

The Music of  
Percy Grainger  
Vol. 1



*University of Houston Wind Ensemble*  
*Eddie Green, Conductor*

## Percy Grainger (1882-1961)

Percy Grainger was born a British subject. He is listed in most reference books as an American composer born in the colony of Victoria, Australia on the 8th of July, 1882. He left his native Australia at the age of 13 and only returned for an occasional concert tour of family visit. Because of the limited time he spent on his native soil, some Australians might be slow to claim him as one of their national composers, yet Grainger maintained an exceptional emotional attachment to his Australia and believed the influence the country had on his music was profound and life-long. Although he made his name as a pianist, he gave his first public recital at the age of 10. He was in fact the first Australian-born composer to achieve international recognition. George Percy Grainger took his mother's family name Aldridge shortly after her suicide in 1922. Their relationship, which can only be described as an obsessive devotion, has been documented in several books, the most perceptive being John Bird's biography published by Faber and Faber in 1982 (sadly out of print).

Percy was a renowned pianist who detested concertizing, a virtuoso who despised virtuosity, and a vegetarian who didn't like vegetables. In 1917, Grainger enlisted in the U.S. Army as G.P. Grainger, Musician Second Class, and played oboe and saxophone in the Fort Hamilton, South Brooklyn band. He described this as "the happiest time in my life" for as a virtually anonymous enlisted man, he escaped the pressures of public recognition concertizing brought him. In an interview with the band director at the University of Texas on 24 May, 1948, he was asked how American Bands compared to European bands, particularly the French "which are known for their virtuosity." Grainger responded quickly, "Oh! I'm sorry to hear that. I don't like virtuosity." He was a preeminent collector of folk songs yet boasted that he never used a folk song in an "original work." On more than one occasion he stated that he didn't really care for folk music . . . he much preferred the music of Bach and early music composers. Grainger made a poor vegetarian eschewing vegetables and preferring to eat oatmeal, hard tack and buttermilk. His bland diet didn't seem to have a deleterious effect on him, though, since he lived a physically robust life until the late 1950s, when he began to experience stomach pains that were later diagnosed as cancer. He died on February 20, 1961 four months short of his seventy-ninth birthday.

Grainger's standing among twentieth-century music as a relative unknown is difficult to explain. He was among the first to use irregular rhythms and meters (before Stravinsky by some ten years), he experimented with electronic music before Varese, and conceived aleatoric or "free" music before the turn of the century. The explanation is perhaps in his use of a basically nineteenth-century harmonic palette as suggested by Keith Brion, or his "lack of compositions in large scale symphonic forms, and his popular reputation as an extraordinary but eccentric pianist and arranger of folk music." Often Grainger is regarded as a minor composer for no other reason than the length of his compositions. Granted he did not write a symphony or concerto and his only "ballet" is for imaginary dancers, yet we must judge Grainger's music by more than length. He is a minor composer when comparing the time it takes to perform his works to that of his contemporaries, but beyond this, his compositions are masterpieces of no less quality.

## Program Notes

### **I. Molly on the Shore**

*Molly on the Shore* in Grainger's words "was originally set for string four-some [string quartet] or string band in the summer of 1907. It was also set for symphony orchestra, theatre orchestra, and violin and piano early in 1914. [It is] based on two Cork Reel tunes, 'Temple Hill' and 'Molly on the Shore,' respectively Nos. 901 and 902 of *The Complete Petrie Collection of Ancient Irish Music* [Dublin, 1855] edited by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford." Molly was "dished up" for band in 1920. It is one of the key works in which Grainger's popularity has never waned. It is a marvelously clear example of scoring and at the original metronome marking between 126 and 144, it remains a concert show piece.

## 2. - 7. **Lincolnshire Posy** (movements I - VI)

John Bird Grainger's biographer, wrote in an article entitled "Grainger on Record," for the reference book *The Percy Grainger Companion* (edited by Lewis Foreman, Thames Publishing, 1981), that Grainger's essay "To Conductors" "should be compulsory reading for anyone embarking on a performance of his music." The Program-Note on *Lincolnshire Posy* should be required reading for any musician. To this day, Grainger's words ring true:

Why this cold-shouldering of the wind band by most composers? Is the wind band—with its varied assortments of reeds (so much richer than the reeds of the symphony orchestra), its complete saxophone family that is found nowhere else (to my ears the saxophone is the most expressive of all wind instruments—the one closest to the human voice. And surely all musical instruments should be rated according to their tonal closeness to man's own voice!), its array of brass (both wide-bore and narrow-bore)—not the equal of any medium ever conceived? As a vehicle of *deeply emotional* expression it seems to me, unrivalled.

'Lincolnshire Posy,' as a whole work, was conceived and scored by me direct for wind band early in 1937. Five, out of six, movements of which it is made up, existed in no other finished form, [the exception for Grainger] though most of these movements [as in the case with almost all my compositions and settings, for whatever medium], were indebted, more or less, to unfinished sketches for a variety of mediums covering many years (in this case the sketches date from 1905 to 1937). These indebtednesses are stated in the scores.

