

## Percy Grainger: Grieg's Interpreter and Propagator

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### Abstract:

The Australian composer-pianist Percy Grainger (1882-1961) came to know Grieg in the Norwegian's final years. After a first contact in 1905, the two met in London in 1906. During the summer of 1907 Grainger stayed with Grieg at Troldhaugen, where they prepared for performances (as soloist and conductor) of Grieg's Piano Concerto. After Grieg's death in September 1907 Grainger continued to promote Grieg's works through his performances, essays, editions, broadcasts, and recordings, right up until his last performance of the Concerto in January 1960 in Minnesota. He also wrote extensively about his connections with Grieg in his letters and autobiographical sketches.

This paper surveys Grainger's half-century of propagation of Grieg's music. It contrasts Grainger's public and private views, and traces the changes over the decades in his opinions about Grieg and his wife. The paper ends with a study of how Grainger fitted Grieg into his evolving views about the Nordic world, how Grieg influenced Grainger's perceptions of his own pianism, composition and folk-music study, and how Grainger sought to reconcile the obligations of propagator, prophet and protégé.

During the 1930s Percy Grainger established his own Museum on the grounds of the University of Melbourne. Although living in the United States, he chose Melbourne because it was his birthplace. He also chose Melbourne because he wanted to increase musical and cultural awareness in the land that he still claimed as home, despite having only occasionally visited Australia since his boyhood. Among the exhibits of the Grainger Museum, from its opening in December 1938 until the Museum's exhibitions were disassembled in 2005, was one entitled "Edvard Grieg & Percy Grainger".<sup>1</sup> It included copies of six of Grieg's letters to Grainger and Nina Grieg's telegram to Grainger about Grieg's funeral. There were photographs of the Danish composer Herman Sandby and Grieg, along with that famous photograph of the Griegs, Julius Röntgen and Grainger, taken in the garden of Troldhaugen in late July 1907. There were two photographs of the Master's watch and chain that Nina Grieg had presented to Grainger after Grieg's death, along with a two-page typed exhibition commentary – or

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<sup>1</sup> See Belinda Jane Nemeč, "The Grainger Museum in its Museological and Historical Contexts" (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2006), vol. 2, pp. 57-69.

Legend – dated 8 December 1938. Many a visitor to the Museum must have pondered the final line of Grainger’s commentary which concluded: “So, in a sense, it would have been better if I had never met the Griegs, sweet and dear though they were to me.”<sup>2</sup> For one who made his reputation on the back of Grieg’s Piano Concerto, promoted Grieg’s music apparently so willingly and selflessly, and who in earlier life certainly did everything possible to promote his personal connection with Grieg, Grainger seems to have come to an odd conclusion. Beneath the surface, however, lay multiple tensions, many of Grainger’s own imagining. There were tensions, arising in 1907 and never satisfactorily resolved in Grainger’s mind, about the fundamental worth of his pianism, composition and folk-music work. More deeply, and evolving over the years, were conflicting roles of protégé and prophet. Rather than the wise prophet spreading world-wide appreciation of Grieg’s genius, Grainger found himself locked into the role of self-interested protégé. Grieg, in fact, became *his* prophet, and, as the years rolled by, Grainger became less and less confident that the Norwegian’s great faith in any of his abilities had been warranted. As the exhibition commentary’s second last sentence states: “I had wanted, critically and impersonally, to proclaim the still unsuspected far-reaching importance of Grieg’s composition innovations; but, instead, I became his protégé, and who believes in the impersonalness and criticalness of a protégé?”

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Over the half century from Grieg’s death in 1907 until Grainger’s death in 1961, Grainger promoted Grieg’s music through many different channels. As a pianist, he gave hundreds of performances of a dozen Grieg works, most notably of the Piano Concerto which he performed fairly regularly between 1905 and 1960.<sup>3</sup> He made gramophone and piano-rolls both of popular Grieg works – “To the Spring”, “Wedding Day at Troldhaugen” and “Norwegian Bridal Procession”, not to mention the Concerto – and also of Grieg’s lesser known, mainly later, piano pieces.<sup>4</sup> As an editor, he produced not only a definitive Schirmer edition of the Piano Concerto in 1919-20, but also Peters

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<sup>2</sup> Percy Grainger, “Edvard Grieg & Percy Grainger”, Museum Legend, dated 8 December 1938, in Nemeck, “The Grainger Museum”, vol. 2, pp. 57-60. All quotations from Grainger’s writings are made by kind permission of Stewart Manville (White Plains, New York).

<sup>3</sup> The first performance appears to have been on 11 March 1905 at the Northern Polytechnic Institute in London, and the last on 30 January 1960 at the Mankato State College in Minnesota.

