

Mortimer Menpes and the Master

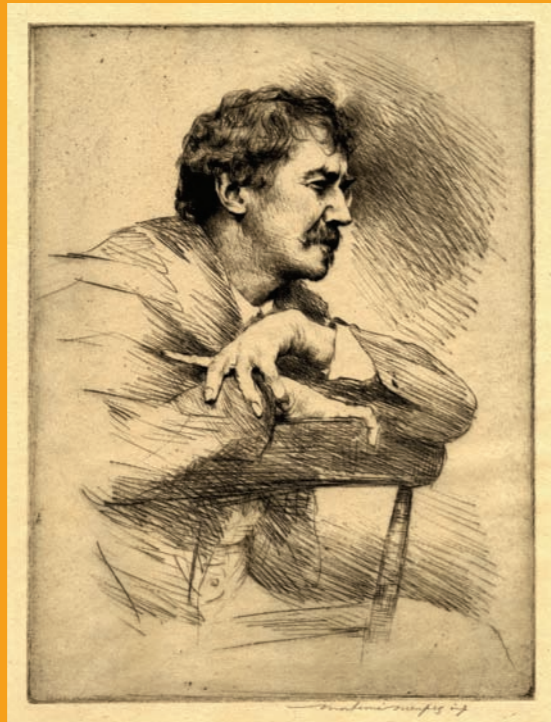
The exact nature of Percy Grainger's relationship with Australian-born painter and print maker, Mortimer Luddington Menpes (1855–1938), is not known. Grainger collected letters from members of the Menpes family, photographs of the artist, some of his travel publications and 29 of his fine etchings.

It is likely a friendship began when Percy Grainger and his Mother Rose arrived in England in 1901. Their Chelsea address was quite close to the Menpes family's extraordinary house at 25 Cadogan Gardens in Kensington, known for its richly detailed Japanese interior. Rose was to become an avid collector of Japanese decorative arts and textiles.

Mortimer Menpes was an enigmatic figure — little is known about the last 30 years of his life other than that he became a successful fruit and carnation farmer at Pangbourne in Berkshire. As a young man he was a prolific and highly skilled etcher and painter, and a celebrated Japanophile, but he is still principally known for his relationship with James McNeil Whistler (1834–1903), the volatile and influential American-born painter who was central to the development of the Aesthetic Movement in England.

Initially, along with painter Walter Sickert, the young Menpes became a studio assistant, printer and follower of the self-styled 'Master'. Menpes was captivated by Whistler to the extent that he had his first daughter christened Dorothy Whistler Menpes. The Grainger Collection includes a richly detailed photograph by an unknown photographer of the Menpes family and Whistler relaxing in a London garden.

With Menpes's growing personal successes and following a (financially lucrative) painting and printing trip to Japan — undertaken against Whistler's express wishes — their relationship dropped meteorically to a level of acrimony, with Whistler firing



Etching and drypoint portrait of Whistler by Mortimer Menpes c.1880.

vindictive broadsides. Central to the rift was the fact that Whistler had gained wide recognition for his concepts relating to Japanese art. After an interview with Menpes, published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1888, in which he talked of the interior decoration of his house inspired by Japanese principles, Whistler became outraged by his follower's temerity at straying into his territory. He wrote to him saying, 'You will blow your brains out of course ... Pigott¹ has shown you what to do, under the circumstances ... Goodbye!'²

When Whistler died in 1903, Menpes published *Whistler as I Knew Him*³ — a frank, but often affectionate memoir. In 2004, the Grainger Collection acquired a numbered and signed edition of the book that includes a tipped-in etching by Whistler of the Menpes children. Somewhat poignantly, Menpes begins the book with the phrase, 'The cry of Whistler's life was, "save me from my friends!"'

The Grainger Collection's holding of Menpes prints has recently been augmented by an etching and drypoint portrait of Whistler, dated c.1880. Both the print and publication will be displayed in a Baillieu Library exhibition of recent acquisitions to be held throughout April and May of this year.

