The proposed conservation treatment of a late-Edwardian silk dress from the Rose Grainger Costume Collection

T

e year I began preparations for the conservation treatment of a late-
Edwardian silk evening dress from the
Rose Grainger Costume Collection. The
collection is significant for its wide timespan
and variety of textile objects, and the dress
represents not only a wonderful opportunity
to work within the collection, but also to apply a
conservation technique not commonly used in
conservation, especially in Australia. The dress, along
with its matching evening bag and shoes,
is a beautiful example of an Edwardian evening
outfit. The dress itself is made of mushroom
pink silk taffeta and is trimmed with twisted
metallic rope braid. The bodice crosses over the
bust and is accented with a variety of buttons
and metal press-studs, and has a tulle
modesty-piece concealing the décolletage. The
under-
bodice is made of fine cotton with lace edging
and comprises several fabric panels that conceal
the centre fastenings. There is a double
wristband that joins the bodice to the skirt, and
a label stitched on to this from 'The Little
Vanity Shop, Madison Avenue, New York'.
The skirt is gathered under the bust and
balloons out to a gathered and weighted hem.

The dress is entirely hand-stitched.

The silk is in very poor condition, with
many tears and splits, and the bottom hem
of the dress, in particular, has almost completely
shattered, making it by the presence of
heavy fabric covered metal weights stitched
into the hem. Because of the extreme delicacy
of the object it will not be possible to repair or
consolidate each individual area of damage
and/or weakness. Consequently, it is proposed
that the dress will be entirely unstitched and
removed from its current under-bodice and
underskirt, and an adhesive lining applied to
the silk in order to provide a flexible support.
This lining will comprise a conservation grade
textile which will be impregnated with a
combination of two adhesives, and it will be
affixed to the silk taffeta by means of heat
setting. After lining, the dress will be
reassembled by restitching, through the original
holes as much as possible.

There is very little in the conservation
literature about the use of adhesives in treatment,
as such extreme interventive treatment is not
commonly carried out in textile conservation,
even in Europe, although just such a
treatment has recently been carried out by
textile conservators at the National Gallery of
Victoria on a morning dress with spectacular
results. The Rose Grainger evening dress is
currently in such poor condition that it could
not be displayed. This treatment will enable it
to be exhibited and provide a solid support
for it to prevent further deterioration in the future.

Bianca Di Fazio

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Deagan Organ Chimes donated

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ts seems inevitable that Percy Grainger and John Calhoun Deagan would have crossed paths.
Grainger had an investigative nature and sought out non-traditional instruments that could
be incorporated into his compositions, while Deagan was a music-loving entrepreneur who
invented and adapted many musical instruments, including the xylophone, marimba, organ
chimes, vibraphone, and orchestra handbells.

Deagan corresponded with Grainger directly and their long-lasting professional relationship
was based on mutual admiration and respect. In the Deagan office hung a photograph of Grainger with
the dedication: ‘To J.C. Deagan whose genius has given us the world’s most perfect percussion
instruments’.

The company itself was not averse to making similar grand claims. The ‘Musical Novelties
Catalogue’ states that their Organ Chimes are ‘universally conceded as being the greatest
novelty instrument ever invented’. A set of these chimes, based on the Indonesian anklung,
have recently been donated to the Grainger Museum by the conservationist Graeme Leak.
The Deagan Organ Chimes were passed on to Leak by Keith Humble, along with the story that a vaudeville
performer had walked into the Grainger Museum from off the street and simply handed them over.

Grainger owned a number of Deagan instruments that are now in the collection, including
the Staff Bells used in performances of the
Organ Chimes was donated to the Museum by Graeme Leak.

Deagan Organ Chimes donated

The catalogue displaying the Deagan Organ Chimes, ‘greatest novelty instrument ever invented’. A set of these chimes was donated to the Museum by Graeme Leak.

An object of historical significance, the Deagan Organ Chimes is a set of bell chimes that were donated to the Grainger Museum by percussionist Graeme Leak. The chimes were designed and manufactured by Percy Grainger and John Calhoun Deagan.

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In April 1926 Percy Grainger was once more in Barstow, the small Californian town that had made such a deep impression on him six years earlier. He wrote a one-page note outlining his memories of the Casa del Desierto, the hotel he had stayed in with his mother. He recalled that Rose’s room was decorated with a ‘coloured photo of Venician [sic] canal & [Bride of Sighs] bridge. Repulsive looking burlerike man on extreme left of photo (that we laughed at) & queer German looking spectacled thin man helping a lady from a gondola.’

This is just one of the many Barstow related items in the collection, ranging from watercolour paintings to Native American handicrafts, rocks, photographs and correspondence with local residents, the Crooks family. Grainger met the Crooks in the 1920s and kept in touch over the years. Their letters to Grainger detail farm life through the seasons: blooming desert flowers, the arrival of the meadow-lark, praying that hunters spare a few quail and cottontail rabbits, and pipes bursting as the water freezes.