<sup>4</sup> See John Bird, *Percy Grainger*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Appendices D and E.

Editions of the Album for Male Voices, Op. 30, and the Four Psalms, Op. 74, with his own forewords and translations into English. These services to the propagation and interpretation of Grieg's *oeuvre* are now well rehearsed in both the Grieg and the Grainger scholarly literatures.

Somewhat less exposed in the historical tradition is Grainger's constant promotion of Grieg in his writings, from the loving recollection of Grieg that appeared in *The Musical Times* of London in October 1907 to his fiftieth anniversary tribute that appeared in the same journal in September 1957.<sup>5</sup> The main message that Grainger sought to convey over these five decades of writing, both within specialist essays about Grieg and more generally themed musical studies, was Grieg's role as an harmonic innovator. In an essay on "Modern and Universal Impulses in Music" of 1916, he claimed Grieg as an "iconoclastic harmonic innovator" amid the "stagnant last quarter of the last century", and claimed that although he was "the most chromatic Scandinavian of his generation, [he] was also the one to whom the totally non-chromatic folk-scales of Norway provided the most inspiration".<sup>6</sup> In his series of essays in 1943 for the Philadelphia journal, *The Etude*<sup>7</sup> -- in celebration of the centenary of Grieg's birth -- Grainger elaborated further: "The cult of the chord, vitally furthered by Grieg, was a marvelous device for engendering musical sensitivity and compassion."<sup>8</sup> And he explained that Grieg built a tension between the traditional harmonic implications of a melody and the actual harmonic behaviours that support -- or undermine -- it. Grainger saw Grieg, in short, as a composer of music, for whom "the inventive germ and the inner musical idea and emotion come always first",<sup>9</sup> rather than those, like Debussy or Ravel, for whom moulding of ideas to the particular resources of instruments was the primary impulse. For this reason, perhaps, he was drawn in his essays to promote the later, more

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<sup>5</sup> Grainger, "Personal Recollections of Grieg", *Musical Times*, 48 (1907), 720; Grainger, "Edvard Grieg: A Tribute", *Musical Times*, 98 (1957), 482-3.

<sup>6</sup> Grainger, "Modern and Universal Impulses in Music", *Etude*, 34/5 (May 1916), 343-4, in Malcolm Gillies and Bruce Clunies Ross, eds., *Grainger on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 77-83 (p. 82).

<sup>7</sup> Grainger, "Grieg: Nationalist and Cosmopolitan", *Etude*, 61/6 (June 1943), 386, 416-18; 61/7 (July 1943), 428, 472; 61/8 (August 1943), 492, 535, 543; 61/9 (September 1943), 569, 616, in Gillies and Clunies Ross, eds., *Grainger on Music*, pp. 318-37.

<sup>8</sup> Gillies and Clunies Ross, eds., *Grainger on Music*, p. 329.

<sup>9</sup> Grainger, "A Blossom Time in Pianoforte Literature", *Etude*, 33/10 (October 1915), 709-10, in Gillies and Clunies Ross, eds., pp. 72-6 (p. 72-3).

subtle, works of Grieg in contrast to the better-known, earlier works that featured more regularly in his performances and recordings. As well as through his essays, Grainger promoted Grieg's music through his broadcasts and lecture-recitals. In his twelve broadcast lecture-recitals for the Australian Broadcasting Commission during 1934-5,<sup>10</sup> he mentioned Grieg in at least six of them, in particular seeing his interest in nature music, wailing sounds and gliding tones as foreshadowing Grainger's own development of a "Free Music", that is, music freed from the fixed steps both of pitches and rhythms.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the public musician there is the private man who, equally, wrote and talked about Grieg. The sources of Grainger's private letters, copious autobiographical writings and the recollections of his doings by others attest to his deeper motivations, anxieties and unrealized plans. From these sources we learn, for instance, that although Grieg may have been dead, Grainger remained, to some degree, yoked to his legacy through the continuing closeness to Nina Grieg – at least until the early 1920s, when the suicide of Grainger's mother caused him to start re-evaluating all of his relationships. He did not always find this connection with Grieg's widow benign, believing that she neither appreciated the creative intent of his own music, nor understood the efforts that Delius and he were making to perpetuate "Griegness".<sup>12</sup> From the recollections of the Norwegian musician, Sparre Olsen, we learn, for instance, that Grainger thought of orchestrating some of Grieg's Op. 66 Norwegian Folksongs, believing that "these intimate miniature treasures are too sensitive to assert themselves as piano pieces",<sup>13</sup> and started to score Grieg's E minor Piano Sonata, Op. 7 as a "Grieg-Grainger Symphony" -- as he explained to his wife, to satisfy the "symphony-craving" of entrepreneurs and

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<sup>10</sup> See John Blacking, "A Commonsense View of All Music": *Reflections on Percy Grainger's Contribution to Ethnomusicology and Music Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), lecture synopses, pp. 151-80.

