

# Kenneth Woods – conductor

[www.kennethwoods.net](http://www.kennethwoods.net)

Artistic Director and Principal Conductor- English Symphony Orchestra

Artistic Director- Colorado MahlerFest

Artistic Director- The Elgar Festival

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***“A true star....” The Washington Post***

***“A symphonic conductor of stature...” Gramophone***

***“The charismatic American conductor, Kenneth Woods...” The Guardian***

***“...a conductor with true vision and purpose.” Peter Oundjian***

***“The English Symphony Orchestra – enjoying a comet-like rise under Kenneth Woods, its Principal Conductor since 2013” Musical Opinion***

***“Stunning concert with every piece done to perfection. The superb Sheku Kanneh-Mason in the Elgar Cello Concerto. The world premiere of David Matthews’s Ninth Symphony (a piece I’d have happily sat through again immediately - who said that tonality was old hat?). And a terrific orchestration of the Elgar Piano Quintet. Everything presided over by the urbane Kenneth Woods...” James Jolly, Editor-in-Chief, Gramophone***



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## Biography

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Hailed by Gramophone Magazine as “a symphonic conductor of stature”, American conductor Kenneth Woods was appointed Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the English Symphony Orchestra in 2013, and has quickly built up an impressive and acclaimed body of work with them. Woods was also recently appointed Artistic Director of both the Colorado MahlerFest – the only US organisation other than the New Year Philharmonic to receive the International Gustav Mahler Society’s Gold Medal – and the Elgar Festival in Worcester.

As a guest, Woods has conducted ensembles including the National Symphony Orchestra (Washington), Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia and the English Chamber Orchestra, and has made numerous broadcasts for BBC Radio 3, National Public Radio and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He has appeared on the stages of some of the world’s leading music festivals, such as Aspen, Scotia and Lucerne.

Under Kenneth Woods’ leadership, the English Symphony Orchestra has gained widespread recognition as one of the most innovative and influential orchestras in the UK. They received Classical Music Magazine’s “Premiere of the Year” plaudit for both Donald Fraser’s orchestration of the Elgar Piano Quintet in 2015 and John Joubert’s opera Jane Eyre in 2016. Jane Eyre also marked the ESO’s first foray into opera, and the premiere and subsequent Somm Recordings CD were both received with international critical acclaim including a string of five-star reviews, Disc of the Month and MusicWeb Opera Recording of the Year nods, and was named the Birmingham Post’s “classical music highlight of 2016.”

The first of Woods’ many acclaimed ESO discs was volume one in the Complete Piano Concertos of Ernst Krenek, selected by The Times as one of their “Best Recordings of 2016,” with Volume 2 chosen by Forbes Magazine as one of their “Top 11 Classical CDs of 2017.” Their recording of Fraser’s Elgar orchestrations for Avie was a Classic FM Disc of the Month, and An Eventful Morning in East London (a collection of 21st Century violin concertos with soloist Harriet Mackenzie) for Nimbus received a five-star review in The Times. Woods’ recording of his own orchestration of Brahms’ Piano Quartet in A major was chosen by The Arts Desk as one of their Top Ten Classical CDs of 2018.

In 2016, Woods and the ESO launched their “21st Century Symphony Project,” an ambitious multi-year effort to commission, premiere and record nine new symphonies by leading composers, with Philip Sawyers’ Third Symphony, a work described by Classical Source as “a masterpiece” following its triumphant St John’s Smith Square premiere in 2017. In 2018 The Spectator selected the premiere of the second work in the 21CSP, David Matthews’ Ninth Symphony, as one of the top-10 classical concerts of 2018. In 2019, the ESO premiered Matthew Taylor’s Fifth Symphony at Cadogan Hall, and this work was welcomed by Robert Matthew-Walker, editor of Musical Opinion as “a masterwork of genuine symphonic thinking.”

Highlights in 2018-19 included the ESO’s sold-out debut at St George’s Bristol with Sheku Kanneh-Mason, a triumphant return to the Orchestra of the Swan with two programmes combining Mahler symphonies with the music of David Matthews, world-premiere recordings of three new symphonies by Christopher Gunning for Signum with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, a gala concert with the North Czech Philharmonic at Prague Castle and the ESO’s first foray into Wagnerian opera with a performance of Act One of Die Walküre. As Artistic Director of the Colorado MahlerFest, Ken has overseen an expansion of the artistic program, introducing a new chamber orchestra concert alongside an acclaimed final concert which included Mahler’s First Symphony and the Korngold Violin Concerto. In his second year as Artistic Director of the Elgar Festival, Ken conducted the ESO and Raphael Wallfisch in the official 100th Anniversary performance of Elgar’s iconic Cello Concerto in a gala concert at Worcester Cathedral which crowned a week of sold-out concerts.

