

The Big Draw. Elgar the Cartoonist

Elgar's creativity went far beyond music, and he was an inveterate cartoonist and doodler. Here we offer some examples of Elgar's own activities in this field.

BACH IN FOUR CLEFS

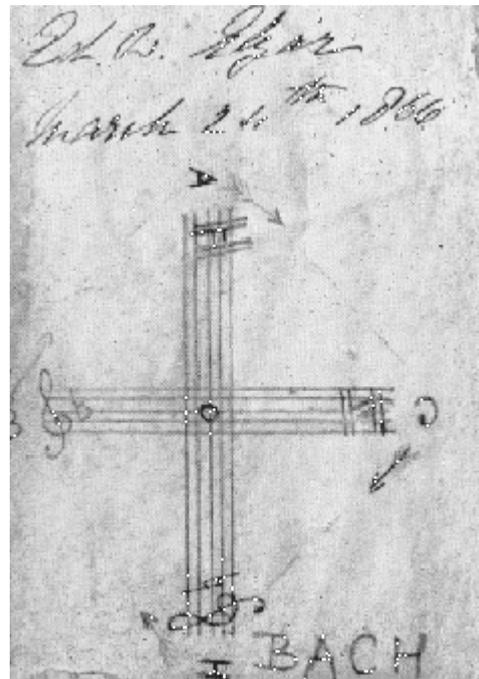
At the age of eight he drew four intersecting staves and gave each of the ends a different clef. A single note drawn at their common centre reads as B, A, C and H (the German equivalent of B natural). His mother dated it, 24 March 1866, and pasted it into an album which is now at the Birthplace Museum.

I drew my first ideas of music from the Cathedral, from books borrowed from the music library, when I was eight, nine or ten. They were barbarously printed in eight different clefs, all of which I learnt before I was 12.

Edward Elgar

Elgar also recalled that in 1866 he was allowed for the first time to attend the Monday rehearsal for the [Worcester] festival and, knowing that they would be rehearsing Beethoven's Mass in C, he had run from the shop to the cathedral with a large score - 'nearly as big as the small boy' - the only copy he could find. He was 9 by this time, and he told me years later with some pride that he could already read all the individual choir parts of the cathedral music, which was still written in the C as well as the F and G clefs.

Wulstan Atkins

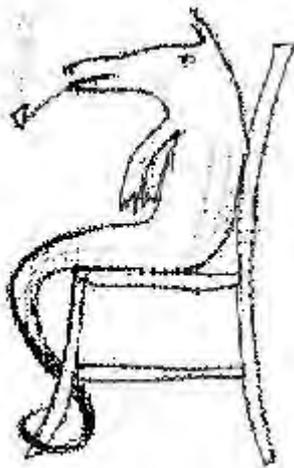


COMPOSITIONS AND DEDICATIONS

"The Banner of St. George" was written at the suggestion of Novello & Co., who took the opportunity afforded by Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee to produce a simple cantata, to a libretto by their house-writer, 'Shapcott Wensley' (actually Mr. H S Bunce of Bristol).

St. George: By this post I send three sketches for the above work & shall be glad to hear if the music is suitable for the purpose. I have treated the opening as a separate number & in my own style, it requires revising but I think it good - for me. I shall be glad to hear your views as early as possible.

Letter from Elgar to Novello, 30 November 1896



The dragon is resting now. Mar 20 '97
Elgar, on completion of the full score

The Banner of St. George is a slight work that does not bulk very largely in the total output of its composer. An epilogue rhapsodises upon the English flag in the customary patriotic drum-thumping vein. There is some expressive writing in the cantata, though the general level reached by the music is not a remarkably high one. It is conceived in a somewhat obvious vein of sentiment, and the patriotic chorus at the end touches no deeper springs than is generally done by this class of composition.

Ernest Newman, 1906

Elgar's growing reputation resulted in a commission for the prestigious Leeds Festival of 1898. His cantata Caractacus was dedicated to Queen Victoria, and a drawing of the Queen sent to his young nieces.