<sup>11</sup> See Grainger, "Free Music" (1938), in Gillies and Clunies Ross, eds., *Grainger on Music*, pp. 293-4.

<sup>12</sup> Grainger, "Nina Grieg Deaf to Delius's and My Music" (1949/52), section 11, "Grainger's Anecdotes", unpublished (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne). See also, Grainger, "Nina Grieg's Clever Naughtiness" (1945), "Ere-I-Forget", unpublished (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne), and Lionel Carley, "Percy Grainger's Memories of the Griegs", Part 2, *In a Nutshell* (Melbourne), 10/2 (June 2002), 9-12 (p. 10-12).

<sup>13</sup> Sparre Olsen, *Percy Grainger* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1963), translated in associated typescript by Bent Vanberg, ed. Stewart R. Manville, pp. 15-16. To the young American-Norwegian pianist, Storm Bull, he also wrote a long letter describing how the Op. 66 pieces might be used as orchestration exercises. See letter, Grainger to Storm Bull, 25 March 1937, in Gillies and Pear, eds., *The All-Round Man*, pp. 134-41.

audiences.<sup>14</sup> “It will score like butter & my Grieg-fame cuts me out to do such a feat”, Grainger commented to his wife. In November 1944 he even wrote out individual orchestral parts for the first sixteen bars of the intended Symphony, for a “trial” with the Houston Orchestra, but then, for whatever reason, abandoned the idea.<sup>15</sup> In one long private musing, from 1945, he fantasized about a Composers’ Guild that might publish annual ratings of compositions and composers.<sup>16</sup> He then drew up a league table, and ranked forty compositions, styles or composers against eleven criteria, ranging from complexity to beauty. Out of the forty, Grainger ranked Wagner first and Rarotongan part-song second. He ranked himself equal ninth, with high scores for experimentation and complexity, and rated Grieg equal thirteenth alongside Tchaikovsky and “African music”. Grieg scored particularly well on such criteria as sense of identity and “local colour”, but less well for complexity and Grainger’s strange criterion of “soul-life”.<sup>17</sup>

With Grainger’s “Aldridge-Grainger-Ström Saga”, a massive auto-biographical ramble written in 1933 while sailing from Copenhagen to Australia, Grainger opened up his growing fascination with matters Nordic.<sup>18</sup> Although a dedicated Anglo-Saxon, whose childhood hero had been Grettir the Strong,<sup>19</sup> Grainger had only started to formalize his racial ideas in the 1920s, around neat typologies promulgated by the American Nordacists Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard.<sup>20</sup> Such “Nordicism”, based around national percentages of Mediterranean, Alpine and Nordic peoples, allowed Grainger to exclude Germany, but include Australia, America, Britain and, of course, Scandinavia, in his world of Nordic relativities. Blue eyes, golden hair and a rosy

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<sup>14</sup> Letter, Grainger to Ella Grainger, 12 November 1944, in Malcolm Gillies and David Pear, eds., *The All-Round Man: Selected Letters of Percy Grainger, 1914-1961* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 196-7.

<sup>15</sup> Kay Dreyfus, *Music by Percy Aldridge Grainger: First Supplementary List and Index* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1995), pp. 103-4, 162.

<sup>16</sup> Grainger, “A World-Wide Tone-Wright (Composer) Guild” (1945), section 38, “Ere-I-Forget”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 201-8.

<sup>17</sup> Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 206-8.

<sup>18</sup> See David Pear, “Grainger on Race and Nation”, *Australasian Music Research*, 5 (2000), 25-47.

<sup>19</sup> See David Pear, “Percy Grainger as ‘Educator-at-Large’: the Formation, Expression and Propagation of his Manliness” (PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1998), pp. 56-9.

<sup>20</sup> In particular, Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916) and Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1920).

