

London Philharmonic Orchestra

ELGAR: THE LEGACY VOL. 1 (1933–49)



ELGAR: THE LEGACY

VOL. 1 (1933–49)

1 **12:39** FROISSART, CONCERT OVERTURE, OP. 19

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

Recorded at Abbey Road Studio 1, London, 21 February 1933 © 2007 London Philharmonic Orchestra

2 **03:24** THREE CHARACTERISTIC PIECES, OP. 10 (NO. 3: *CONTRASTS: THE GAVOTTE, A.D. 1700 & 1900*)

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

Recorded at Abbey Road Studio 1, London, 21 February 1933 © 2007 London Philharmonic Orchestra

3–5 **12:10** SERENADE FOR STRING ORCHESTRA IN E MINOR, OP. 20

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

Recorded at Kingsway Hall, London, 29 August 1933 © 2007 London Philharmonic Orchestra

i) *Allegro piacevole*

ii) *Larghetto*

iii) *Allegretto*

6 **04:22** ELEGY FOR STRING ORCHESTRA, OP. 58

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

Recorded at Kingsway Hall, London, 29 August 1933 © 2007 London Philharmonic Orchestra

7 **07:52** CORONATION MARCH, OP. 65

Sir Landon Ronald conductor

Recorded at Kingsway Hall, London, 7 March 1935 © 2007 London Philharmonic Orchestra

8 **04:25** POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE MILITARY MARCH IN D MAJOR, OP. 39 NO. 1

Sir Henry Wood conductor

Recorded at Abbey Road Studios, London, 4 March 1940 © 2023 London Philharmonic Orchestra

9 **03:58** POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE MILITARY MARCH IN G MAJOR, OP. 39 NO. 4

Sir Henry Wood conductor

Recorded at Abbey Road Studios, London, 4 March 1940 © 2023 London Philharmonic Orchestra

10 **04:39** IMPERIAL MARCH, OP. 32

Julius Harrison conductor

Recorded at Kingsway Hall, London, 31 December 1946 © 2023 London Philharmonic Orchestra

11–14 **48:44** SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN A FLAT MAJOR, OP. 55

Sir Adrian Boult conductor

Recorded at Abbey Road Studio 1, London, 26–27 September 1949. © 2020 London Philharmonic Orchestra

Lawrence Collingwood/David Bicknell *producers* Anthony Griffith/Arthur Clarke *engineers*

