

Introduction

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Introduction

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Welcome to the first issue of *Grainger Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. We hope this venture will be a tangible manifestation of the scholarship which today surrounds the Australian pianist, composer and social commentator, Percy Grainger.

In this, the second decade of the 21st century, the mention of the name Percy Aldridge Grainger to any individual with a sufficiently broad musical education is likely to elicit a spark of interest in his original compositions, folk music arrangements, virtuosic pianism, and his adventurous compositional explorations in free music, including his innovative (but perhaps naive?) ‘tone tools’. Equally importantly, this interest is frequently accompanied by admiration for Grainger’s frankness, even on deeply personal matters, and esteem for the impressively articulate presentation of his social views. Grainger was not merely a man of music, he was a man of words, to which this journal is in one sense a testimony. Today we see him more clearly for the free spirit he was, and stubbornly remained for his entire life. Thanks to his habit of free-range intellectual grazing, his articles, lectures, newspaper commentaries and private correspondence reflect such a broad range of interests—and the encouragement for others to be equally expansive—that this journal can afford to be equally catholic and inclusive in its content. But we should not forget that despite his ubiquitous curiosity, Grainger rarely compromised. He would sometimes even abandon projects rather than accommodate a middle ground on issues about which he sustained deeply-held convictions, including, for instance, the use of folk song, the purpose of composition and the arts in society, and even racial purity.

Grainger has, over all, been treated kindly as the years progressed since his death 50 years ago. While this is of course an unsurprising response to the originality, charm and quality of his music, it is also due in part to his ‘self-curation’, or as one of this issue’s contributors, Michael Piggott, would term, ‘auto-archiving’, in a museum dedicated to himself in Melbourne. In its earliest decades the museum served perhaps more to hinder than to encourage the cultivation of Grainger’s popularity, given its establishment in a country so vehemently attuned to social equality and whose national exercise appeared to be, for too many years, chopping down tall poppies. Grainger was indeed a tall poppy, but he had the audacity to remind people that this was the case, a trait not only un-endearing to the antipodean, but one which did not lend itself to taking the practitioner seriously. America, we think it is only fair to say, would

have warmed to a Grainger Museum much sooner. But Australia got there in the end, and emphatically so, as the recently refurbished museum bears abundant witness.

But this coming-of-age in public opinion of Grainger's intellectual and musical endeavours is also the product of a growing understanding of, and appreciation for, the fantastical period of world history in which he lived. The past ten years have witnessed a number of major publications focussed on Grainger, and they are supported by the quality of new recordings of his works. These latter are as much a testimony to the venturesome aesthetic convictions of the recording companies responsible, as they are to the insight of the musicians involved. All these have collectively nurtured Grainger's credibility in the minds of the musical public.

Grainger's life was a rich one. He was an Australian who reaped the benefits of a continental European education (including many languages) and residence in the British Empire's capital, London, during the lush and exuberant years of Edward VII. His departure to the United States in 1914 caused some stir, of course, but from the perspective of us, his inheritors, a yet further enrichment to his already bountiful life experiences. It also furnished him with the artistically frontier environment in which he so readily flourished. It could not be said that Grainger was in any sense socially a leader, but he was not to be led, either. Most importantly, the United States positioned him in the forefront of concert pianists of the time, and financially, he was thereafter sufficiently comfortable to be able to implement many of his artistic schemes, which counted among them the harebrained (attempting to establish a reformed English language usage) to the vainglorious but brilliant Grainger Museum at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

True to Grainger's life philosophy with its 'all-rounded' attempt to savour as much in life as possible, *Grainger Studies* is not merely a journal about Percy Grainger—though he figures prominently in it, and we hope he will continue to do so in our future annual issues. But to reflect the wide intellectual scope of Grainger's interests, we intend to ensure that the journal is as authentic a representation as possible of the style in which he devoured knowledge so gluttonously. An evangelist for life itself, Grainger wrote in August 1932: 'It is no use living merely not to die—one should live to REALLY LIVE & Ella & I do.' It is the philosophy encapsulated in this attitude to life that has bequeathed us such a wealth of interesting explorations undertaken by Grainger. So many, that some certainly seem dilettante and amateurish. From our 21st-century standpoint, the value of these is soon brought into question, and their lack of method subject to criticism. But Grainger's era was one of great intellectual enterprise, the 'have-a-go' mentality which he so much admired. Fear of being held wrong—or even worse, in some sense legally

accountable—for one's views on any given subject, were yet to be cultivated by a more 'professional' academic community. Grainger enjoyed his 'speechifying', while his abundant letter collection, as well as his autobiographical documents, demonstrate his incessantly querulous nature coupled with his (thankfully) obsessive tendency to write it all down—in at least one version.

In keeping with Grainger's 'all-round' philosophy, this first issue of the journal explores, through Michael Piggott's case study of the writing of the *Australian dictionary of biography* entry on Grainger, some of the challenges of life-writing itself—highly pertinent in a journal based around the incessant biographer and autobiographer that was Grainger. Mark Pinner's documentation of racial stereotypes in colonial musical theatre and Derham Groves' examination of joss houses help us better understand the multi-racial Australia into which Grainger was born and which no doubt helped shape his paradoxical opinions and prejudices on racial questions and the arts of other cultures. An interest that brought ridicule to Grainger from some quarters—clothing design—is given, by Sharon Peoples, the serious re-evaluation it deserves, placing it in the context of wider dress reform movements and Australia's heritage of military and convict dress for men. Simon Purtell's work on the process of standardisation of performing pitch, aided by the efforts of Nellie Melba, an old family friend of the Graingers', gives us an insight into the concert milieu of his birth city. Grainger's music is the subject of two articles: Malcolm Gillies draws connections between Grainger's interest in early music and his understanding of 'democracy'; while Peter Tregear examines, from an aesthetic perspective, that which Grainger always hoped would be his greatest legacy: his musical compositions. Finally, Eleanor Tan reviews the most recent substantial publication to appear on Grainger and his music, *The new Percy Grainger companion*.

This new journal is a venture of faith by the staff of the University of Melbourne Library. We would like to thank Philip Kent, University Librarian, and Jock Murphy, Director of Collections, for their help in ensuring it could happen, and their patience as its gestation was not dissimilar to that of an elephant. Our Advisory Board members have been generous with their time, suggestions and guidance, as have the anonymous scholars and experts who reviewed and commented so thoughtfully on each article submitted. Designers Janet Boschen of Boschen Design and Gavin Leys of the University of Melbourne have demonstrated insight and creativity in interpreting the spirit of the publication in graphic terms. Shirley Sullivan, Helen Morgan and colleagues of the University Library, together with Simon Strong and other staff of the Melbourne University Bookshop, have enabled the journal to be

published simultaneously online and in print, so that it will reach the broadest possible readership.

We trust you will enjoy this first issue, pass on the link to other interested individuals and organisations, give us feedback, and perhaps submit a contribution for future issues.

In June 1941 Grainger wrote to his friend Henry Balfour Gardiner: 'Most museums, most cultural endeavors, suffer from being subjected to TOO MUCH TASTE, TOO MUCH ELIMINATION, TOO MUCH SELECTION, TOO MUCH SPECIALISATION! What we want (in museums & cultural records) is ALL-SIDEDNESS, side-lights, cross-references.' We hope that *Grainger Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* will also realise this ambition.



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