complexion were the external markers of this Nordicness.<sup>21</sup> By the 1930s, however, Grainger had moved from an idiosyncratically racialist perspective to a more malevolent, racist stance. In his private writings he claimed that “the most Nordic races have the most flawless beauty and with it the most utter greatness”, and held up Grieg as an uncontested model of “Nordic beauty”, hence Nordic greatness.<sup>22</sup> But he was moving dangerously towards an expression of racial supremacy, when he asked the questions: “Must we Nordics go on *forever* shamming that we *do not know* that we are overmen in beauty, souldepth, spirit-powers? Must we stand by silently forever while the lower races (French, German, Jews) tell us they own powers & gifts that we know they don’t?”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, one of his broadcast lecture-recitals in Australia during 1934-5 was entitled “The Superiority of Nordic Music”, in which Grainger asserted that Nordic folksongs “out-sing all other folk-songs in their sheer melodic beauty” and claimed that Nordic composers, ever since the thirteenth century, had “out-soared all others in the purity, grandeur, complexity and passionate emotionality of their musical speech”.<sup>24</sup> Grainger’s strong sense of racial affinity endured to the end. In a late anecdote from 1954, entitled “What is Behind My Music”, he explained that when he played music by Nordic composers he felt “sustained & sponsored” by his racial ancestors. Writing to his wife ten years before, he referred to a performance of the Grieg Ballade thus: “When I play such a piece, it is as if Grieg (being a partly-British Norwegian) stood at my side saying, ‘You don’t need to be afraid; you are a friend of my race; it is right for you to play my music.’”<sup>25</sup> He felt similarly supported when playing music by Cyril Scott, Balfour Gardiner, David Guion and even the Canadian-born African-American composer, Nathaniel Dett. But not Chopin or Beethoven!

Nowhere is Grainger’s Nordic partisanship more clearly expressed than in his commentary to the Grieg display in his Melbourne Museum. Its repeated refrain is,

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<sup>21</sup> Letter, Grainger to Ellen Bull, 23 October 1941, in Gillies and Pear, eds., *The All-Round Man*, pp. 182-5 (p. 184): “If the eyes are not blue or grey, the hair not golden, the skin not rosy, I do not count the man fully Nordic.”

<sup>22</sup> Grainger, “Aldridge-Grainger-Ström Saga”, pp. 119-121 (15 November 1933), in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 132-6 (p. 134).

<sup>23</sup> Pp. 119-121 (15 November 1933), in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 132-6 (p. 133).

<sup>24</sup> Grainger, “The Superiority of Nordic Music”, in Blacking, “*A Commonsense View*”, pp. 172-3. See also, “The Superiority of Nordic Music”, *Quest*, 7/2 (November 1937), 7-8

<sup>25</sup> Unpublished letter, Grainger to Ella Grainger, 7 March 1944 (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne).

“Thus does one Nordic composer help another!” That first “Nordic help”, Grainger acknowledges, as having come from his friend, the Danish composer and cellist, Herman Sandby. Through Sandby, Grieg had seen some of Grainger’s early choruses and so their first contact had been facilitated. The second “Nordic help” was from Grieg himself, who had helped Grainger to become “an international pianist overnight”.<sup>26</sup> A third help came also through Grieg, via his Dutch friend Julius Röntgen, whom Grainger had met at Trolldhaugen. Through Röntgen in Holland, Grainger felt, his concert career in Europe had been established in 1910. “Thus”, he concluded, “through Grieg I was freed from the misery of being a ‘society pianist’ in London and started to earn my way by serving the broad public rather than a narrow class.”

With such a glowing accolade to Grieg, his Nordic partisan, why is it that Grainger’s Museum commentary slides towards the conclusion that it would have been better had they never met? The answer lies partly in Grainger’s increasingly retrospective turn of mind as he grew older. After his mother’s death in 1922 he increasingly dwelt upon his earlier years, and their life together. In establishing his Melbourne Museum between 1934 and 1938 he opened up many old wounds and anxieties, some of which had their seeds in his Norwegian visit of 1907. These anxieties concerned Grainger’s musical priorities and the distribution of his many talents – an issue *always* of sensitivity for Grainger, and, in 1907, a matter of occasional disagreement between Grainger and his strong-willed mother. Although Grieg was never to know, the 1907 Trolldhaugen visit raised seminal questions for the insecure Grainger about what he did –and how good he was – in each of the domains of performance, composition and folk-music activity.

During the Trolldhaugen visit of 1907, Grainger was alert to every nuance of Grieg’s reception of his work. Grieg appeared to appreciate Grainger most as a pianist, particularly of Grieg’s own works. Indeed, in an article of 1926 Grainger claimed that Grieg only became friendly with him “because of my love for the least popular of his compositions”,<sup>27</sup> namely, some of the late piano pieces, which Grieg had first heard

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<sup>26</sup> Grainger, “Edvard Grieg & Percy Grainger”, Museum Legend.

