From Friends to Members: the future of the Friends of the Grainger Museum

The Friends of the Grainger Museum began life as the Friends of Percy Grainger at a meeting on Friday 1 April 1932, held under the auspices of the University of Melbourne with generous support from the School of Music. The archives of the Friends show that for the next three decades the group supported the Museum in many ways, including the provision of funds for the restoration of items connected with Grainger, including the piano in the maingang in 1994, the dulcimer in 1996, Percy Grainger’s childhood piano in 1999 and, in 2000, Rose Grainger’s ‘Hoard House’ in London guitarist. For several years until 2004, the Friends ran performance and composition competitions. As a result some wonderful performances and original compositions were produced, giving many young people an insight into Grainger’s creativity.

Of equal importance was the Friends’ role in promoting the Museum and its collections. Dozens of exhibitions, concerts, tours and lectures were held over the years, initiated and run both by the Museum and the Friends, bringing countless people into the building, while other support was concerned with the trials and tribulations of the Museum. One of these was the proposal by the University to cease funding the position of curator at the end of 1996. Letters of protest were forwarded to the University administration and these, with a grant from the Faculty of Music of 50% of a year's salary, helped to keep the position in existence.

Earlier this year, on Tuesday 15 May 2007, the Friends formally dissolved the organisation at a gathering that began with a tour of the empty Museum, a rare experience that allowed everyone to appreciate the original design and unique spaces. We then heard Peter Lovell from Lovell Chen architects and heritage consultants outline plans for the restoration of the Grainger Museum. Through a wonderful presentation we were informed of the work that will be undertaken over the next year to bring the Museum to a new state-of-the-art facility for displaying this priceless collection in a unique building.

The dissolution of the Friends group, while sounding dramatic, will actually continue to work, continued with the University establishing a Members group, similar to that of the Ian Potter Museum of Art. Former Friends of the Grainger Museum are currently receiving all previous donations, including invitations to events such as the current ‘Facing Percy Grainger’ exhibition and tours of Hoard House. Information on the establishment of a Members group will be available shortly.

There is much about which to be confident in regard to the future, in particular the University’s commitment to re-establish the Museum as a significant aspect of its cultural collections. Professor Warren Bobbington, in his role as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (University Relations), has shown enthusiastic support for the Museum and the work of its staff, noting that ‘Grainger’s place in our musical history is increasingly understood’ and that he is ‘optimistic about the future of Grainger’s gift’ to the University.’

Rose Grainger at the National Gallery of Victoria


The exhibition is curated by Elizabeth Fyfe, Associate Professor of Fashion History at RMIT University, and Mia Rushton, Exhibitions Project Manager at the NGV. It features a selection of costumes worn by some of the world’s most famous black women, including Gabrielle Chanel, Dior, Givenchy, and Yves Saint Laurent.

The exhibition is part of the NGV’s larger celebrations for the centenary of the opening of the National Gallery of Victoria, which includes a series of exhibitions, events, and educational programs. The centenary celebrations also coincide with the NGV’s Re-Opening, which took place in 2006.


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Percy's Grainger's gifted father

John Harry Grainger (1854-1917) was a significant 19th century Australian architect and engineer. His story has been little known about until this new book on his life by a specialist in Grainger's work. The book is well-researched, with many photos and diagrams of his projects, and is a valuable addition to our knowledge of the architect.

The Legacy of Grieg

Edvard Grieg died on a September 1907. To commemorate this event the International Grieg Society held its major conference in Bergen, Norway — Grieg's home town. This year the theme of this gathering was 'Beyond Grieg — Edvard Grieg and his Diverse Influences on Music of the 20th and 21st Centuries'.

For those who are currently wondering how Grieg's legacy is cared for in Norway, I strongly recommend a visit to the Bergen Public Library, which Grieg bequeathed his documentary legacy, and to which the staff made us warmly welcome during this conference. If you cannot go there in person, try the website, http://nibiblioteket.no/

Notes
1 Copy of Paul Grainger's 'Newman' picture by Jelka Delius. Grainger Museum Legend.
3 Maxwell, Colonial Photographs and Exhibitions.
4 Copy of Paul Grainger's 'Nevermore' picture by Jelka Delius. Grainger Museum Legend.
5 Copy of Paul Grainger's 'Nevermore' picture by Jelka Delius. Grainger Museum Legend.

Another series in Grainger's collection is no. 50 — 'By Reef and Palm', named after a novel by Louis Becke. The Kenny studios made a practice of accumulating glass plate negatives from many sources, including missionaries who used the medium to accompany their lectures on the benefits of conversion by showing views of islanders before and after the introduction of Christianity. The postcards show life in 'a South Sea Arcadia', ranging from family groups posing in front of their homes to a 'Water carrier', a bare-breasted young woman walking through the palms, which would not look out of place in a Gauguin painting.

Grainger himself rejected the notion that his interest in primitive art was a case of seeking 'the charm of the exotic'. Rather, he saw 'civilised life and art on the one hand, and primitive life and art on the other hand [as] twin halves of a cultural whole'. Although Grieg believed that his was a sophisticated attitude, it shows inevitable traces of colonialism, which is reflected in the postcards described.