In return Grainger wrote of his life as a professional musician travelling the world. He also sent recordings, photographs, books and newspaper clippings. The family was particularly touched by Grainger’s gesture of sending them four framed photographs of Clifford Crooks after he passed away in 1937. In March 1938 Grainger received word from Marie Crooks of a devastating flood that had severely damaged their home. He visited the next month and Clarence Crooks showed him how it had dramatically altered the landscape. In a letter to Ella he wrote that ‘the lovely tree mother & I used to jump over, just where the road bent round before the lane to the Crooks’ is a lifeless clump of stumps. First the sand & wreckage piled up around it, choking it to death — filling up all its clefts, breathing gaps. Then men cut its top branches off, to help stem the river back into its old ruts … Now the whole road from the bridge to Crooks’ home up & vanishing — just a wild wasteland!’

During this stay Grainger also found himself in a position to verify his memories of the Casa del Desierto, recorded two years earlier. He wrote to Ella: ‘what luck: only one room free in the hotel & that in 3 & 4 (together), the one mother & I used in 1926. All the eyegays (pictures) on the walls the same, roomougut looking unchanged!’

In July, just prior to sailing to Australia to work on the Museum, Percy and Ella travelled back to Barstow. During their short stay Grainger thoroughly documented rooms three and four of the Casa del Desierto. In one photograph he can be seen the image of Venice that had so amused he and Rose, propped on a table between the beds, with a hand-written card for identification. Grainger took photographs of the old riverbed, his ‘mother’s tree’ and ‘Ella’s pool’.

As well as photographing Barstow for the Museum collection Grainger made a visit to the Crooks’ ranch, which was now covered in mud and silt. The house had been cut in two and jacked-up on to levelled dollarie for moving to a new location. Clarence’s niece Emma Crooks Revan described his visit that day: ‘Percy played the piano and as usual he pounded out the lovely chords, causing the house to rock back-and-forth on the moving rollers, and we feared the house might “fall and crush”, but no one really cared, for Percy’s music was just what we needed that night — our spirits had been so low thinking of all we had lost.’

The Crooks family did not initially expect their friendship with the famous performer to be an enduring one due to the vast differences in their lifestyles. For Grainger, however, their relationship was forged in a place that was deeply significant to him. The landscape, architecture and people were all intrinsically linked and Grainger would remain a loyal and generous friend.

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**Piecing together the Lincolnshire Posy**

The circumstances surrounding the creation and early performances of *Lincolnshire Posy* are both fascinating and revelatory. The story begins with a lost letter of invitation that Edwin Franko Goldman wrote to Percy Grainger on behalf of the American Bandmasters’ Association. (I refer to this request as a ‘lost letter of invitation’ because I could not find specific information about it in any published sources on Grainger). With the discovery of this letter in the Grainger Museum collection, along with additional relevant material — programmes, correspondence, and Grainger’s diary notes — one can construct with some accuracy the sequence of events that led to the creation and early performances of *Lincolnshire Posy*.

Edward Goldman and the American Bandmasters’ Association asked Grainger to compose ‘some new band numbers’ for the forthcoming American Bandmasters’ Association Convention in Milwaukee. With very little time to fulfil Goldman’s request for new musical compositions, Grainger embarked on a two-week concert tour (from the 5th to around the 22nd of February) directed by Mr. Grainger as guest conductor, in the concert given by the University of Miami Symphonic band, specially arranged by Percy Grainger during the last 10 days working out the details in his mind. His method was to write out the parts, then follow up with a compressed score (rarely a full score). This process worked well for him as he could continue to write music while travelling around the country. Amazingly, while immersed in writing this extensive musical composition, Grainger embarked on a two-week concert tour (from the 5th to around the 22nd of February) travelling to Florida, Texas and elsewhere to conduct, perform and try out some of the new music he was writing.

When I first examined Grainger’s diary entries I was surprised to read about what appeared to be the first public performance of an unfinished version of *Lincolnshire Posy* at Miami High School on 8 February, 1937. The program does not list *Lincolnshire Posy* but the reason for this is clarified in the glowing reviews of the concert that appeared in the Miami newspapers on the following day. Henry Carvendish wrote the following review of the concert which appeared on the front page of *The Miami Herald* on 9 February, 1937:

**Surprise Numbers Feature Concert**

Grainger Takes Old English Folk Tunes and Gives Them New Setting

Specially arranged by Percy Grainger during the last 10 days for initial performances here, these short English folk tunes were inserted into the program as the surprise feature of the concert given by the University of Miami Symphonic band, directed by Mr Grainger as guest conductor, in the auditorium of Miami High school last night.

Mr. Grainger told his audience that: ‘Some time ago Mr. Shephard wrote me and said he wanted to have the second half of the program made up entirely of Grainger compositions. So I thought it would be best to write some new pieces for the occasion.’

The spontaneous laughter evoked by the remark was but a prelude to an amusing few minutes wherein the composer and guest conductor related the circumstances under which the three English folk tunes were collected in Lincolnshire in England by means of phonograph recordings.

It is important to point out that this spontaneous yet formal concert performance of three movements of *Lincolnshire Posy* by the University of Miami Symphonic Band on 8 February, 1937, predates by one month the performance of the same three movements by the Milwaukee Symphonic Band at the ABA convention, 7 March, 1937.

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**Endnotes**