<sup>27</sup> “Percy Grainger on Ideals”, *Australian Music News*, 15/11 (June 1926), 45, 47. See Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 225-7.

under Grainger's hands in London in 1906. Grieg, writing in his diary shortly after Grainger's departure from Troidhaugen, expressed the matter a little differently: "Even amongst *the very greatest pianists* I do not know one that I could compare with him," he confided, and explained that this was because Grainger "has actually realized my ideals of pianism".<sup>28</sup> Grainger's apprehensions, however, were several. Grieg appeared most to appreciate his playing of Chopin and Bach-Busoni, and was least appreciative when he played his own compositions. Moreover, Grainger felt inadequate when, in rehearsal of Grieg's own Concerto, Grieg asked if Grainger could play the octaves at the end of the first movement faster, as Grieg had heard Busoni do.<sup>29</sup> Grainger had to confess that he could not. This made Grainger realize that Grieg saw in him "somewhat of a Busoni". He added, however, "tho not a full Busoni".<sup>30</sup> Grainger's concern was further raised when Grieg referred to Grainger's "individual, unexpected renderings" of some of those very pieces that had brought them together in London, the Op. 66 Norwegian Folksongs. Grieg continued that, while being other than his intentions, these renderings pleased him as "*there is real personality*". The super-sensitive Grainger would, of course, immediately worry about "what the things are that I do other than his intentions."<sup>31</sup> To cap matters, the only letter he received from Grieg after the visit avoided any specific mention of pianism, devoting most of its three paragraphs to Grainger's compositional and folksong activities.<sup>32</sup>

If Grainger felt anxious about his pianism, he was in positive retreat as a composer as a result of his 1907 visit to the Griegs. He believed that Grieg had been side-tracked by his appreciation of Grainger the pianist, concluding four decades later: "Having found in me a flawless forth-herald of his op. 66 and op. 72 it went without

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<sup>28</sup> Grieg, diary entry for 5 August 1907, in Grainger's translation. See undated press release of 1934/5, "Grieg's Estimate of Percy Grainger", unpublished (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne).

<sup>29</sup> Grainger, "Grieg on Busoni's Lightning Octaves in Grieg Concerto" (1949), section 9, "Grainger's Anecdotes", in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 227-28.

<sup>30</sup> Grainger, "Grieg on Busoni's Lightning Octaves". Grainger's recollection here is probably coloured by a report in 1911 that Busoni, his former teacher, had called him a "charlatan" as a pianist. Grainger reflected in 1953 that "each of us had what the other lacked," meaning that Busoni was a charlatan as a composer. ("Busoni & P.G." (1953), section 42, "Grainger's Anecdotes", in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 253-8 (p. 257)).

<sup>31</sup> Grainger, "Doings & Sayings", entry for 31 July 1907, unpublished manuscript (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne)..

<sup>32</sup> Letter, Grieg to Grainger, 11 August 1907, in Finn Benestad, ed., *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends* (Columbus, Ohio: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), pp. 269-70.



saying that he [Grieg] would want to see me stick to pianism”.<sup>33</sup> But, for the Grainger of 1907, pianism was merely a means to a higher, *compositional* end, deliberately for the moment withheld until his pianistic career was more fully established. With hindsight, however, it is easy to see why Grieg would have appreciated the virile and steely pianist in Grainger rather than the experimental composer. During Grainger’s visit, as his diary shows, he initially introduced works of four sorts to Grieg: three Kipling settings; three Faeroe Island folksong settings, nineteen British folksong settings, two “music-hallish” tunes.<sup>34</sup> Virtually none of these had been performed in public and many were still very much “under development”. None, by the standards of the day, could be considered formally substantial, whatever their particular harmonic piquancies or melodic charms.<sup>35</sup> Grainger played, for instance, “a scrap only” of *Molly on the Shore*, one of his more effective folksong settings, which he had just arranged for piano as a birthday gift for his mother earlier that month.<sup>36</sup> These performances came with all the enthusiasm, freshness and naivety of Grainger’s recent folksong discoveries in the field – a passion that Grainger pursued with much greater gusto than Grieg. Hence, Grieg’s reported comment: “That is the difference between you & me in our approach to folksong. I am always a Romantiker & you are a scientist.”<sup>37</sup> The works that Grainger played to Grieg, then, showed only a little of the originality that Grainger, while still mainly a miniaturist, would later develop in form and texture. Despite Grieg’s early heralding of Grainger’s settings as a new way forward for English composition (and something “quite different from Elgar; *very* original”, as overheard and reported by Grainger<sup>38</sup>), the Australian also recorded that “G[rieg] makes a fuss that the harmonic wealth (‘so strange, yet so perfectly natural sounding’) in my settings was not turned to account in things wholly my own”<sup>39</sup>. But it was the word “strange” that Grainger remembered most, recording

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<sup>33</sup> Grainger, “Grieg’s Growing Fretfulness at My Tone-Works” (1949/52), section 10, “Grainger’s Anecdotes”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 190-3 (p. 192).

<sup>34</sup> See Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, pp. 1-2.

<sup>35</sup> See, further, the “overheard comments” reported by Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, entry for 25 July 1907.

<sup>36</sup> See Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, entry for 25 July 1907; Tom Lewis, *A Source Guide to the Music of Percy Grainger* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1991), p. 218.

