

Recording of the week: Toscanini conducts Elgar

This week's selection comes from Kevin Lemonnier, Preservation Audio Engineer.

This is the only known recording in existence of Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957) conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra performing Elgar's Introduction and Allegro Op. 47. The performance took place during the 1937 London Music Festival and was privately recorded off broadcast, onto a lacquer disc, by audio engineer [Kenneth H. Leech](#) (1892-1995).

[Toscanini conducting Elgar's Introduction and Allegro Op. 47](#)



Portrait of the composer Arturo Toscanini c.1926 (J. Paul Getty Museum)

The audio quality is rather poor due to wear and shrinkage of the cellulose nitrate but it still reveals a driving performance from the Italian master.

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Recording of the week: Sparkie Williams the talking budgerigar

This week's selection comes from Cheryl Tipp, Curator of Wildlife and Environmental Sounds.

Sparkie Williams was a prize-winning talking budgerigar, renowned for his impressive vocabulary of over 500 words, sayings and rhymes. In 1958 he was crowned top bird in the BBC's International Cage Word Contest which turned him into an overnight star. His success led him to be the face (or should that be beak?) of an ad campaign for leading bird seed producer Capern and so impressed Parlophone that they offered him a record deal.

His owner, Mrs Mattie Williams, employed an almost military approach to Sparkie's oral development, dedicating several hours a day to teaching her beloved budgie to speak. Her Geordie accent can clearly be heard in Sparkie's delivery of the rhyme at the end of this [recording](#).

[Excerpts from Philip Marsden introduces Sparkie Williams_Parlophone 1958](#)



Sparkie Williams

(courtesy of the Great North Museum: Hancock)

After his death in 1962, Sparkie was stuffed and donated to the [Great North Museum: Hancock](#) in Newcastle where he is currently on display.

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Recording of the week: Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton

This week's selection comes from Dr Eva del Rey, Curator of Drama and Literature Recordings and Digital Performance.

In this recording, made in 1991 at the [Institute of Contemporary Arts](#) in London, British literary theorist Terry Eagleton discusses the intricacies of the concept of ideology with French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002).

Bourdieu explains his concept of symbolic violence, by which he means the systems of meaning that legitimize and thus solidify structures of inequality, often in a way that is undetectable and invisible to its very victims.

[Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Eagleton in conversation](#)



Fight with Cudgels (c.1820-1823), Francisco de Goya. Wikimedia Commons.

This recording is an accessible introduction to one of the most influential social thinkers of the last three decades of the twentieth century, and also one of the very few available online featuring Pierre Bourdieu explaining his work in the English language.

Over 800 recordings of talks and discussions held at the ICA between 1982-1993 can be explored on [British Library Sounds](#).

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Recording of the week: John Blackwood McEwen

This week's selection comes from Jonathan Summers, Curator of Classical Music

Recordings.

Scottish composer Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948) had a distinguished career producing a large amount of music, little of which is heard today. He was Principal of the Royal Academy of Music from 1924-1936 and was knighted in 1931. His String Quartet No. 6, 'Biscay', written in 1913 (and confusingly published as No. 8), consists of three movements. The second and third were recorded in 1916 by the London String Quartet and a live recording from 1951 of the complete work exists from the Library of Congress. Here is the delightful third movement, [La racleuse](#) (The Oyster-Raker) from 1916.

[String Quartet No. 6 \(Biscay\)_La racleuse](#)



Portrait of Sir John Blackwood McEwen by Reginald Grenville Eves (Royal College of Music, CC BY-SA 4.0) via Wikimedia Commons

Visit [Chamber Music](#) on British Library Sounds to listen to more performances by the London String Quartet.

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Recording of the week: Linton Kwesi Johnson on dub poet Michael Smith

This week's selection comes from Stephen Cleary, Lead Curator of Literary & Creative Recordings.

In this recording, poet and reggae artist Linton Kwesi Johnson gives a lecture on the late Jamaican performance poet Mikey Smith (1954-1983), author of 'Me Cyaan Believe It'. The talk is based on his personal knowledge of the poet and the obscure circumstances of his death.

[Remembering Michael Smith_Linton Kwesi Johnson](#)



The recording was made live in Cambridge in 2012, at the conference '[The Power of Caribbean Poetry: Word & Sound](#)'. [Linton Kwesi Johnson's oral history interview](#), made for the British Library project 'Authors' Lives' 2014-2015, is available to listen to at the Library by [appointment](#).

Follow [@BL_DramaSound](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.