*To Her Most Gracious Majesty QUEEN VICTORIA This
Cantata, Caractacus, is, by special permission,
Dedicated By Her Majesty's Loyal and Devoted
Servant, Edward Elgar*

I received the Queen's permission for the dedication this morning and went up to tell Novello. I am much impressed by what I have read quickly. Will you think me very bold if I wish you had not put so much stress sometimes upon very small words ... the accent does not fall as it would in reading which I take to be the test - but this is impudence on my part. It is a noble work.

**Letter from Sir Walter Parratt
to Elgar, 2 August 1898**

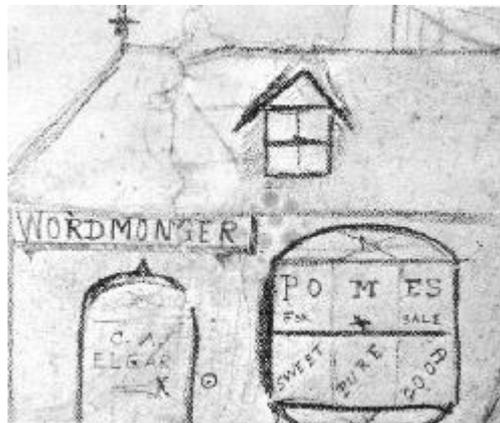
WORDS BY ALICE

Both to satisfy her own literary ambitions (she was already a published author), and to provide fuel for Edward's music, Alice Elgar took on the role of lyricist on many occasions.

Come and hasten to the dancing,
Merry eyes will soon be glancing,
Ha! my heart upbonds!
Come and dance a merry measure,
Quaff the bright brown ale, my treasure,
Hark! what joyous sounds!
To E.E. from C.A.E. 5 March 1895

I believe that the Elgars had begun with a plan of travelling to Munich by way of Ratisbon, where there were some Catholic music publishers, but in the end they spent their extra time at Garmisch in the Bavarian Highlands. It was here that Edward saw the Schuhplatt'l dances which suggested his suite, From the Bavarian Highlands.

Rosa Burley



"DRAW ON, SWEET KNIGHT"

*With his reputation firmly established by the chain of festival choral works, culminating in *The Dream of Gerontius*, and by the success of the *Enigma Variations*, Elgar began to be offered a succession of honours. It took some considerable persuasion before he would accept an Honorary D.Mus. from Cambridge in 1900: none whatever when he was offered a Knighthood in 1904. Both occasions produced cartoons.*

This Cambridge jamboree (!) is on Thursday 22nd. after which the deluge: I feel Gibbonsy, Croftish, Byrdlich & foolish all over.

Yours gownily
E.E.

I have much pleasure in informing you that the King has graciously signified his intention to confer upon you the honour of Knighthood on the occasion of the celebration of His Majesty's Birthday - Until a public announcement is made, may I ask you to treat this communication as

confidential?

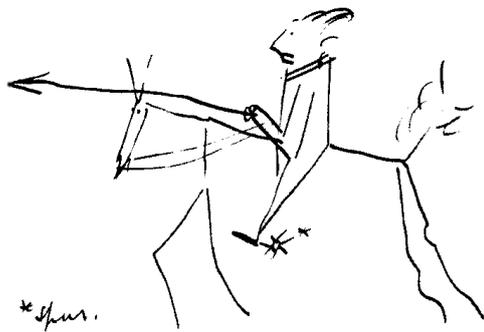
Letter from Arthur Balfour, 21 June 1904

A. saw letter from A. J. Balfour locked it up safes - met E. at Gt. Malvern & togesser to the Wells. A. told E. of letter, he sd. with such a light in his face 'has it come' but then thought it wd only be about copyright. Then he opened the letter ...

Alice Elgar diary

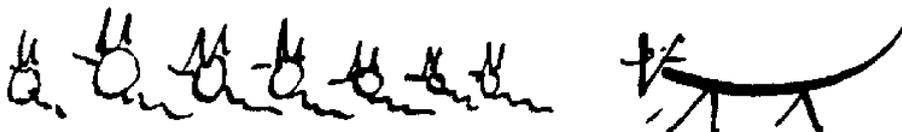


Philharmonic ladies going to Cambridge for the event. (great excitement)
Letter to Jaeger, 14 November 1900



Just back from Palace. All vesy nice, your own Faser.
Postcard from Elgar to Carice, 5 July 1904

ANIMALS AND BIRDS



Elgar was a great animal lover, and an extensive menagerie wended its way across his letters and manuscripts.