Brian Allison
Grainger Collection Curator

Notes

- 1 Richard Pigott was an infamous journalist, forger and blackmailer who shot himself while on the run in Spain in 1889 as an ultimate evasion of the police.
- 2 Glasgow University Library Special Collections, <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/manuscripts>.
- 3 Mortimer Menpes, *Whistler as I Knew Him*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1904.

Accessing Material in the Grainger Collection

We would like to remind our readers that, even though the Museum building itself is currently closed for capital works, much of the actual collection is still available for researchers and members of the public to access.

Grainger correspondence, personal papers, music manuscripts, published music, books, photographs and other commonly drawn-upon research material are now conveniently housed within the University's Baillieu Library.

Any person wishing to access items from the Grainger Collection's archives should either call us on +61 3 8344 5270 or email grainger@unimelb.edu.au.

Once we have received your request, we will arrange for you to view the material in the Special Collections Reading Room on the 3rd floor of the Baillieu Library. We usually require at least 24 hours notice to retrieve material from the collection — occasionally it may take a little longer, depending on the complexity of the request.

As well, all the music CDs in the Grainger Collection are currently available to listen to in the Music Library, which is also situated on the 3rd floor of the Baillieu Library. Researchers should ask Music Library staff for the CD they would like to hear.

Grainger Collection items currently stored in off-site storage may also be retrieved and delivered to the Baillieu Library on a seven day turnaround.

Like Percy Grainger, Meredith Moon was an exceptional character, an innovator, a free thinker and an innate non-conformist. A former senior lecturer in the Faculty of Music he was, among other things, a pioneer of early instruments in Australia and a maker of harpsichords and related instruments. Given the significance of his work, the Faculty of Music has donated one of Moon's instruments to the Grainger Collection in memory of a kindred spirit of a later generation. The instrument in question is a spinet that has formed part of the Early Music Studio collection since being donated from Moon's estate.

Australian-born Meredith Maxwell Moon (1929–2000) was, like Grainger, enamoured of music of earlier eras. Also like Grainger he travelled abroad to develop knowledge and insight that he would eventually bring back for the benefit of Australian musical culture. While working as Superintendent of Music at

Meredith Moon Spinet Donated



Spinet (detail) made by Meredith Moon in 1970.

Photo by Brian Allison

Oxford University's Bodleian Library during the 1960s, he started to build copies of early keyboard instruments — initially as a hobby. He produced some 30 instruments and his clients are reported to have included such influential figures as the renowned early music specialist and Professor of Music at Kings' College (London), Thurston Dart.

On his return to Melbourne, Meredith Moon was appointed to the staff of the Faculty of Music at the University of Melbourne. He became a legend in his own time. Among those captivated by his teaching and inspired to pursue a career in musicology are three of the Faculty's present senior academics — Professor Warren Bebbington,

Associate Professor Kerry Murphy and Dr Jan Stockigt. At the same time Moon also shared his knowledge of instrument building with a group of enthusiastic young harpsichord lovers: Mars McMillan, Alistair McAllister and Mark Nobel, who became known as the 'Clifton Hill School' of harpsichord makers.

Meredith built the instrument we are donating in 1970, based on an 18th century spinet, probably of English origin. It is possibly the last instrument he made and it remained in his possession until his death. The standard and principles of historical instrument building have advanced since the 1970s, particularly where the pursuit of authenticity is concerned, and it is more fitting that the instrument be preserved as an important relic of a particular time in the 20th century rediscovery of early music.

Professor John Griffiths
Director, Early Music Studio

A Case for a Collection

Moving an entire collection from one location to another is an enormous undertaking for any cultural institution and requires a great deal of coordination and preparation on the part of staff. One of the key tasks involved is the correct labelling, packaging and crating of all collection items. This ensures their safe transportation and storage, and the subsequent ease of access to objects when required during the Museum's closure.

It was during this process that we found ourselves cataloguing, labelling and wrapping a large number of suitcases, trunks and packing cases in the collection that once belonged to Percy Grainger. It struck me as rather comical at the time that we were now packing up the very objects that themselves had been used as packaging by Grainger when sending his material to the museum in the first place!

