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 Leicogur (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 1940s. The disc in the Museum’s (date unknown) was made in England on the Decca label and has full colour images on both sides to accompany Mendelssohn’s Spring Songs; op 49 nos 6 and Offenbach’s ‘Barcarolle’ (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.

Grainger Collection Curatorial Assistant

Dr Jennifer Hill

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 public 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, Karlis Love, composed a Concerto 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 Hirshfeld-Mack (1863–1906) 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 2003 Australia Day award.

Brian Allison
Grainger Collection Curator

The Man and the Museum

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

INFORMATION DIVISION
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
**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. The 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’s archives 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 CDs 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.

**Mortimer Menpes and the Master**

The exact nature of Percy Grainger's relationship with Australian-born painter and print maker, Mortimer Luddington Menpes (1853–1935), is not known. Grainger collected letters from members of the Menpes family, photographs of the artist, some of his travel publications and 24 of his fine engravings.

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 24 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 Clifton Court, Bath, 1904.

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

"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 cataloging 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 out the Grainger Museum two trunks containing Percussion Instrument cases in the collection that once belonged to Percy Grainger. This case was ultimately used to transport Grainger's music manuscripts to the Museum.

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 makers: 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 and significant relic of a particular time in the 20th century rediscovery of early music.

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