'There you are. Did you see Dove? I wish she wouldn't sit there. She sits and watches my pen every time I want more ink. I know she'll put her beak in the inkpot one day.'

'New and interesting variety of dove,' I said. 'The inky-beaked turtle-dove.'

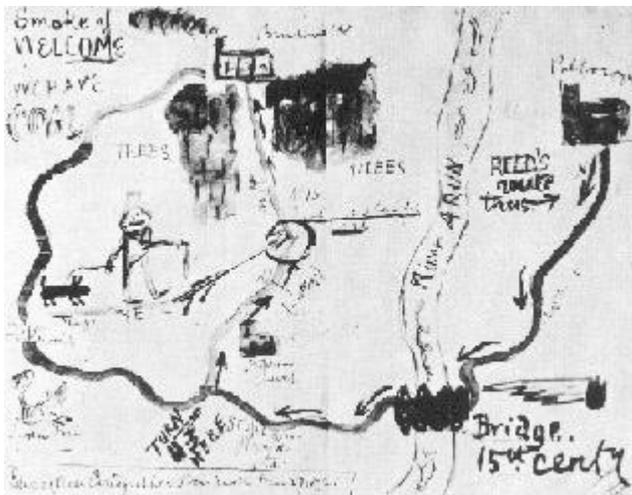
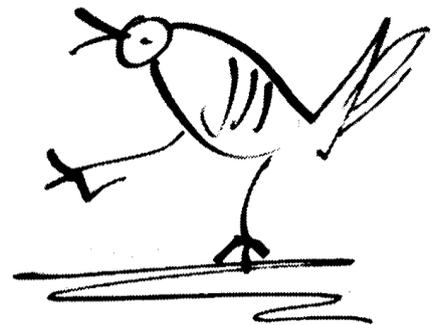
'She led me a fine dance in the spring,' E.E. said. 'I thought she seemed out of sorts, but I did not guess at once what was the matter. She used to wait till I was near the cage and then go into it and sit down on the floor. I believe she wants to make a nest! I said to myself; well, why doesn't she do it? Next day I found her in the veranda struggling with a great stiff straw. She flew up with it over and over again trying to get in through the cage door. At last she got it in and proceeded to sit down on it in a helpless sort of way and she looked at me with

such a reproachful expression! I wondered what she wanted me to do. "You absurd thing," I said, "you can't expect me to show you how to make a nest?" But evidently she did; so I went round the place looking for things - feathers, bits of hay, leaves - Dove watching me all the while and never very far away. Of course I didn't trouble to arrange the stuff. I just put it down in a little heap on the floor of the cage and thought she'd use the nesting-box, but not a bit of it! There she was next morning, sitting on it just as I'd put it - and she'd laid an egg! No, there were no bung yirds! Dove was a bad sitter; pity, wasn't it?'
'Dorabella', August 1909

BRINKWELLS

During the Great War, Elgar took every opportunity to get into the countryside and away from Severn House. From the spring of 1917 the Elgars rented a small cottage in Sussex, Brinkwells, and in these idyllic surroundings he was once again able to get down to a period of sustained composition.

The chamber music was written largely at Brinkwells, and Billie Reed, leader of the London Symphony Orchestra and a great friend of Elgar's, made the journey to Sussex with his violin on many occasions to try over the new works.



Imagine then an old oak-beamed cottage set on a wooded hill, and across an old-world garden another building resembling an artist's studio. From this studio there is a view of a hill sloping down to more thickly wooded country; beyond this the river Arun, and, in the distance, the heights of the South Downs are visible. Near the cottage, rises a strange plateau, on which there are a number of trees with gnarled and twisted branches, bare of bark or leaves - a ghastly sight in the evening, when the

branches seem to be beckoning and holding up gaunt arms in derision. In the first movement of the Quintet the composer's subjective impressions produce a very eerie effect upon the hearer. Their influence is also apparent in the Sonata (second movement) and the finale of the Quartet, in which there is a striking ponticello effect.