i) Andante. Nobilmente e semplice – Allegro

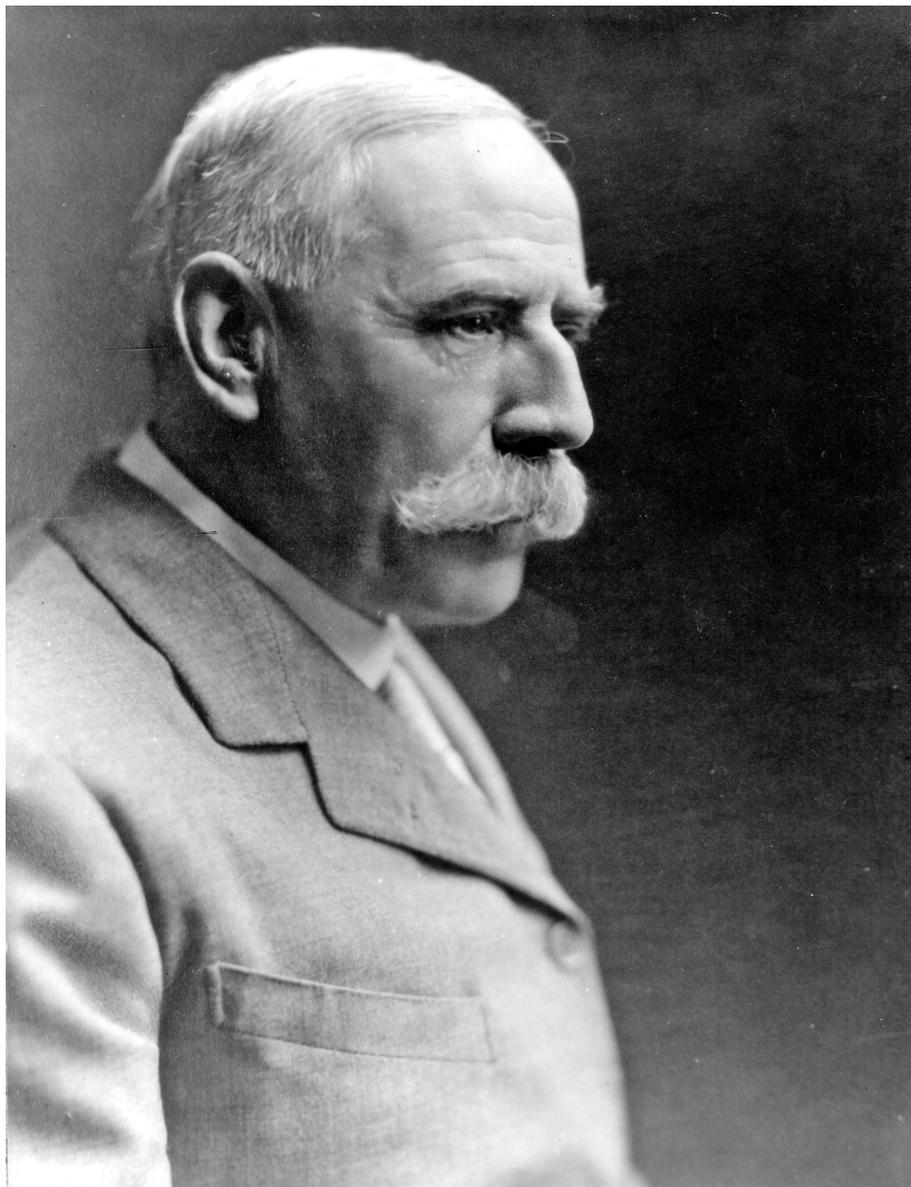
ii) Allegro molto

iii) Adagio

iv) Lento – Allegro

SIR EDWARD ELGAR AND THE LPO

BY ANDREW NEILL



The London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO) gave its first performance in London's Queen's Hall on 7 October 1932. Preceded by twelve rehearsals, Sir Thomas Beecham conducted a concert that began with Berlioz's *Roman Carnival Overture*, prompting a review by the perceptive critic Ernest Newman, who wrote 'You want to know what an orchestra ought to be like? Well just listen to this'.

In 1932 Sir Hamilton Harty, Principal Conductor of the Hallé Orchestra, was appointed Conductor-in-Chief of the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO). Partly to compensate for the loss of some key members to the newly-formed LPO and BBC Symphony Orchestra (BBCSO), Harty 'poached' some players from the Hallé, which, unsurprisingly, felt the conductor's new position was 'not compatible with the whole-hearted devotion to the interests of the Hallé Orchestra'. Harty's contract with the Hallé was not, therefore, renewed. In addition, there was turmoil within the London orchestral world with players leaving the LSO and BBCSO to join the LPO, with some then being 'poached' back again. Elgar had been Principal Conductor of the LSO from 1911-12 and had developed a close relationship with the Orchestra's Leader, W H (Billy) Reed. To make things worse in 1932, the LSO was also trying to remove Reed (then nearly 60). Consequently, it would seem that HMV side-stepped what had become a chaotic situation by using the BBCSO and LPO for its 1933 series of Elgar recordings.

Elgar's contact with the LPO, although inevitably short, turned out to be the forerunner of a close relationship that the

Orchestra developed with his music, recording and performing many of his works from 1949 onwards under conductors such as Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink and Vernon Handley. The new Orchestra was just the sort of body that would stimulate the interest of the 75-year-old Elgar as he embarked on what turned out to be his last forays into the studio. He would make his first recordings with the Orchestra on 21 February 1933 in Abbey Road Studios, and his last on 29 August 1933 in the Kingsway Hall. In between, he made his final recordings with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Elgar died six months later on 23 February 1934.