Percy Grainger first began transporting objects to his new museum in 1935, well before construction work on the building had been completed:

As soon as my New Zealand Broadcasting



A well-travelled leather suitcase belonging to Percy Grainger. This case was ultimately used to transport Grainger's music manuscripts to the Museum.

Photo by Brian Allison

Tour is over I will be sending to the Grainger Museum two trunks containing Chime Bells and Aluminium Marimba and other matters for the Museum. All the contents of these Percussion Instrument Trunks have been with us in Australia and have been used there in our concerts and broadcasts as well as in the N.Z. Tour. (Grainger, Percy Aldridge, *draft of letter to the University of Melbourne*, 1935.)

He continued sending material to the Museum — meticulously packed, labelled and inventoried (albeit using a rather idiosyncratic taxonomic system of his own devising) — on a regular basis throughout the rest of his life. In his will, he also made arrangements for the transference of the balance of his collection to Melbourne after his death.

Today, as well as being significant museum artefacts, Grainger's suitcases can be read as interesting historical documents in their own right. Through them, one can see how large a role travel played in his life (as a performer, he spent a great deal of time away from home — indeed, added together, he quite literally spent years on board ship, train or bus over the course of his musical career). The labels, dates and handwritten data on his luggage allow us to follow Grainger's movements while he was using it — and also what these cases contained when they reached the Grainger Museum, their final destination.

Astrid Britt Krautschneider
Grainger Collection Assistant Curator

Hoard House

NEWS FROM THE GRAINGER COLLECTION



Saturn label recording of Mendelssohn's *Spring Song* and Offenbach's *Barcarole*, performed by Henry Loma and his Light Orchestra — date unknown.
Photo by Brian Allison

Percy's 78s and LPs Catalogued

The Grainger Museum's collection of historic recordings, recently catalogued and now searchable on the Museum's database, is extensive, with nearly 700 items, many of which are themselves boxed sets with up to 16 discs. It comprises records (mostly 78 rpm together with some early LPs) owned by Percy and Rose Grainger, plus donations and acquisitions from other sources.

Percy Grainger features in the collection as pianist and composer in both commercial and non-commercial recordings. There are many commercial recordings featuring Grainger as pianist, the majority on the Columbia label, but also some very early single-sided 78s from his London years. There are also spoken voice recordings, such as one of Grainger talking at Interlochen National Music Camp (Michigan) on 'Personality in Art'.

Grainger's friend, scientist Burnett Cross, made a number of amateur recordings of Grainger and others in and around White Plains, New York and elsewhere. He captured concert rehearsals and concerts, informal music-making and even Grainger improvising; most of these discs came to the Museum in the 1980s.

The collection of non-Grainger recordings is also very fine. Particularly strong in the area of early music — a special interest of Grainger's — it includes many recordings made by *Editions de L'Oiseau Lyre* and those from *L'Anthologie Sonore* series. There is also a collection of items originally owned by Australian composer Dorian Le Gallienne, including recorded performances of his own works. This has been augmented by the gift of a rare recording of his ballet *Voyageur* (W. & G. Selected Release).

The most visually stunning item in the collection is probably the ten inch picture disc reproduced here. Discs of this sort were introduced as early as the 1930s. The disc in the Museum (date unknown) was made in England on the Saturn label and has full colour images on both sides to accompany Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, op 62 no 6 and Offenbach's 'Barcarole' (from *Tales of Hoffman* [sic]) played by Henry Loma and his Light Orchestra.

The condition of the discs themselves is generally good, sometimes pristine (although some discs are clearly now unplayable). Unfortunately the Museum is not in a position to provide facilities on which to hear these recordings, but perhaps the digitising of some key recordings from the collection will be possible at a future date.