2019-20 will see Woods making his debut with the Madison Symphony Orchestra in a program featuring Richard Strauss’s Ein Heldenleben. At the ESO he’ll be joined by Nicola Benedetti for the Elgar Violin Concerto, and Isata Kanneh-Mason and Alexander Sitkovetsky for piano and violin concertos by Ludwig van Beethoven as part of the orchestra’s year-long celebration of that composer’s 250<sup>th</sup> birthday, while at Colorado MahlerFest he conducts Mahler’s Second Symphony and Wagner’s Die Walküre.



## Major Positions

### English Symphony Orchestra- Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, 2013-

- Live highlights:
  - Classical Music Magazine Premiere of the year 2015 (Elgar Piano Quintet) and 2016 (Joubert –Jane Eyre)
  - Birmingham Post Classical Highlight of 2016
  - Top 10 Classical Concerts in 2018 (premiere of David Matthews’ Ninth Symphony), The Specator
  - Notable debuts – Cadogan Hall (London), Bridgewater Hall (Manchester), Kings Place (London), St George’s (Bristol)
- Quadrupled the orchestra’s budget in four years
- Restored regular Arts Council funding to the orchestra for the first time in ten years
- Returned the orchestra to regular recording after a twelve year break. Highlights include:
  - Complete Krenek Piano Concertos in 2 volumes (Toccata). 2016 Sunday Times Best Recordings of the Year, 2017 Forbes Magazine Top 11 Classical CDs
  - Brahms (arr. Woods) Piano Quartet (Nimbus) – The Arts Desk 2018 Ten Best Classical Recordings
  - Sawyers Third Symphony (Nimbus) – Gramophone Magazine Critics’ Choice Best CDs of 2017
  - Joubert – Jane Eyre (Somm) – MusicWeb International Recording of the Year
- Oversaw major expansion of education and outreach work:
  - Established new advanced-level ESO Youth Orchestra
  - Established ESO as Resident Orchestra of Music Hubs in Herefordshire and Worcestershire
  - Residencies and partnerships Elgar School of Music, Hereford Sixth Form College, Worcester Schools Chorus, Kings’ School
- New Artistic series and residencies:
  - Orchestra in Residence, City of Hereford
  - Official Orchestra, City of Worcester, secured three-year civic funding guarantee
  - Orchestra-in-Residence, The Elgar Festival
  - Resident Orchestra, Worcester Live

### Colorado MahlerFest- Artistic Director 2015-

- New initiatives including Visiting Composer chair and Mahler Conducting Fellowship
- Expansion of programme with new chamber orchestra programme, expanded chamber music and recital offerings
- New Festival Artist programme, bringing world-class resident musicians to Boulder every year

### Elgar Festival- Artistic Director 2017-

- As founding Artistic Director, helped assemble a consortium of over twenty performing organisations, venues, educational groups, youth orchestras and tourist development offices
- Critics’ Choice in Sunday Times and Guardian (2018), feature article in Sunday Times (2019), BBC Radio 3
- 2019 Festival – a series of sold out concerts and ground-breaking educational work

### Orchestra of the Swan- Principal Guest Conductor, 2009-2014

- Brought the orchestra to a new international audience through a hugely acclaimed series of recordings and broadcasts on BBC Radio 3, National Public Radio, American Public Media, CBC and many European broadcasters, opening up opportunities for international touring
- Created international commissioning partnership with Kyo-Shin Arts, leading to MusicWeb Recording of the Year in 2012
- Conducted world premieres of works by John McCabe, Robert Saxton, Deborah Pritchard, James Schleffer, Philip Sawyers and many others

## Guest Conducting Highlights

Royal Philharmonic

Royal Northern Sinfonia

National Symphony Orchestra (Washington)

North Czech Philharmonic Orchestra

National Orchestra of the Dominican Republic

Fort Wayne Philharmonic

BBC National Orchestra of Wales

English Chamber Orchestra

State of Mexico Symphony

Scotia Festival Orchestra

South Bohemian Chamber Symphony

Erie Chamber Orchestra

References and detailed CV available on request.

## Critical Acclaim

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### **Beethoven and Matthew Taylor Fifth Symphonies in Cadogan Hall, London**

“Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony also received one of the best performances I have heard live.” Robert Matthew-Walker, Classical Source

### **An Eventful Morning in East London: 21st Century Violin Concertos with Harriet Mackenzie (Nimbus Alliance)**

“Five Stars!” Richard Morrison, The Times (London), May 2017

### **ESO at The Bridgewater Hall: Music of Kaija Saariaho, Thea Musgrave, Deborah Pritchard and Emily Doolittle**

“The English String Orchestra’s charismatic American conductor, [Kenneth Woods](#), led a programme entirely of contemporary female composers. Thea Musgrave’s *Green*, Kaija Saariaho’s *Terra Memoria* and Emily Doolittle’s *falling still* were eloquently played” Alfred Hickling, The Guardian, April 2017