HMV's plans for recording with the LPO were ambitious, but the cancer that would eventually end Elgar's life was beginning to drain his energy and the February sessions were shortened, meaning that the Prelude to *The Kingdom* and his *Elegy* were recorded by the BBC Symphony Orchestra the following month. Nevertheless, the Concert Overture *Froissart* was recorded with the LPO, and the third of *Three Characteristic Pieces* – 'Contrasts' – was included in those first sessions. It was the strings of the LPO that came for the last studio sessions on 29 August 1933, Elgar conducting a warm, beautifully controlled performance of the *Serenade*, the LPO players relishing the opportunity. Although Elgar was in splendid form, there is evidence that he was tiring by the time he came to record his *Elegy* at the end of the day. HMV now had two recordings of the *Elegy*, but it was this one made with the LPO that was issued commercially. With Richard Strauss, Elgar had been one of the first great composers to record a serious body of his work, beginning in 1914 under the acoustic process. He re-recorded many

pieces again after the microphone was introduced in 1925, although *Froissart* was only captured the once. Elgar continued to visit the studio almost annually until his last contribution by telephone in January 1934, when he supervised recordings of excerpts from *Caractacus* from his bed in Worcester.



Edward Elgar with violinist Yehudi Menuhin and conductor Thomas Beecham, following a performance of Elgar's Violin Concerto at London's Royal Albert Hall, 30 December 1932.

© Raymond Monk

1 FROISSART, CONCERT OVERTURE, OP. 19

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

The Concert Overture *Froissart* was, when completed in 1890, Elgar's most substantial orchestral composition to date. It was commissioned in 1889 by the Worcester Music Festival committee, which requested a short orchestral piece for the following year's Three Choirs Festival. Of Elgar's three Concert Overtures, *Froissart* is the only one with a worked-out development section and, as such, represented a considerable advance for the composer. Sir Walter Scott's novel *Old Mortality* provided the inspiration – in it Scott muses on the 14th-century French historian Jean Froissart and his 'true chivalrous feeling'. A drawing of a knight by Edith Lander decorates the title page of Elgar's manuscript, alongside a quotation from Keats: 'When Chivalry lifted up her lance on high'. Ernest Newman, writing in 1906 in his book *Elgar*, commented that *Froissart* was '... an exceedingly pleasant work, breathing as healthy an atmosphere as one could wish to have in music. To hear it now, in the light of our knowledge of the later Elgar, is to realise how thoroughly, even in those early days, he understood the secret of the orchestra'.

2 THREE CHARACTERISTIC PIECES, OP. 10 (NO. 3: CONTRASTS: THE GAVOTTE, A.D. 1700 & 1900)

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

The *Three Characteristic Pieces* were published in 1899 (the year of the *Enigma Variations*) but were first heard much earlier, in 1888. Published as Elgar's Op. 10, he dedicated the composition to Lady Mary Lygon, who was about to accompany her brother, Earl Beauchamp, to Australia following his appointment as Governor of New South Wales. Lady Lygon is generally accepted as the subject of the *Enigma's* Variation XIII, 'Romanza'. Elgar describes the third of his *Characteristic Pieces*, 'Contrasts', as follows:

I saw two dancers once in Leipzig who came down the stage in antique dress dancing a gavotte: when they reached the footlights they suddenly turned round & appeared to be two very young & modern people & danced a gay & lively measure ... They had come down the stage backwards & danced away with their (modern) faces towards us: when they reached the back of the stage they suddenly turned round & the old decrepit couple danced gingerly to the old tune.

3–5 SERENADE FOR STRING ORCHESTRA IN E MINOR, OP. 20

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

- i) *Allegro piacevole*
- ii) *Larghetto*
- iii) *Allegretto*

Now that we are able to reflect on Elgar's life in considerable detail, we can observe the important signposts that signal the music of this self-taught composer's maturity. His *Serenade for String Orchestra* of 1892 is a case in point, the slow movement laying the foundations for such movements composed 20 years later, and the skill of the string writing hinting at the mastery that would be displayed in the more complex *Introduction and Allegro* of 1905. The *Serenade*, although undemanding technically, displays many of the traits of the mature Elgar: the poignant, memorable slow movement preceded by a first movement opening with a rhythmic figure on the violas. The *Allegretto* that completes the *Serenade* with its bold statements and recollection of the first movement's rhythmic figure leads to a satisfactory conclusion, the rhythm underpinning a typical Elgarian falling phrase.

