

# The Dorabella Cipher Solution

NOTE: this document makes use of the Dorabella True Type Font by Peter Brooks (available at <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/Elgar-Cipher/files/>)

If you do not wish to install this, please read the pdf file instead:

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/Elgar-Cipher/files/dora%20solution.pdf>

## The key

L	A	D	P	E	N	N	Y
ω	3	m	ε	ϣ	Ϸ	ϸ	Ϲ
W	R	I	T	I	G	I	C
c	u	ɔ	n	l	o	j	ʔ
O	S	W	Y	K	P	B	U
ε	3	m	ω	Ϸ	ϣ	ϸ	Ϲ

Elgar used the key

***Lady Penny, writing in code is a way to keep busy!***

Given that the symbols come in groups of 8, corresponding to 1, 2, or 3 semicircles, the first group could indeed be 'LADYPENW', but this is ugly. Elgar chose a far more beautiful option:

**LADPENNY**

which plays on the sound of the D (in Elgar's time, a "d" was a penny). Then delete every letter that's repeated, starting at the end and working back (this is the absolutely natural way to do it, if you think about it), until you get 24 characters:

**LADPENNY WRITIGIC OSWYKPBU**

which is exactly what we have.

## The plaintext

The decrypted message makes sense if one assumes that Elgar had talked (or written) to Dora about his interest in gardening, and the fact that he had recently pruned, far too vigorously, his prize rose bed.

***P.S. Now droop beige weeds set in it – pure idiocy –  
one entire bed! Luigi Ccibunud luv'ngly tuned liuto  
studo two.***

## Explanatory Notes

The **P.S.** is an exact substitution - the cipher was contained with another letter, so this seems a natural start.

**now droop:** a 'c' has been coded instead of an 'o', remainder is exact

**beige weeds set in it:** exact substitution

**pure idiocy:** a 'b' has been coded instead of a 'p', remainder is exact

**one endtire bed!:** exact substitution. An extra 'd' is included in 'entire'.

**Luigi Ccibunud:** Luigi is a common Italian name of the time. Dora was famous for her stutter, and it seems Elgar was playfully teasing here with C-c-i-bunudi? Instead of the real name, Cherubini.

**luv'ngly:** exact substitution. The missing character is exactly at the dot in the ciphertext.

**tuned liuto:** exact substitution – “liuto” is the Italian word for “lute”. Note that “Luigi”, the name earlier on, is also Italian. Elgar wrote his “Lute Song” using words written by Alice in 1897, the same year as the cipher

**studo two:** perhaps missing an 'i', making “studio two”, which sounds modern, but *studio* was an Italian musical term in common usage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century meaning *study*, equivalent in meaning to the French *étude*.

Elgar plays with the letter D – always with the letter D, and no other – in four places in the cipher. First, in the key (LA-DEE), then in ENDTIRE (the letter D is silent), then in CCIBUNUD (pronouncing

the last part as BUNU-DEE), and then in STUDO (STU-DEE-O). Why? Because Elgar loved (and was well-known for) wordplay, and Dora's name (D Penny) would have amused him enormously, since a penny was always denoted by the letter D.

*Thanks to Rob Marston, for a very useful Excel spreadsheet which aided in the decryption, and to Peter Brooks, who designed the Dorabella truetype font used in this document.*

***Tim S Roberts***

***Original August 2009***

***Revised September 2013 and March 2014***