

VIOLIN
CONCERTO
Elgar

SOSPIRI
SALUT D'AMOUR
CHANSON DE MATIN
CHANSON DE NUIT
LA CAPRICIEUSE

**Thomas
Bowes**

SINFONIA ARCADIANA
NIC FALLOWFIELD



EDWARD ELGAR 1857-1934

Violin Concerto in B minor op.61

1	I. Allegro	18.31
2	II. Andante	13.08
3	III. Allegro molto	20.24
4	Salut d'amour op.12	3.24
5	Chanson de nuit op.15/1	4.10
6	La Capricieuse op.17	4.18
7	Sospiri op.70	4.46
8	Chanson de matin op.15/2	3.41

THOMAS BOWES violin

SINFONIA ARCADIANA / NIC FALLOWFIELD
ARRANGEMENTS BY ELEANOR ALBERGA (4-8)



For almost as long as I can remember, Elgar's music has been for me a source of solace, of affirmation, and of feeling things deeply. My relationship with his music, and particularly the violin concerto, goes way back to my teens. And in about 1974, probably to make sense of these feelings, a rather dreamy 14-year-old made the picture on the cover of the album you're holding.

I didn't start to play any of Elgar's music seriously until my 30s. It was around then too that I began to develop close relationships with all those who are part of this recording. With Eleanor Alberga (we got married in 1992) I played the short pieces featured here, along with Elgar's sonata, many times in our recital programmes, with conductor Nic Fallowfield I played and studied the concerto, and with Arne Akselberg (sound engineer) and Stephen Frost (producer and editor) I started to make my own recordings of Bach and other music. By 2022 the need to record some Elgar had crystallised and become an imperative, and I realised that the ideal orchestra and studio were already very much part of my professional life. So, in December of that year, in Abbey Road Studio 1, as fine a band as anywhere and with whom I had spent countless hours recording film music was fixed by Susie Gillis at Isobel Griffiths Ltd to record the concerto. In May of '26 we convened again to record Eleanor's new arrangements of the five shorter pieces.

So, Sinfonia Arcadiana is that mystifying thing – a recording orchestra, or to put it more plainly, a session band. Make no mistake though as to its pedigree. Here are players of vast experience and great sensibility who came together for this project in a spirit of huge enthusiasm. Never was a 'soloist' so supported. There was tremendous significance too in creating this recording in Studio 1 at Abbey Road. This space was opened by Elgar in 1931 and he recorded much of his own music here in his last years – most famously the violin concerto, with a young Yehudi Menuhin. How often I have sat in that very room gazing into its airy spaces, hoping to catch some of the embers.

Can we read Elgar's life and career as the mingling of two contrary needs? I like to think so. His drive to make his way in the world, to get his music heard and recognised must have been increasingly in conflict with his desire to retreat into a deeply private world. And as he became a much-lauded national icon in the early 1900s this tension must have become acute. The violin concerto, a vast story of love set in several time zones and written at the very height of his worldly success, is so confessional as to be especially vulnerable to a literal unpicking. This is what he placed at the top of the score,

'Aquí está encerrada el alma de

which might be translated as:

'Herein is entombed (enshrined) the soul of.....'

I rather rejoice in the fact that there are those five dots with that cryptic quotation to ponder as one embarks on this great journey. Whoever stood behind those dots for Elgar – be it himself, one Alice or another, Julia or Helen or others known or unknown – I like to think, really, they stand for us. It is *our* most private, most intimate, perhaps only fleetingly acknowledged selves that Elgar takes by the hand and leads in this odyssey of love. And it's why, if we're able to stay with him for its near hour-length course, we feel that we have lived, and intensely relived, half or more of our lives when we reach that strangely uplifting sense of acceptance in those final moments.

As a young man Elgar had invested hugely in becoming a virtuoso on the violin. It was a project that only came to an end when he heard the great violinist August Wilhelmj and realised that he would never have the bigness of tone he needed for a solo career. But whenever he turns to writing for the violin, the music, I feel, is quite literally taking on his voice. As Nigel Kennedy put it,

'... the violin reflects your heart... it will just give away your feelings...'

If the principal theme of his concerto is the expression of tenderest and most intimate feelings towards others, it must also be said to have a highly developed sense of the passing of time and what happens to those feelings. To my mind at least there is an abrupt change of 'tense' in the finale, which allows longer perspectives to operate. It is how we sense that, when at 8'39" in the finale (track 3) we hear a theme not heard for nearly ten minutes and in a previous movement, we *know* half a lifetime has elapsed. When we are then ushered into a whole world of memory in the 'accompanied cadenza' at 10'48" and dare to open, what? – a box of long-lost letters and faded photographs, and relive an intimacy and a parting that is so heartrendingly touching, we know we are looking back over a very long span indeed.

The concerto was premiered on 10 November 1910 at the Queen's Hall in London. The composer conducted and the soloist was Fritz Kreisler, outwardly and officially at least, the dedicatee. It is Kreisler to whom we owe the greatest debt in pushing for this work to come into being. He had written very publicly about Elgar being the torchbearer of the most radical path in European music, and wanted something from the composer that would embody this but also be in the great tradition of the violin concertos of Beethoven and Brahms. Having got the project moving, he worked closely with Elgar towards the end of the composition process, though by far the greatest input as to the violin part, and the greatest help in many other ways, came from a violinist of much more humble standing: W.H. 'Billy' Reed, later to become a really close friend of the composer. It is tempting to see in Elgar's relationship with these two violinists his two lifelong but competing quests: Kreisler, a world celebrity, being that towards fame and fortune; Reed representing the longed-for retrieval of a golden childhood and a simpler life away from the stresses that come with being a public figure.

