

Serenade in E minor, op.20

Edward Elgar
(1857-1934)

Allegro piacevole
Larghetto
Allegretto

Elgar's musical antecedents were not very grand; nor was his parentage. This obviously rankled with him: "You would not wish your board to be disgraced by the presence of a piano-tuner's son and his wife" he wrote declining an invitation to a formal luncheon in London—this when he was an established composer on the national scene. But he was raised in a pervasive musical atmosphere, and his early compositions reflect the very active musical world of Worcester and its surroundings at the end of the nineteenth century. The *Serenade for Strings* was first performed at the Worcester Ladies Orchestral Class in 1892, although its public première (in Antwerp) did not come for another four years, and its first outing in England post-dated the *Enigma Variations*. It is probable that it was a re-working of three pieces for strings that also appeared in Worcester, in 1888—these were not published, and the scores have never been found. The *Serenade* had a special place in Elgar's affections, and was one of the two pieces that he conducted in his last recording session in HMV's Abbey Road Studios, on August 19th 1933. "I like 'em" he said to a friend; "the first thing I ever did".

Between the *Three Pieces* and the *Serenade* Elgar and his new wife Alice had moved to London, failed to hit any bullseyes there, and returned somewhat disconsolately to Worcestershire, settling in Malvern. Here the air and the views seem to have refreshed his spirits, for the *Serenade* is a work of relaxed charm, from the gently bouncing ostinato at its beginning ("*piacevole*" means "peaceful"), through the lovely, unmistakably Elgarian scene-painting of the *larghetto*, and the gradual return in the last movement to the bobbing theme with which the work began.