W H Reed

WAITING ...

The last decade of Elgar's life was filled with concerts, festivals, horse-racing, dogs, a home in the country - in fact, everything one might wish on someone in his retirement. Except that we do not allow our composers to retire: we, and they, wait expectantly for ... what, I wonder?

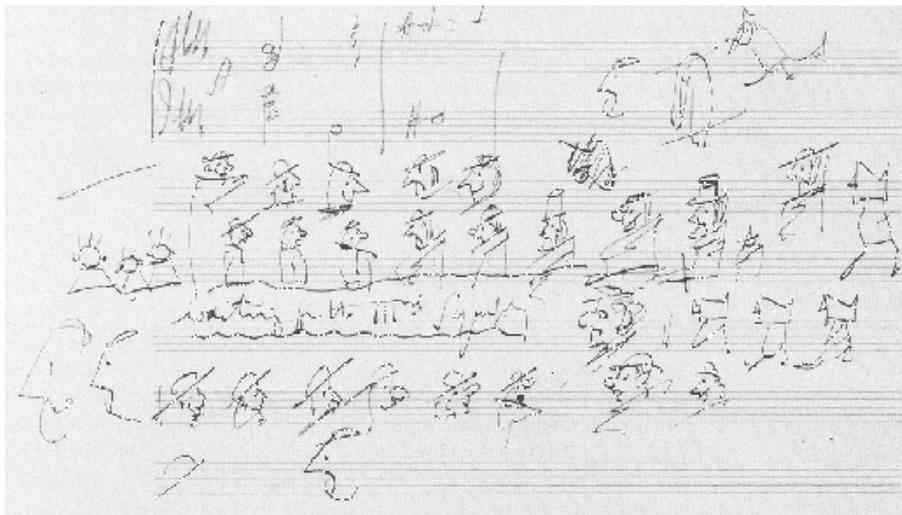


No news: garden going on: dogs well & very opinionated. I took Dick's besom down to the river, dipped it in several times & washed the mud off the bottom step: when I looked round there were three solemn folk sitting on the top step. They are *awful*(ly nice).

Letter to Carice, 8 May 1928

Many thanks for your letter: there is nothing to say about the mythical Symphony for some time, - probably a long time, - possibly no time, - never.

Letter to Walter Legge, 5 August 1932



"Waiting for the Illrd

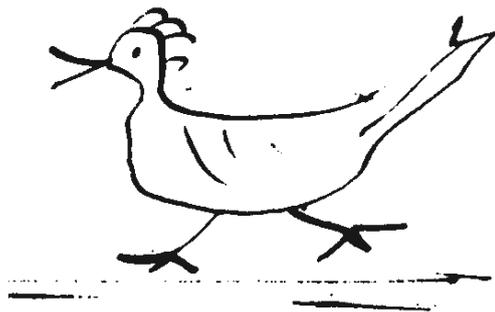
The author was now summoned to Marl Bank more frequently than ever. A great deal of music was being written for this opera - the name was now altered to *The Spanish Lady* (the name of one of the characters) - and he had written out some of the numbers for violin and piano (the piano part consisting principally of his own musical shorthand and quite undecipherable to any one but himself), notably a Spanish dance, a bolero, a saraband, and a country dance. also numerous vocal portions which had to be played on the violin while he played excitedly on the piano.

Then the playing would cease and he would tell the story of the opera with a wealth of detail as to what was happening on the stage, pointing out a bar of the music that fitted in with some particular situation. Seizing a piece of paper during one of these discussions he

hurriedly drew in pen and ink a rough sketch of the stage showing the position of the church, the green, exits and entrances. He seemed to have it all in his head.

Then he would suddenly change the subject and go back to the piano and begin to play portions of the third Symphony - growing excited over this, just as he had been over the opera, and begging the author to get his violin and play this or that phrase any number of times until he was tired. Then he would suddenly say: 'Enough of this, let us go out in the car and take the dogs on the common. Marco is a lad and he knows all about music.' Or, in another mood: 'Marco is a lad and he knows better than to listen to music.'

W H Reed, January 1933



Compiled by Martin Bird.

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