Elgar never again tasted such unadulterated triumph at the premiere of a new work. Indeed, he was very soon to be hopelessly out of fashion. Virginia Woolf said this about the advent of modernism: 'On or about December 1910 human character changed'. With its premiere in November of that year, this places Elgar's concerto as the very last gasp of undiluted pre-modernist expression. It takes no refracted or clever slant on the human condition, nor does it place irony, detachment, or any of the other fragmentations we are now so used to, in front of direct transmission of human feeling.

Whilst Elgar revelled in his success, he must also have felt that his private world was under threat. Perhaps this is not an uncommon tension in creative artists finding fame after a long struggle; the need for the world to endorse their work pulls against that essential need to retreat into a private realm – one from where the real creative sparks come. So, at the height of public acclaim, Elgar pours out the most secret recesses of his heart; every last scrap of his intimate and private world is revealed. Little wonder that he needs to send us down a rabbit hole with those five dots, to keep something of himself for himself.

Surrounding the huge concerto of 1910 on this album are, what might be called, five satellites. Four of these shorter pieces were written in the years before Elgar's real breakthrough as a composer. The outlier is *Sospiri*. Written in 1914, initially to recapture the popular success of *Salut d'amour* – his first big 'hit' – , he soon realised it had outgrown this function. Whereas Elgar made orchestral arrangements as well as arrangements for violin and piano for all these pieces, except *La Capricieuse*, no versions for solo violin and orchestra exist from the composer. Eleanor says this about the new arrangements you can hear on this album:

'Tom and I played these pieces – often as encores, and sometimes as a set in a concert – a great deal on our tours in the US, China and elsewhere in the 90s and early 2000s. They were always received with that sort of collective sigh that is a signal of something rather personal having been shared. I loved them then, and now that Tom and I hardly ever share the concert platform (I seem to be too busy writing these days), I wanted to do something that I felt dear Elgar might approve of and that would rekindle the feeling I had for them in my busier days as a pianist. My approach was to be as bold as I dared but to respect and amplify what Elgar's magic is and to remember the reactions of audiences when we'd played them as violin and piano pieces. They each do the thing that a great miniature can – create an outsize emotional response.'

Eleanor Alberga, producer Simon Kiln and engineer Arne Akselberg (front), control room, Studio 1, Abbey Road, 3 May 2026



Thomas Bowes, leader Jacqueline Shave and cellist Tim Gill, control room, Studio 1, Abbey Road, 19 December 2022



Nic Fallowfield and producer Stephen Frost, Studio 1, Abbey Road, 19 December 2022





SINFONIA ARCADIANA

Conductor: Nic Fallowfield

VIOLINS

Jacqueline Shave *leader*
David Greed
Jenny Godson
Clio Gould
Peter Hanson
Philippe Honoré
Thomas Kemp
Patrick Kiernan
Steve Morris
Everton Nelson
Oscar Perks
Deborah Preece
Catherine Thompson
Clare Thompson
Natalia Bonner +
Mark Berrow +
Magnus Johnston +
Dorina Markoff +
Laura Melhuish +
Perry Montague-Mason +
Patrick Savage +
Ralph De Souza +
Marcus Barcham Stevens +
Jonathan Strange +
Paul Willey +

VIOLAS

Garfield Jackson
Reiad Chibah
Clive Howard
Peter Lale
Edward Vanderspar
Bruce White
Clare Finnimore +
Clifton Harrison +

CELLOS

Tim Gill
Joely Koos
Bozidar Vukotic
Tony Woollard
Caroline Dearnley +
Nick Cooper +
Paul Kegg +
Jonathan Williams +

DOUBLE BASSES

Chris Laurence +
Mary Scully *
Laurence Ungless
Alice Kent +
Lucy Shaw +

FLUTES

Karen Jones
Helen Keen +
Anna Noakes * [**piccolo*]

OBOES

John Anderson +
James Hulme *
Janey Miller [**cor anglais*]

CLARINETS

Nicholas Rodwell
Anthony Pike [**bass clarinet*]

BASSOONS

Gavin McNaughton
Emma Harding +
Rachel Simms [*+contrabassoon*]

HORNS

Richard Watkins
Nigel Black
Laurence Davies +
Michael Thompson +

TRUMPETS

Kate Moore +
Tom Rees-Roberts +

TROMBONES

Andy Wood +
Ed Tarrant +
Barry Clements
[*bass trombone*] +

TUBA

Owen Slade +

HARP

Hugh Webb *

TIMPANI

Bill Lockhart

+ = Violin Concerto only

* = Alberga arrangements only

This album is dedicated to Corporal Richard Bowes 1891–1976

Executive Producer for Rubicon: Matthew Cosgrove

Executive Producer for Thomas Bowes: Michael Foster

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Recording Producers and Editors: Stephen Frost [1–3]; Simon Kiln [4–8]

Recording Engineer: Arne Akselberg

Violin: Nicolò Amati, Cremona, 1659

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Artist biographies can be found at www.rubiconclassics.com

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