Dr Jennifer Hill
Grainger Collection Curatorial Assistant

Grainger Collection Items Travel to Tasmania

The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, Tasmania, is presently holding an elegantly curated exhibition of musical instruments by sculptor, Garry Greenwood. The Grainger Collection has contributed to the show with the loan of two instruments plus eight of Greenwood's quirky drawings. The Grainger Museum presented a large exhibition of Greenwood's work in 2002 which was awarded the Melbourne Fringe Festival Visual Arts Award.

Garry Greenwood is an innovator in the area of musical technology — specifically exploring the acoustic properties of leather. His prolific output includes string, wind and percussion instruments. A following of accomplished musicians who have adopted his instruments include the Brian Brown Trio, Stuart Favilla and Joanne Canon, who have collaborated with Greenwood to create semi-acoustic/electronic instruments, and the Tasmanian-based Chordwainers ensemble.

Leader of the Chordwainers, Karlin Love, composed a *Concertino for Leather Instruments and Wind Orchestra*. The composition was

premiered in the University of Melbourne's Melba Hall by the University of Tasmania Wind Band in 2003.

Greenwood aims at producing instruments that can be played across musical genres. He also has a strongly 'democratic' approach to music-making, aiming at creative experimentation between musicians as a priority, irrespective of relative levels of skill — a notion that exists strongly within Percy Grainger's legacy.

The Grainger Collection holds musical instruments created by another unique

innovator who shared similar principles. Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack (1893–1965) was trained at the Weimar Bauhaus, and in the 1920s made elaborate machines for combining colour and sound. The Grainger Collection preserves some of his experimental wind and string instruments designed to engage children in the act of ensemble playing.

Greenwood, who is a nationally and internationally recognised sculptor, was acknowledged for his extraordinary creative output with a 2005 Australia Day award.

Brian Allison
Grainger Collection Curator



Dragon Horn moulded and carved from leather by Garry Greenwood.

Interest in discovering the very essence of an idea or a thing goes back to the days of the ancient Greek philosophers. Precisely who Percy Grainger was and basically what the Grainger Museum is, however, are questions which have real contemporary relevance as the changes being planned for the Museum create the need for succinct and meaningful answers. Crafting 'dot point' English is a largely enviable skill, as necessary for these answers as for responding to the still common association of the man with whips and comparison of the building with a public convenience.

Firstly, Grainger himself. Given my role at the University, perhaps inevitably I am drawn to his auto-archivist persona; to Grainger the collector, the documenter of traditional music and so on. But in presentations to archivists and articles in the professional literature, where audiences and readership have only a vague idea of who Grainger was, I've tried to summarise his biography with the words 'Australian-born pianist, composer and musical innovator', and observed that his biographers

have also acknowledged his considerable proficiency and originality in painting and clothing design; his interest in avant-garde sound experiments with music-making machines (in the pre-electronic era); his athleticism; his theories about music, creativity, personal relationships, friendship, race and language; his contribution to the preservation of folk music; and his relationships with his mother, girlfriends and wife.

I have never felt my summary sufficiently captures the core of Grainger's being, and have sometimes resorted to the old 'X is sort of like Y' formula. When the names are recognised, most people seem to understand when I style Grainger as a cross between Norman Lindsay, Barrie Kosky, Jonathon Mills, Barry Humphries and Rolf Harris. And having recently seen the Andy Warhol exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, from now on I'll probably weave him into my list.

Trying to pin down in a few words the kernel of the Grainger Museum is equally

challenging. We all know that there are museums ... and there are *museums*. The Grainger is not a museum despite its name, or more to the point, not only a museum, any more than the Australian War Memorial is a museum. The Grainger is a multi-function cultural institution, a museum-archive-library-film/sound archive-art museum-teaching/research centre; formed around a single individual and his circle; operating within the broad canvas of Australian and world music, in a research intensive university setting; and located in a building, heritage listed because of its origins and contents, beside a renowned Music Faculty. It is also a 'museum' with an acknowledged public role and with connections existing or potential with other Grainger collections, other music collections and with diverse friends, supporters ... and, we trust, 'Hoard House' readers.

Michael Piggott
University of Melbourne Archivist



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Library Digitised Collections

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