<sup>37</sup> Grainger, “Grieg on His Romanticism, My Scientificness, re Folksong” (1952), section 13, “Grainger’s Anecdotes”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 250-1.

<sup>38</sup> Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, entry for 25 July 1907.

<sup>39</sup> Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, entry for 25 July 1907.

elsewhere in his diary of the visit that, on introducing two music-hall tunes to Grieg – “Badælia”<sup>40</sup> and “When I marry Amelia”<sup>41</sup> – Nina Grieg had commented, “they are so strange.” Grieg had answered flippantly with a rhyme: “They aren’t strange; they are Grainge’.”<sup>42</sup> Over four decades later, Grainger still remembered the word “strange”, now as Grieg’s response to his British folk music settings, but the sentence has become: “They are so strange, as if they came from China”.<sup>43</sup> For him, Grieg’s response to his passacaglia on an English tune, *Green Bushes*, was crucial. He had recently completed the work, in its original arrangement for small orchestra. After an initial hearing that both Grieg and Röntgen seemed to appreciate, Grainger had played it again to Grieg. Grainger’s diary entry records that Grieg “clearly suffers badly at the discordant working-up on the muted strings on towards the end” and concluded, “I don’t doubt but he shakes his inner head doubtingly over ‘Gr[een] B[ushe]s’.”<sup>44</sup> Herein lay Grainger’s problem. Everything he initially sought to present of his own to Grieg was a folksong setting, a music-hall tune or a Kipling setting – all works that could be considered less than substantial, and some even frivolous. Grainger seems to have realized this on the second day, as he recorded: “Then I fetch ‘Wamphray March’<sup>45</sup> to still a craving for something (presumably) all my own & bump it out. It seems to awaken unqualified liking & trust. G[rieg] says: ‘I like that best of all. Das ist ein grossartiges Stück. Frisch! etc.’”<sup>46</sup> But, to Grainger’s mind, the damage had already been done. Grieg had, Grainger believed, dismissed his composition (and his folk-music collecting) as “will-of-the-wisps, luring me away from my true path (pianism)”.<sup>47</sup> Writing this passage for his “Anecdotes” in 1949, Grainger confessed that the “unbroken fretfulness” that he had first observed in Grieg over *Green Bushes* had “spread to everything of my own that I played”, so much so that on resketching his “Soldier-Soldier” Kipling setting while still at Trolldhaugen he had “played nought of it to Grieg”.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “Bedelia”, from the Broadway show *The Jersey Lily* (1903) by Jean Schwartz.

<sup>41</sup> From *The Toreador* (1901), a comedy by Tanner and Nicholls, with music by Lionel Monckton.

<sup>42</sup> Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, entry for 31 July 1907. Pronounced “Grange”!

<sup>43</sup> Grainger, “Grieg’s Growing Fretfulness”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, p. 191.

<sup>44</sup> Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, entry for 26 July 1907.

<sup>45</sup> *Lads of Wamphray* (1904), originally a setting for men’s chorus and orchestra of a folk poem from Walter Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.

<sup>46</sup> Grainger, “Doings & Sayings”, entry for 26 July 1907.

<sup>47</sup> Grainger, “Grieg’s Growing Fretfulness”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, p. 192.

<sup>48</sup> Grainger, “Grieg’s Growing Fretfulness”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, p. 192.

Was Grainger correct about Grieg's view of his compositions? The most telling comment, of which Grainger was probably never aware, comes in Grieg's letter to the Russian, Alexander Siloti, on 16 August 1907.<sup>49</sup> Grieg comments that Grainger: "has the same absurd idea as you: he doesn't want to be a pianist, but – something else! In other words: 'Dort wo Du nicht bist, dort ist das Glück!'"<sup>50</sup>

That other great enthusiasm that Grainger brought to Trolldhaugen, for folksong collecting was also, it seemed to Grainger, unappreciated by Grieg, but not because of any perceived lack of skill. Grieg's diary entry of 5 August 1907 makes that very clear: "His work on folk music is of the greatest importance, since in him are combined musical excellence, skill in the science of comparative languages, historical and poetic vision, and a colossal enthusiasm for the task. And not only enthusiasm, but it would seem also a practical grip of the subject."<sup>51</sup> Grainger had promoted the virtues of the English Folksong Society during his visit, and tried to "rouse them all up to the idea of a Norweg. F. S. Soc."<sup>52</sup> Grieg wrote polite, but unconvincing, lines in his letter of 11 August 1907 to Grainger, about how impressed he was by "the seriousness and energy with which the English Folksong Society has set about its tasks".<sup>53</sup> Writing in 1952, however, Grainger highlighted Grieg's lack of sympathy with the peasants, quoting him as saying, "I wanted to like the peasants . . . But when the drinking bowl was handed around & I saw the stain of chewed tobacco on its rim, I just felt sickened." By contrast Grainger observed of himself that "I feel piously (worshippingly) towards the personalities of the country folk who have preserved folk-art for us thru the ages & consider no detail of their art-life & artistic point-of-view unworthy of preservation".<sup>54</sup> Grainger's perceptions of Grieg's stance to his folksong work were largely again correct. For one of such pianistic talents folksong collecting was a laudable, yet a peripheral, even distracting, activity. Grieg's diary entry of 5 August 1907 continued: "It seems to me that he [Grainger] will devote all his best powers to folk music, which I greatly regret, as it presupposes in him an

