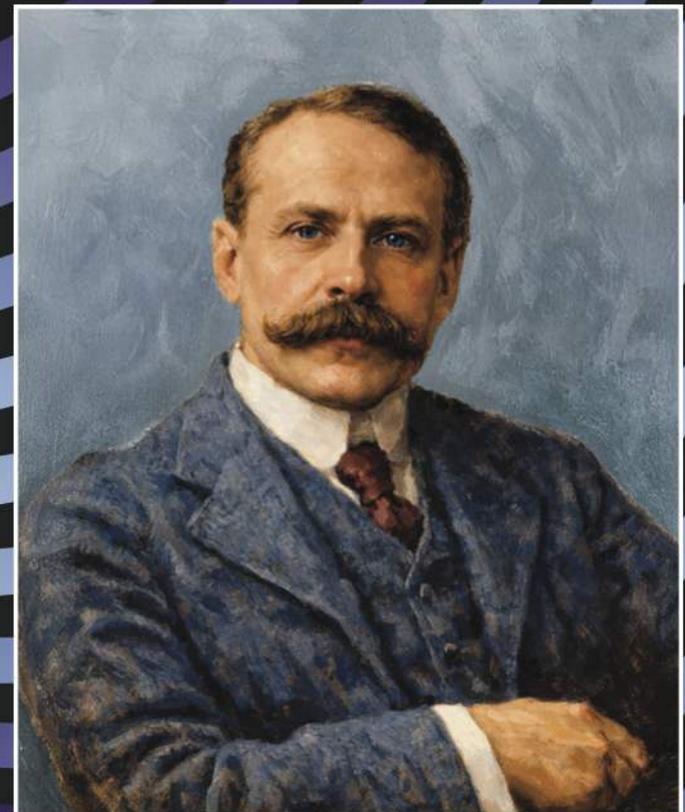


ELGAR

Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 36 “Enigma Variations”

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Yehudi MENUHIN



Sir Edward Elgar
Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 36
“Enigma Variations”

1	Theme	1:26
2	Variation 1. C.A.E.	1:56
3	Variation 2. H.D.S-P.	0:53
4	Variation 3. R.B.T.	1:21
5	Variation 4. W.M.B.	0:34
6	Variation 5. R.P.A.	2:18
7	Variation 6. Ysobel	1:18
8	Variation 7. Troyte	1:03
9	Variation 8. W.N.	1:52
10	Variation 9. Nimrod	4:03
11	Variation 10. Dorabella	2:54
12	Variation 11. G.R.S.	1:02
13	Variation 12. B.G.N.	2:33
14	Variation 13. Romanza	3:12
15	Variation 14. E.D.U.	5:41

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Yehudi Menuhin, conductor, *conductor*

Recorded in 1994 at CTS Wembley Studio, London

Executive producer: **Alan Peters**

Producer: **John H. West**

Engineer: **Dick Lewzey**

Assistant engineers: **Richard Keightely** and **Mathew Dilley**

20-bit recording, editing, mastering and 32-bit digital sound
processing by Sound Technology, Cambridge

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

During the first half of 1898, **Edward Elgar** had been preoccupied with the composition of the large-scale choral work *Caractacus* and preparation for its premiere in Leeds in October of that year. Sadly this

fine work, inspired by Elgar’s beloved British Camp in the Malvern Hills, has never found wholehearted acceptance among the concert-going public. Following the premiere Elgar was disappointed to find that he was only likely to be offered commissions for more choral works in future; he however was more interested in composing a symphonic work inspired by the life and death of Gordon of Khartoum. On 20 October 1898 he wrote to his friend A.J.Jaeger of Novello in low spirits saying that although he liked the idea of the Gordon symphony, he saw little point in pressing ahead regardless since Novellos ‘wouldn’t give £5 for it – I tell you I am sick of it all: why can’t I be encouraged to do decent stuff & not hounded into triviality’. The following day he went to teach in Malvern as usual and returned tired out. After dinner his wife gave him a cigar and sat him down at the piano. As he played, his wife suddenly stopped him with ‘Edward, that’s a good tune’. The ‘good tune’ was to become the opening passage of the ***Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 30***, now known by its nickname, ***Enigma Variations***. From this theme Elgar wove a series of variations in which were captured endearing characteristics or pen-portraits of various ‘friends pictured within’ (Elgar’s dedication).