6 ELEGY FOR STRING ORCHESTRA, OP. 58

Sir Edward Elgar conductor

The *Elegy* was commissioned by the Worshipful Company of Musicians in 1909, following the death of its Junior Warden. During the latter's funeral service, it was realised that the Company had no music of an appropriate nature for such an occasion. This led to Elgar's commission which, when completed, he described as a piece that 'makes no pretension to be anything but quiet, somewhat sad & soothing'. Composed for general use, Elgar's *Elegy* turned out to be a heartfelt reflective piece suitable for mourning or use in gratitude for a life well-lived. Elgar conducted the premiere at Mansion House, London, on 13 June 1909 during a private event arranged by the Company.

7 CORONATION MARCH, OP. 65

Sir Landon Ronald conductor

Sir Landon Ronald (1873–1938) studied under Parry and Stanford at the Royal College of Music and made his conducting debut at the age of 17 at London's Lyric Theatre. He was an exceptional accompanist and was the pianist for Dame Nellie Melba when she toured North America. He conducted at Covent Garden, and it was this association with singers that led him to be invited to become musical advisor to The Gramophone Company and its HMV label, bringing renowned singers of the time such as Melba and Adelina Patti to record for the label. Ronald conducted the newly-formed LSO and premiered Elgar's First Symphony in Rome in 1909. With the LPO, Ronald made renowned recordings of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with Fritz Kreisler (who loved working with Ronald) and Schumann's Piano Concerto with Alfred Cortot.

Ronald's friendship with Elgar led the composer to dedicate *Falstaff* to him, but Elgar's contract with HMV meant that Ronald was only able to record one piece of Elgar's music – the *Coronation March* – before his premature death in 1938. To fit this long March onto two sides of a 78rpm disc meant that it had to be cut slightly. The recording was made for the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935, the work having been premiered during the King's Coronation ceremony on 22 June 1911. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown' might be the theme running through this dark-hued piece. Elgar's *Coronation March* is his largest composition in this vein, and its magnificence does not hide the fact that it is no

celebration of monarchy, but more a reflection of the responsibilities of kingship.

Sir Landon Ronald





Sir Henry Wood

8 POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE MILITARY MARCH
IN D MAJOR, OP. 39 NO. 1

9 POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE MILITARY MARCH
IN G MAJOR, OP. 39 NO. 4

Sir Henry Wood conductor

Sir Henry Wood (1869–1944), twelve years younger than Elgar, was an early champion of his music. A conductor of great versatility, he also conducted the first British performances of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, Mahler's Eighth Symphony, Hans Pfitzner's opera *Palestrina*, and Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto and his Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. The ink barely dry on the score, Wood conducted Elgar's First Symphony less than a month after its 1908 premiere in Manchester and, over 90 years later, his recording of Elgar's Violin Concerto with Albert Sammons remains one of the finest.

Perhaps the most famous of Wood's Elgar premieres was when he conducted the first and second 'Pomp and Circumstance' Marches in London, three days after their first performances in Liverpool on 19 October 1901. He later wrote: 'I shall never forget the scene at the close of the first of them – the one in D major. The people simply rose and yelled. I had to play it again – with the same result; in fact they refused to let me go on with the programme ... Merely to restore order, I played the march a third time. And that, I may say, was the one and only time in the history of the Promenade concerts that an orchestral item was accorded a double encore.'

Both Marches have in common trio tunes to which words were subsequently attached, with only a limited degree of success. Like the first March, the fourth (the first performance of which took place in London on 24 August 1907), suffered the application of patriotic words on three occasions: by Alice (Lady) Elgar, by Alfred Noyes, and by A P Herbert as 'Song of Liberty' during the Second World War. Musically however, these attachments are more successful than A C Benson's 'Land of Hope and Glory', words written for the first March, in which the metre of the poem's first line does not match the rhythm of the tune.