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<sup>49</sup> Letter, Grieg to Alexander Siloti, 16 August 1907, in Finn Benestad, ed., *Edvard Grieg: Letters to Colleagues and Friends*, p. 634.

<sup>50</sup> "Where you are not, there is happiness!", quoting Schubert's *Der Wanderer* (1816).

<sup>51</sup> David Monrad Johansen, *Edvard Grieg*, trans. Madge Robertson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1938), diary entry for 5 August 1907.

<sup>52</sup> Grainger, "Doings & Sayings", entry for 31 July 1907.

<sup>53</sup> Letter, Grieg to Grainger, 11 August 1907, in Nemeč, "The Grainger Museum", pp. 67-68 (p. 68).

<sup>54</sup> Grainger, "Grieg on his Romanticism", in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 250-51.

undervaluation of his pianistic qualities – an undervaluation that is only too apparent.”<sup>55</sup> Grieg’s punch line again came in a quotation, this time from Goethe: “Willst du immer weiter schweifen?”<sup>56</sup>

Grainger left Trolldhaugen on 4 August 1907 with doubts about Grieg’s valuations of *all* of his musical activities. Those doubts about his pianism were largely fantasies. Grieg’s regard remained undiminished, as his diary proves. Those about his composition and folksong activity had greater basis in fact, although about folksong Grieg did not doubt his aptitude for the task. By dying so soon afterwards, Grieg had no way of clarifying his position. For Grainger that was initially a relief. Grieg would never come to know about his “filthy playing” (as Grainger expressed it) and so would never realize that he had “picked the wrong horse”.<sup>57</sup> Nor would Grieg be able to contradict the playing tradition that Grainger laid for the Concerto, and crystallized in his edition of 1919-20 and the numerous recordings and countless performances over the next fifty-three years. In the long term, however, Grieg’s prompt demise simply fed Grainger’s nagging doubts about his own musical worth. Grieg, as no one before, had starkly raised the issue of both the absolute and the relative worths of Grainger’s three different musical tracks. And, in many ways, history initially bore out Grieg’s evaluations rather than Grainger’s youthful aspirations.

When Grieg’s diaries were finally published in 1934 in David Monrad Johansen’s biography,<sup>58</sup> the Australian’s brooding was only heightened. Those entries were, in one way, very welcome to Grainger. On many scores, they clarified Grieg’s innermost thoughts, and were very complimentary to Grainger. As if a proof to a hitherto unsolved problem had been produced, Grainger issued a self-congratulatory press release entitled “Grieg’s Estimate of Percy Grainger, *or* Grainger Mentioned in Grieg’s Diary, *or* New

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<sup>55</sup> In Grainger’s own translation, found in his unpublished press release of 1934/5 entitled “Grieg’s Estimate of Percy Grainger” (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne); Finn Benestad and William H. Halverson, eds., *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches* (Columbus, Ohio: Peer Gynt Press, 2001), diary entry for 5 August 1907 (p. 194) gives the translation: “It looks as if he wants to devote all of his best efforts to the folk song – which I very much regret, for it presupposes an underestimate of his qualifications as a pianist, which he demonstrates all too clearly.”

<sup>56</sup> “Will you always roam yet farther?” (Goethe), diary entry for 5 August 1907.

<sup>57</sup> Grainger, “Grieg on Busoni’s Lightning Octaves”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 227-8 (p. 227).

<sup>58</sup> David Monrad Johansen, *Edvard Grieg* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1934).

Proofs of What Grieg Thought of Grainger”.<sup>59</sup> He provided his own translations of Grieg’s Norwegian texts. Yet, he later referred to “this grief I tholed (endured) at his [Grieg’s] hands as a tone-wright [composer]”.<sup>60</sup> By his late middle-age, Grainger knew that he had neither managed to create a reputation as a composer of substantial works, nor fulfilled Grieg’s high expectations of him as a pianist.

