

**Lionel Carley:**

## **Percy Grainger's promotion of Grieg**

Current work on a book on Grieg's relations with British musicians on the concert tours that he undertook in England has led this writer to take a sideways glance at the friendship the Norwegian composer enjoyed near the end of his life with the Australian-born, but London-based pianist and composer Percy Grainger. This diversion has resulted in the publication of two essays on the friendship, the first of which specifically chronicles for the first time Grainger's ten-day visit to Trolldhaugen in 1907 (see *Studia Musicologica Norvegica*, 25, Oslo 1999), with the second outlining the overall course of Grainger's interest in Grieg and his music, from the time it was first encountered at home in Melbourne - when as a boy he would hear his music-teacher mother play many of Grieg's earlier piano pieces - until well beyond Grieg's death (see *The Grieg Companion*, 5, London 2000).

Grainger emigrated to America in 1914 and was to take out US citizenship some four years later. The house at White Plains in New York State that he bought in 1921 gradually filled up with mementoes of his musical career, enthusiastically collected during many of his many world-wide concert-tours. In the 1930's he conceived the idea of erecting a museum to house his various acquisitions, and negotiations with the University of Melbourne resulted in the acceptance by the university authorities of his offer to build such an institution on the Melbourne campus. Ever-conscious of the importance, as he saw it, of ensuring a place among immortals for his composer friends (no less than for himself), he collected their scores, both printed and autograph, often with their own (and/or his own) performance markings, their letters and other documents, and, more idiosyncratically, items of their clothing and other personal memorabilia. He even willed his own skeleton to the museum. This, however was a gift - following his death in 1961 - that the university declined to accept.

Although the house at White Plains, preserved with much of the furniture and effects with which Grainger and his Swedish-born wife Ella lived, remains a subsidiary memorial to the composer and still, too, contains much that is of musicological interest, the more significant holdings that remained after Ella's death in 1980 ultimately passed into the Melbourne collection, in accordance with Grainger's will. The result is that most of the items relating to Edvard and Nina Grieg are now in Australia - a considerable distance to travel for Grieg scholars who might wish to search at first hand for little-known material relating to the Norwegian composer.

The Grieg collection includes a number of objects, such as the ivory napkin ring given by Grieg on Grainger's last day at Trolldhaugen "*so that you may come again*", as well as Grieg's gold watch and chain, together with its original case, given by Nina after Grieg's death ("*keep it and never forget him*") - these together with a number of items of lesser importance. Grieg's and Nina's letters are also there (usually with Grainger's own translations of them into English), as are typescripts of Grainger's letters to the Griegs.

Many of the published scores used by Grieg during his final London performances in 1906, and containing his own performance markings, are among the more important items in Melbourne's Grieg holdings. And there are several printed Grieg scores that the composer presented and inscribed to Grainger either in London that year or at Trolldhaugen in 1907.

Between 1920 and 1945 Grainger himself published (with Schott, Peters or Schirmer) a number of his own editions of Grieg's music, the most significant probably being a two-piano version of *the A minor Concerto* containing emendations to the original score made when Grainger studied and rehearsed the work with Grieg in preparation for the Leeds Festival of 1907, at which Grieg was to conduct and Grainger to play the solo part. In this arrangement, Grainger carefully documents Grieg's own late changes and those that he himself had made with Grieg's approval. There is also an edition, made by Grainger in September 1944 and published the following year, of the 'main themes and episodes' of the first movements of the Concerto - this for piano alone.

Then there is Grainger's edition of Grieg's *Norwegian Bridal Procession*. This was a work that their mutual friend Delius had orchestrated in 1889 - the only example of Delius ever arranging a complete work of any other composer. Grainger's edition is for solo piano, and it includes a long and highly detailed essay on how Grieg's piece originally came about, together with detailed directions as to how it should be performed. Various Grainger sources tell us of unpublished MSS: in 1898 orchestral arrangements of three of the *Lyric Pieces*, Opus 12 (nos. 2, 5 and 4, in that order), and in 1921 a two-piano arrangement of *Knut Luråsens halling* no. 2. Then comes a real curiosity: an abortive attempt to orchestrate the *Piano Sonata in E-minor* towards the end of 1944. Grainger initially made a set of orchestral parts for the first sixteen bars (a title-page identifying the work as "*Grieg-Grainger Symphony*"), and a few days later he started on a full score - labelled "*Conductor's Score*" - which then failed to get past the first nine bars. Why he began and indeed why he did not finish this abortive work remains a mystery. Grainger also edited and published, with his own English translations, the *Album for Male Chorus*, Opus 30, and the *Four Psalms*, Opus 74. Other translations that he made from Grieg were of *Den Bergtekne* (The Mountain Thrall) Opus 32 - this under Grieg's supervision - and of just one song *De Norske Fjelde* (The Norwegian Mountains) Opus 61, no. 6.

Grainger consistently championed Grieg's music on concert platforms around the world, but his championship took yet another form in the various essays and less formal writings that he published over the years, from an appreciation in London's "*Musical Times*" two months after Grieg's death to a second memorial tribute in that same journal fifty years later. The longest piece he wrote on Grieg was spaced over four issues of the American magazine "*The Etude*", celebrating the centenary of Grieg's birth in 1943.

A final, and more personal area of his interest in the Griegs is contained in the unpublished memoranda that Grainger jotted down at different times throughout his adult life, sometimes in the form of diary notes, at other times in the form of memoirs and anecdotes. Among this wealth of musico-historical material there is much that relates to the friendship with the Griegs. It is often frankly and directly expressed and snatches of

remembered conversation are often recorded verbatim. As might have been expected, much of this material is complimentary to Grieg himself, revealing, as it does, many of the Norwegian composer's feelings about his music, his friends, and his views on specific issues. Taken together with the manuscript diary that Grainger wrote up after his visit to Trolldhaugen, such material merits closer contemplation by Grieg scholars.

Grainger met Nina many times in the years following Grieg's death, in Norway, in Denmark and in England, and his notes demonstrate some perceptive insights into her character, not all of which are as complimentary as in the case of her late husband. She certainly spoke briefly and frankly to Grainger about the ups and downs of her marriage ("*Edvard and I lived like cat and dog. We were both so unfaithful and both so jealous*"), and sometimes - to Grainger's evident surprise - she would speak unkindly of mutual friends, questioning, for example Johan Halvorsen's competence as a conductor and Julius Röntgen's ability as a composer. And when, on one particular occasion, a large-scale reception was held in Grainger's honour in Kristiania, he was disturbed at the bad mood in which he found her and guessed that it may have been due to jealousy that she relegated to a place in the background while he himself took centre stage.

Nevertheless, the positives were greater than the negatives. Whatever else, Grainger notes, she had been the right wife for Grieg. And that, from the point of view of the support that Grieg had so much needed as a composer, was all that really mattered.

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