Sir Henry Wood made his first recordings with the London Philharmonic Orchestra on 10 October 1932, three days after its first public performance and before Sir Thomas Beecham made his first recordings with the newly formed Orchestra. Made for EMI's Columbia label on 4 March 1940 in Abbey Road Studios (inaugurated by Elgar on 12 November 1931, and where Wood had first recorded with the Orchestra eight years earlier), these recordings are testament to his no-nonsense approach. The sessions also included music by Berlioz and Gounod. The trio tune in the first March, marked *Largamente*, has a spring to its step and, as a consequence, Wood's substantially broader tempo for the repeat – although marked *Molto maestoso* and therefore implied – comes as something of a surprise. The recording avoids the repeat between letters A and G, coming in at under 4'30" and thus keeping to one side of a 78 rpm recording. The fourth March, with its lighter orchestration, is perhaps more successful, the trio tune introduced *nobilmente* and repeated *grandioso*, the difference subtly balanced. In both Marches the

Orchestra plays with great conviction and power, its personnel yet to be depleted by the demands of war.

10 IMPERIAL MARCH, OP. 32

Julius Harrison conductor



From the collection of Lewis Foreman

Julius Harrison in 1936

Julius Harrison (1889–1963), a friend of Elgar and devotee of his music, had worked with the conductors Arthur Nikisch and Felix Weingartner before the First World War, later becoming Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music. His compositions, which include a *Mass in C* and a *Requiem*, are influenced by Brahms and Elgar. This little-known recording of Elgar's *Imperial March* was made in 1946. Composed for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, it received its premiere during a Crystal Palace

Concert conducted by August Manns on 19 April 1897. The March is barely 'imperial' and has little that is 'jingoistic' about it, instead exhibiting a jauntiness and elasticity that belie its title.

11–14 SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN A FLAT MAJOR, OP. 55

Sir Adrian Boult conductor

- i) *Andante. Nobilmente e semplice – Allegro*
- ii) *Allegro molto*
- iii) *Adagio*
- iv) *Lento – Allegro*

Sir Adrian Boult (1889–1983) followed Eduard van Beinum in the long line of prestigious LPO Principal Conductors appointed after the Second World War (holding the position from 1950–57), and was one of the few who made recordings spanning the period from acoustic horns to the digital process. He took over conducting Diaghilev's Ballet Russes at short notice in 1919, proving to be a natural ballet conductor. He made his first recordings in 1920, of music from the ballet *The Good-Humoured Ladies* with music by Scarlatti arranged by Vincenzo Tommasini.

Initially cautious about Elgar's music, Boult became one of his greatest supporters musically, recording many of his works. Following a performance of Elgar's Second Symphony on 17 March 1920, Elgar wrote to the 30-year-old Boult, who had just conducted the work in London's Queen's Hall: 'My dear Adrian. With the sounds ringing in my ears I send a word of thanks for your splendid conducting of the Sym – I am most grateful to you for your affectionate care of it & I feel that my reputation in the future is safe in your hands. It was a wonderful series of sounds. Bless you!'. These prescient

words suggested that Boult was the man to take care of Elgar's music in the future, and this turned out to be the case. Boult recorded Elgar's Second Symphony five times (three with the LPO) and the First Symphony three times (all with the LPO, as here).

Although Elgar mastered orchestration early, it took the self-taught composer until he was over 50 before he was confident enough to complete a symphony. That Elgar was largely an autodidact makes his two symphonies particularly interesting, and perhaps explains their originality. This is apparent in the way he uses his material and his use of the orchestra. This was not unique, but it was unique as far as music in this country was concerned.

When Elgar's First Symphony was premiered on 3 December 1908 in Manchester, with the great Wagnerian Hans Richter conducting the Hallé Orchestra, the reception was extraordinary. The conductor Arthur Nikisch wrote: 'I consider Elgar's symphony a masterpiece of the first order, one that will soon be ranked on the same basis with the great symphonic models – Beethoven and Brahms', while the critic from *The Daily Mail* observed: 'It is quite plain that here we have perhaps the finest masterpiece of its type that ever came from the pen of an English composer.'