Clearly, as the decades passed, Grieg’s opinions still mattered greatly to the growingly introspective Grainger. In a classic essay of self-doubt, “The Things I Dislike” of 1954, Grainger, now aged seventy-two, concluded that “in my life almost everything has happened as it shouldn’t have. This is due to my having behaved badly to others, & others having behaved badly to me.”<sup>61</sup> His lack of achievement, by then, even had Nordic roots. Back in 1941 he had seen himself as trapped by “this drift towards meanness & smallness [that] is the race-disease of the whole Nordic race”.<sup>62</sup> In warning his friend Cyril Scott not to write only “small ‘potboilers’”, he quoted Grieg as saying to him, “Always hold to big issues where you can. Do not do as I did: always clinging on to everything that is small – letting the big things escape.”<sup>63</sup> This appears to be a reinterpretation of something Grieg had written to Grainger in a letter of 30 June 1907, shortly before the Troidhaugen visit – “Just take care that you choose what is intrinsically important and do not allow yourself to be caught by what is unimportant – as I, unfortunately, so often have done.”<sup>64</sup> In this letter to Scott, Grainger admitted his failure as a composer, through not having written works of the size of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*, or a Wagner opera or a Brahms symphony. But he excused himself by interpreting all works before his mid-1930s experiments with “Free Music”<sup>65</sup> as mere

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<sup>59</sup> Grainger, unpublished press release from 1934/35, undated (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne).

<sup>60</sup> Grainger, “Grieg on Busoni’s Lightning Octaves” (1949), in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 227-8 (p. 228).

<sup>61</sup> Grainger, section 87, “Grainger’s Anecdotes”, in Gillies, Pear and Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait*, pp. 149-60 (p. 153).

<sup>62</sup> Letter, Grainger to Cyril Scott, 17 June 1941, in Gillies and Pear, eds., *The All-Round Man*, pp. 170-4 (p. 171-2).

<sup>63</sup> Letter, Grainger to Cyril Scott, 17 June 1941, in Gillies and Pear, eds., *The All-Round Man*, p. 172.

<sup>64</sup> Letter, Grieg to Grainger, 30 June 1907, in Nemeč, “The Grainger Museum”, vol. 2, p. 67.

<sup>65</sup> Grainger’s attempt to create a music free from the fixed steps of pitch and rhythm. His *Free Music No. 1* for strings, later for theremins, dates from 1934. See Grainger, “Free Music” (1938), in Gillies and Clunies Ross, eds., *Grainger on Music*, pp. 293-4.

orchestration studies, not his “mature muse”.<sup>66</sup> Yet, Grainger would write few works after that letter to Scott of 1941, and his “Free Music” would remain just an experiment, rapidly to be overtaken by advances in electronic music. At the end of his 1957 *Musical Times* tribute to Grieg, Grainger again quoted those lines of Grieg about holding to what is intrinsically important.<sup>67</sup> The implication was clear. Grieg had seen many injustices, had failed to take up many opportunities, even by his own admission, but he had still prevailed. Grainger believed that, by contrast, he himself had not.

For Grainger, there was one further psychological twist. His desire for “impersonalness” was deep and related to his genuine aspiration to be a standard-bearer for the Nordic race rather than a superficial artist of “individuality” and “personality”. Writing to the Scottish critic, D.C. Parker, in 1951 he commented: “I never wanted to be a ‘popular’ composer – not even to the extent that Grieg is. I wanted to be a studious composer, a painstaking folklorist, an innovator, a hard-working universalist *without a style or a bent of my own*.”<sup>68</sup> This desire for impersonalness also related to his role as “Grieg-honorer”,<sup>69</sup> and keeper of the faith that Grieg had bestowed in him. Grainger came to realize the burden of being the publicly acknowledged recipient of Grieg’s watch and chain, for who would see him as impartial, as more than a self-interested opportunist?<sup>70</sup> Grainger had wanted to be Grieg’s prophet, but instead the reverse had occurred. Grieg had become *his* prophet, and he only the protégé. “So, in a sense, it would have been better if I had never met the Griegs, sweet and dear though they were to me.”<sup>71</sup> But, would it *really* have been better if Grainger and the Griegs had never met?

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<sup>66</sup> Letter, Grainger to Cyril Scott, 17 June 1941, in Gillies and Pear, eds., *The All-Round Man*, p. 172.

<sup>67</sup> Grainger, “Edvard Grieg: A Tribute”, *Musical Times*, 98 (1957), 482-3.

<sup>68</sup> Unpublished letter, Grainger to D.C. Parker, 23 September 1951 (Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne).

<sup>69</sup> See Grainger, “Nina Grieg’s Clever Naughtiness”.

<sup>70</sup> See Grainger, “Nina Grieg’s Clever Naughtiness”.

<sup>71</sup> Percy Grainger, “Edvard Grieg & Percy Grainger”, *Museum Legend*.