### **Gramophone Magazine, Critics Choice for 2016, Hans Gal Piano Concerto with Kenneth Woods, Sarah Beth Briggs and Royal Northern Sinfonia**

“Kenneth Woods and the Royal Northern Sinfonia accompany superbly...With crystal clear sound, this is the most enjoyable concerto disc I have heard since Krenek’s Piano Concertos (4/16) and Pritchard’s *Wall of Water* (5/15). Hang on, didn’t Woods conduct those, too...?” Guy Rickards, Gramophone Magazine, December 2016

### **Colorado MahlerFest Orchestra, Mahler Symphony no. 10 (Cooke IV)**

“Kenneth Woods makes shattering impact at MahlerFest.... it was an amazing feat of brilliance.” Kelly Dean Hanson-Boulder Daily Camera, May 2017

### **English Symphony Orchestra, John Joubert- *Jane Eyre, An Opera in Two Acts*, World Premiere, Ruddock Performing Arts Centre, Birmingham**

[Classical Music Magazine](#) “Premiere of the Year”- 2016

“...Kenneth Woods conducted a well-prepared performance that ought on disc to win new admirers for the operatic Joubert” — [John Allison, Daily Telegraph](#), October, 2016

“The highlight of...a spectacular year for classical music in the Midlands.... Kenneth Woods conducted an on-fire English Symphony Orchestra...” [Chris Morley, The Birmingham Post](#)

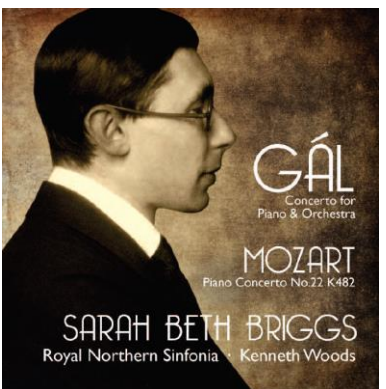
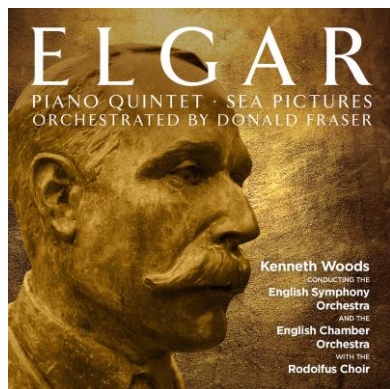
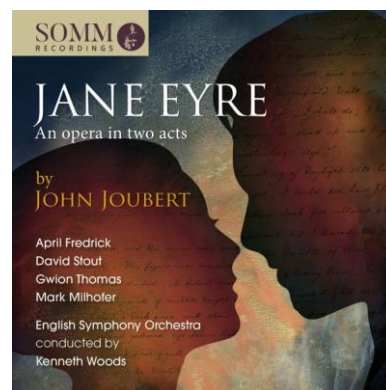
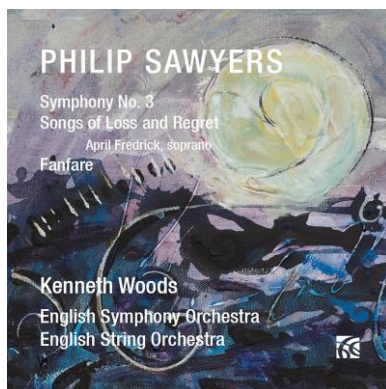
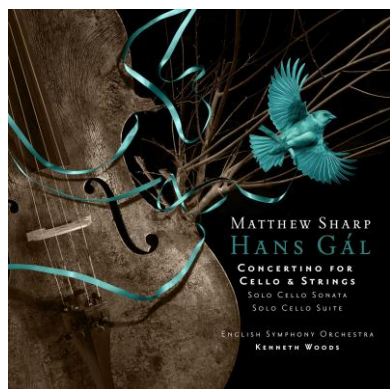
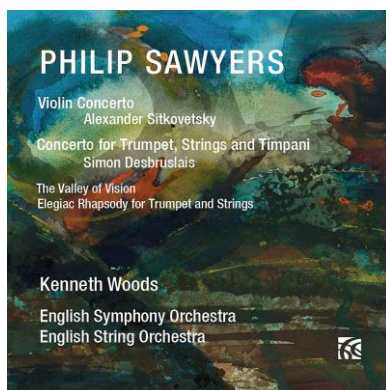
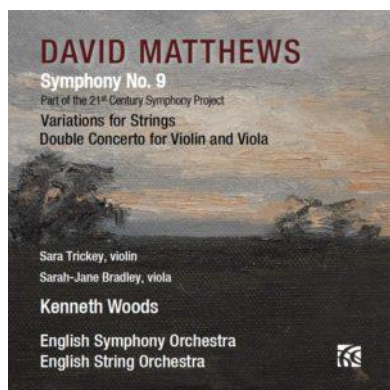
### **2015 ESO Elgar Pilgrimage, World Premieres by Sawyers and Donald Fraser**