The Symphony is dominated by a motto theme or *idée fixe*, an approach that is not in itself original, as the fourth and fifth symphonies of Tchaikovsky and that of Berlioz demonstrate. However, for Elgar, this is no 'fate' motif hammering uncompromisingly on the composer's door; it is the subtle

engine of the work, weaving in and out of the Symphony, at times elusively and at others forcefully, becoming, as it progresses, a distant memory quietly haunting the listener until it ends in hard-won triumph.

Two *pianissimo* timpani rolls announce the Symphony, its originality apparent as, beginning in the home key, 'nobly and simply' over *staccato* lower strings, the long melody is quietly played in the woodwind for 25 bars before a *crescendo* leads into a repetition by the full orchestra. The theme ends; the orchestra pauses and, with a wrench from 4/4 to 2/2, dives into another world, that of the first-subject *Allegro* in the contrasting key of D minor. Eventually the second subject appears, but cannot still the restlessness. Elgar keeps a rein on the increasing use of brass with allowable lapses (*tutta forza* – full power!). Muted horns hint at the 'motto' theme and the orchestration becomes increasingly complex, with the use of devices such as divided second violins and, on occasion, using only the last desks of the strings, thereby diffusing the source of the sound. However, in a passage that Elgar asked to be played in a 'veiled and remote' manner, a solo violin and solo cello with harps to the fore suggest the return of the 'motto theme'. Elgar, the renowned orchestrator, displays his skill in the magical closing pages of the movement: solos for clarinet, viola and double bass, the other strings *sul ponticello* (played near the bridge), the horns muted, harp arpeggios creating a stillness and atmosphere of longing as, just before the end, all tension dissipated, the woodwind, horns and timpani (*pianissimo*) herald a final *pizzicato* in the lower strings.

The *Allegro molto* second movement, largely in F sharp minor, scurries away as short phrases prevent the music from settling. A second, marching theme sustains the tension but a new theme, in B flat major, allows the music to relax. (Once, in a rehearsal, Elgar asked the orchestra to play this 'like something you hear down by the river'.) A solo violin takes over before the marching tune recurs, slowing the music, the scoring becoming sparser as the strings segue into the *Adagio*, the main theme note-for-note that of the previous movement. This is no conjuring trick, as music of peace and longing eases the hardest of hearts. Towards the movement's end, Elgar introduces a new theme (closely related to the 'motto'). The music slows, and muted trombones set up the closing hushed clarinet phrase.

The fourth movement begins *Lento* (slowly) in D minor, the rustling strings hinting at what is to come as the principal theme of the movement is quietly played by bassoons and *pizzicato* cellos, before the 'motto' theme is heard, as from afar. Then *Allegro*, with a change to G minor, the movement strides away. As Elgar develops his material, the march-like main theme is transformed into a melody of great beauty which, although banished by the impatient orchestra, establishes the rhythm as Elgar moves towards the climax of his Symphony. At last the 'motto' theme is reprised. Hesitant at first, as syncopated chords attempt to prevent its progress, it eventually asserts itself. *Grandioso*, we are propelled towards the ending, which is not so much one of triumph but of joy, a celebration of Elgar's description of his Symphony: 'There is no programme beyond a wide experience of human life, with a great charity (love) & a massive hope in the future.'

Andrew Neill was Chairman of the Elgar Society from 1992–2008. He has contributed programme and booklet notes on the music of Elgar, Strauss, Vaughan Williams and their contemporaries for the LPO and other orchestras, and has broadcast and written extensively about these composers for a wide range of journals and publications.



Sir Adrian Boult

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trailblazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In September 2021 Edward Gardner became the Orchestra's Principal Conductor, succeeding Vladimir Jurowski, who became Conductor Emeritus in recognition of his transformative impact on the Orchestra as Principal Conductor from 2007–21.

The Orchestra is based at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including those with LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti, Tennstedt and Masur, to Jurowski and Gardner.

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