slow section more allied to parts 1–3 of the second-subject group than to the first. Although Boult does use cue 35 to initiate a return to his main tempo, the point is not as sharply articulated as in Elgar's performances. Solti, whose performance is in some ways modelled on Elgar's, seems to be at a loss at the end of the exposition, for he chooses a tempo below his main one (he starts the movement at crotchet = 114, starts the development at crotchet = 100 and then slows down substantially for the octave-and-thirds motive, which is taken at crotchet = between 70 and 80). Boult, Slatkin, Solti and many others have a far greater predilection for slowing down than speeding up, so Elgar's balanced approach is missed.

As recordings, Elgar's two versions of the Second Symphony are among the finest specimens of their age and type. The acoustic recording was one of the most ambitious projects of the time. It had no cuts and Elgar's full orchestration was followed, but with reduced strings: 4 firsts, 3 seconds, 2 violas, 2 cellos, double bass, and an extra double bassoon was added for reinforcement. The small number of strings meant that in many *divisi* passages solo strings are heard. Nevertheless, the overall balance is by no means objectionable and the forward presence of the wind that results from so few strings is not wholly contradicted by the electrical version, which used 16 firsts, 14 seconds, 10 violas, 10 cellos and 4 double basses. The use of gut strings, lighter bow pressure, more notes per bow stroke, less strenuous use of vibrato, and other factors seem to have favoured a more forward wind presence.[37] The lush, rich string sound of modern recordings

[37] Simple microphone placement, which rarely amounted to more than three microphones placed in front of the strings, ensured that many recordings of the period are more truthfully balanced than post-war recordings, when 30 or 40 microphones were not unusual and the engineers could rebalance the entire orchestra if they wished.

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seems quite remote from Elgar's conception of the symphony as evidenced in the two recordings.[38]

The precision of the orchestral playing in both versions is extraordinary, especially in the acoustic recording. One passage plainly illustrates this: Elgar marks cue 7 *Tempo primo*, but very rapid string and woodwind arpeggiations, offbeat accents, and a generally intricate texture cause many modern conductors to slow down at this climactic point; Slatkin, for instance, drops the tempo from c. crotchet = 102 to c. 85 in order to cater for the modern concern for note-by-note accuracy. Elgar launches the passage at his main tempo in both recordings, which in the acoustic one is crotchet = 114. Listening to each line in the acoustic version it is quite wonderful to hear so many instruments unanimous in what must have been a trying space and demanding situation. If a few occasionally get out of step it seems a small price to pay for the rising tension of this transitional passage prior to the next hypermetric point, the arrival of the second-subject group at cue 8.

Elgar's technique as a recording conductor seems exemplary. He navigates the side turns without any hint that he is working from memory (with 78s it would be unusual for a conductor to be allowed to hear the previous take, and there was no chance for the conductor to lead into the new side with a few extra bars). Elgar picks up with precision from the end of the previous take (that is the previous side) so that when a modern transfer engineer joins up the sides for LP or CD the change is imperceptible.

Both the acoustic and electrical gramophone respond sensitively to the manifold differences between modern orchestral playing and the sound Elgar was used to. Although portamento was on its way out, there is still plenty in both recordings. To be sure, the reduced strings of the acoustic version somewhat diminish what we can learn of string playing in 1924, for a smaller group of players may well have been inclined to use more sliding to cover themselves in some passages than would a larger group. Even so, we can still appreciate the contribution portamento makes to phrasing and also the manner in which it can be used, alongside a less intense use of vibrato than later string playing, to 'background' the strings in passages where the wind have the principal line. In such passages the strings become a smooth carpet over which the woodwind gracefully tread. The brass and woodwind are also quite distinctive in sonority and could not be mistaken for those of a modern British orchestra.

Perhaps the most striking lesson about Elgar as a conductor here is his concern for clarity in the broader rhythmic structure. His means of accessing each point or goal in this structure was flexible and allowed him considerable expressive freedom. Alternative takes of *Falstaff*, *Wand of Youth* Suites, First Symphony, Cello Concerto and Violin Concerto show that Elgar was disposed to variations from take to take, as if his conception of the work, whilst clearly worked out in its broader strategy, was capable of considerable flexibility in smaller-scale decisions. In this respect the conclusion is remarkable, for as Elgar shifts the emphasis here, varies agogic emphasis there, all within a constantly shifting pulse pattern, so the emotional consequences for the listener change. What in

[38] It would be interesting to conduct an experiment with a modern orchestra famed for its rich string textures, such as the London Symphony Orchestra, to find out if 1927 recording conditions and technology deprived the strings of some of their richness and brought the wind forward. My belief, until proven wrong by such an experiment, is that changing performance styles are of greater import than changing technologies.

one take is sad may become wistful in another (it goes without saying that no two listeners need experience the same, or for that matter any, emotion in their listening, but it is undeniable that the emotional response may be different in some way). For me the alternative version that has been assembled for the whole of the Violin Concerto's slow movement (matrices 2B2972-1, 2B2973-1, 2B2974-1) is darker, less consolatory than the published one; this is largely on the basis of the second of the three sides, which is the only one that holds a different performance: the other two were simply recorded on a different lathe but at the same time as the published recordings (hence the A suffix on the published sides); however, it was common for the settings and even the balance on the other lathe to be set differently.

Other lessons about Elgar as a conductor have been told eloquently elsewhere. Moore has done more than anyone else to foster an appreciation of Elgar's recordings and document their extent. He writes:

> he was a child of the Age of Performance, and this fact subtly but definitely influenced his composition and his conducting. To Elgar, neither composing nor conducting in itself entirely encompassed the art of making music. Rather, music was made of an ineffable combination of conception and performance, and no very definite line could be drawn to divide the two functions.[39]

Herein lies Elgar's greatness as a conductor of his own music. Already gifted with great empathy for the technical aspects of recording through his interest in inventions and science, he was able to enter the recording studio and rekindle the creative forces that prompted the creation of his music. He was brought thereby to complete the creative process in performance through a 'very curious jerky beat',[40] bringing to his music 'nervous energy'[41] that is unique in Elgar performance and seems, given modern performance priorities, unlikely to be repeated in the near future.

Simon Tresize

[39] Moore, *An Elgar Discography*, 5.

[40] As observed by the contralto Astra Desmond, quoted in Lloyd, 'Elgar as Conductor', 299.

[41] Lloyd, 'Elgar as Conductor', 299.

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