One of the variations was of Dora Penny (**Dorabella**) who as Mrs Powell published in 1937 her Memoirs of a Variation. This delightful volume contains her joyful reaction to a play-through by the composer at the piano of variations including **C. A. E.** (Mrs Elgar) ‘very serene and lovely – and in some curious way like her’. Next **R. B. T.** (Richard Baxter Townshend) which made her laugh ‘which rather annoyed me. You don’t generally laugh when you hear a piece of music for the first time dedicated to someone you know, but I just couldn’t help it, and when it was over we both roared with laughter!’ The same reaction greeted Troyte (Griffith). About **Nimrod**, Dora Penny’s reaction was ‘That must be a wonderful person, when am I going to meet him?’ to which the reply came ‘Oh, you will like him, he is the dearest person’. She had no idea at that stage that she had been made the subject of a variation and when Elgar played it to her she was lost for words. Only later did she realise that she had been the ‘victim of E. E.’s impish humour’ as he had caught to perfection her stammer.

Elgar’s musical colleagues among the ‘friends pictured within’ included **G. R. S.** (George Sinclair, Organist of Hereford Cathedral) or rather his bulldog Dan who tumbles into the river and swims vigorously ashore; **Ysobel** (Isobel Fitton, a viola player and one of Elgar’s students); **H. D. S-P.**

(Hew Stuart-Powell, a pianist); and **B. G. N.** (Basil Nevinson who played the cello). Elgar apparently caught their playing styles to perfection. Even to his friends Troyte Griffith was inclined to be at times abrupt and according to the composer his variation illustrates a somewhat stormy piano lesson! Other friends include **W. M. B.** (William Baker) who had inherited a substantial residence where the Elgars often stayed and who was known as 'The Squire'. Elgar captures **R. P. A.**'s (Richard, son of the poet Matthew Arnold) laugh. **W. N.** was Winifred Norbury, secretary of the Worcestershire Philharmonic and * * * was Lady Mary Lygon of Madresfield who was shortly to accompany her brother to a governorship in Australia. Accordingly over the sound of ship's engines Elgar quotes Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. '**Nimrod**' is so-named because Jaeger is the German word for 'hunter', Nimrod being a mighty hunter mentioned in the Book of Genesis.

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Lord Yehudi Menuhin had one of the longest careers among 20th century musicians.

Born in New York to Russian-Jewish parents on 22 April 1916 Menuhin began playing the violin and at the age of seven played the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in San Francisco. As a teenager he achieved further fame playing the Beethoven concerto in New York under Fritz Busch (1927) and two years later he played the Beethoven, Brahms and Bach concertos with the Berlin Philharmonic and Bruno Walter in Berlin, Paris and Dresden. That year (1929) he also made his London debut with the London Symphony Orchestra and Busch. His most famous early recording is the Elgar concerto recorded with the composer in 1932, performed with Elgar the following year in Paris. Menuhin studied with the Romanian violinist and composer Georges Enescu, whose other pupils included Ivry Gitlis and Arthur Grumiaux. About Enescu, Menuhin remarked that he was 'the greatest single factor in my musical growth and development'. The two men remained firm friends long after Menuhin concluded his studies.

Another composer with whom he enjoyed a fruitful relationship was Béla Bartók, from whom Menuhin commissioned the Sonata for Solo Violin in 1944. During the Second World War Menuhin gave over 400 concerts for the Allied troops and also played to concentration camp survivors in 1946. His wartime experiences doubtless helped to shape

his social conscience, and he was known for campaigning strenuously for social justice. His interest in and respect for other cultures was evident in his partnership with Ravi Shankar and his reluctance to be pigeon-holed took an altogether unexpected and musically rewarding direction with two light LPs recorded with jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli in the 70s.

In 1957 he commenced a second career as conductor and in 1959 became Artistic Director of the Bath Festival, conducting many concerts and recording prolifically with his own specially formed chamber orchestra. Menuhin made many outstanding records, most notably with British orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic, the Philharmonia and the English Chamber Orchestras. In 1963 he founded the Menuhin School of Music in Stoke d'Abernon (Surrey) for gifted children. He received many international honours during his long career, culminating in a Life Peerage in 1993. Menuhin died in Berlin on 12 March 1999.

James Murray

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