“[One] of the most exciting events I have experienced during a reviewing career approaching half a century....” [Chris Morley, The Birmingham Post](#)


“... but October’s performance under Kenneth Woods in the appropriately named Elgar Concert Hall at Birmingham University was a revelation... This triumph of transcription deserves to be heard worldwide.” [Classical Music Magazine, Premiere of the Year, 2015](#)

# Discography

( Ctrl+click on cover images for full details and reviews)

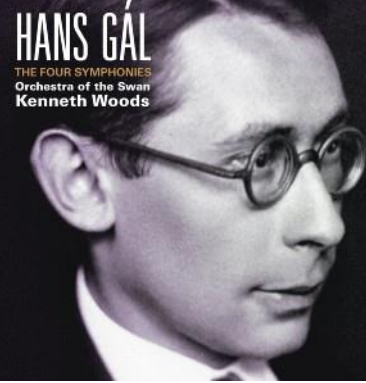


DEBORAH PRITCHARD  
**WALL OF WATER**  
 AFTER THE PAINTINGS BY MAGGI HAMBLING



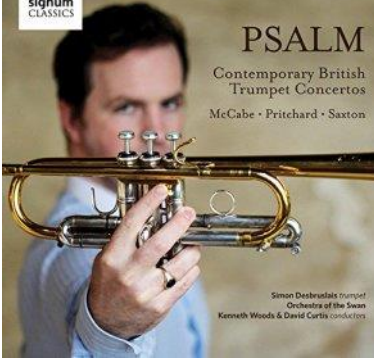
ENGLISH STRING ORCHESTRA  
 KENNETH WOODS CONDUCTOR  
 HARRIET MACKENZIE VIOLIN

**HANS GÁL**  
 THE FOUR SYMPHONIES  
 Orchestra of the Swan  
 Kenneth Woods



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Simon Dedering's trumpet  
 Orchestra of the Swan  
 Kenneth Woods & David Curtis conductors

**MAHLER**  
 DAS LIED VON DER ERDE  
 LIEDER EINES FAHRENDEN GESELLEN  
 arrangements for chamber ensemble by Armin Schönerberg

Brennen Gillyory tenor  
 Emma Curtis contralto  
 David Stout baritone

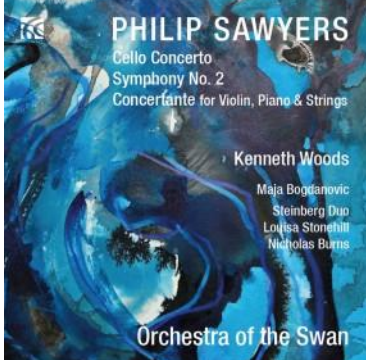
ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN  
 Kenneth Woods conductor



**PHILIP SAWYERS**  
 Cello Concerto  
 Symphony No. 2  
 Concertante for Violin, Piano & Strings

Kenneth Woods  
 Maja Bogdanovic  
 Steinberg Duo  
 Louise Stonehill  
 Nicholas Barnes

Orchestra of the Swan



Hans Gál | Robert Schumann  
 Symphony No.1 | Symphony No.1



Kenneth Woods  
 orchestra of the swan

Hans Gál | Robert Schumann  
 Symphony No.4 | Symphony No.2



Kenneth Woods  
 orchestra of the swan

BRAHMS Serenade no. 1 in D major  
 Original version for sextet (reconstructed Alan Boultwood)

ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN  
 Kenneth Woods conductor




SCHÖNBERG Verklärte Nacht  
 Original version for sextet  
 Ensemble Epomeo and friends


TURINA Rapsodia Sinfónica  
 FRANCK Symphonic Variations  
 FALLA Nights in the Gardens of Spain

VALERIE TRYON  
 piano

ROYAL  
 PHILHARMONIC  
 ORCHESTRA  
 KENNETH WOODS  
 conductor



Hans Gál | Robert Schumann  
 Symphony No.3 | Symphony No.3 Rhenish



Kenneth Woods  
 orchestra of the swan

Hans Gál | Robert Schumann  
 Symphony No.2 | Symphony No.4



Kenneth Woods  
 orchestra of the swan

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 HARU NO UMI REDUX  
 HAGEN KOTU CONCERTO: GEJJI

春の響 春の海

James Nyoraku Schlefer  
 Yumji Kurosawa

ORCHESTRA OF THE SWAN  
 David Curtis & Kenneth Woods



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