The bunch of 'musical wildflowers' (hence the title 'Lincolnshire Posy') is based on folksongs collected in Lincolnshire, [pronounced Lincoln-sure] England (one noted by Miss Lucy E. Broadwood; the other five noted by me, mainly in the years 1905-1906, and with the help of the phonograph), and the work is dedicated to the old folksingers who sang so sweetly to me. Indeed, each number is intended to be a kind of musical portrait of the singers who sang its underlying melody—a musical portrait of the singer's personality no less than of his habits of song—his regular or irregular wonts of rhythm, his preference for gaunt or ornately arabesqued delivery, his contrasts of legato and staccato, his tendency towards breathy or delicacy of tone . . . these folksingers were kings and queens of song!

These musical portraits of my folksingers were tone-painted in a mood of considerable bitterness at memories of the cruel treatment meted out to folksingers as human beings (most of them died in poorhouses or in other down-heartening surroundings) and at the thought of how their high gifts oftenest were allowed to perish unheard, unrecorded and unhonoured.

In Grainger's "notes" he describes each singer with emotional outpourings deep from within his soul. His admiration was for the singers—not the songs—yet the beauty of each singer is heard in the splendid, sensitive and innovative scoring. Many consider *Lincolnshire Posy* as Grainger's masterpiece, and rightfully so. Its quality is unmatched in the wind band repertoire.

## 8. **Colonial Song**

*Colonial Song* is an original and Grainger adheres to his policy of using no folk tunes in his original compositions. The *Colonial Song* is intended to reflect the people and scenery of his native Australia, in fact, he wished to convey an "emotion . . . of native born colonials in general." Grainger wrote:

Perhaps it is not unnatural that people living more or less alone in vast virgin countries and struggling against natural and climactic hardships (rather than against the more actively and dramatically exciting counter wills of their fellow men, as in more thickly populated lands) should run largely to that patiently yearning, inactive sentimental wishfulness that we find so touchingly expressed in much American art; for instance in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and in Stephen Foster's songs . . . I have also noticed curious almost Italian-like, musical tendencies in brass band performances and ways of singing in Australia (such as a preference for richness and intensity of tone and soulful breadth of phrasing over more subtly and sensitively varied delicacies of expression) which are also reflected here.

The original version of *Colonial Song* was presented to his mother as a Yule gift in 1911, and the band arrangement was presented to her in 1918. It is number one of a planned series of works entitled "Sentimentales." Only two works exist.

## 9. Blithe Bells

*Blithe Bells* is a Free Ramble on J.S. Bach's aria *Schafe Können sicher weiden, wo ein guter Hirte wacht* . . . from the Secular Cantata BWV 208 *Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd*. "The ramble," Grainger wrote "[is] for George H. Greenwood in friendship and worth-prize-ment. Set, Nov. 1930 - Feb. 1931, for 15 or more single instruments, or for elastic scoring." Grainger had a passion for the music of Bach and earlier composers. Keith Brion remarked on the similarities between *Blithe Bells* and the quotational compositions of Charles Ives, "Grainger's treatment of Bach's *Sheep May Safely Graze* is pure Grainger . . . in fact, rather than being quotational the music sounds as if Grainger has swallowed Bach, digested him and by some mysterious and rather delicious process, both composers emerge as equals—with a tiny dash of George Gershwin for seasoning." The edition used was scored during March, 1931 for band. In 1983, Keith Brion compiled an edition and reconstructed twenty parts. Since then, the additional parts have been found. Grainger's original setting remains in manuscript.

## 10. Irish Tune from County Derry

Grainger wrote:

The Tune was collected by Miss J. [Jane] Ross of New Town, Limavady County Derry (Ireland) and printed in *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland* by Stanford on page 57 of which collection the following remarks by George Petrie go before the tune, which is headed: 'Name unknown':

For the following beautiful air I have to express my very grateful acknowledgement to Miss J. Ross, of New Town, Limavady, in the County of Londonderry—a lady who has made a large collection of the popular unpublished melodies of the county, which she has very kindly placed at my disposal, and which had added very considerable to the stock of tunes which I had previously acquired from that still very Irish county. I say still very Irish, for though it has been planted for more than two centuries by English and Scottish settlers, the old Irish race still forms the great majority of its peasant inhabitants; and there are few, if any countries in which, with less foreign admixture, the ancient melodies of the country have been so extensively preserved. The name of the tune unfortunately was not ascertained by Miss Ross, who sent it to me with the simple remark that it was 'very old,' in the correctness of which statement I have no hesitation in expressing my perfect concurrence.

## 11. Shepherd's Hey

*Shepherd's Hey* is an English Morris dance tune that was scored for band in 1918. It was the result of the time Grainger spent as an enlisted musician in the U.S. Army. It was a time Grainger referred to as "the happiest time of my life." This work follows Karl Klimesch's (the German composer Grainger studied with in Frankfurt between 1896 and 1901) philosophy of composition: "If you have no theme or melody in your melodic inspiration runs out stop your piece. No prelude, no interlude, no postlude, just the pith of the music all the time." Grainger indicated on the score that "This setting is not suitable to dance Morris dances to." The word "Hey" in the title is a particular movement in Morris dancing.

## 12. "The Duke of Marlborough" Fanfare

Grainger dedicated "*The Duke of Marlborough*" Fanfare "lovingly and reverently" "to the memory of Edvard Grieg," as were all of his British folk music settings, and wrote:

My fanfare (written March 5-6, 1939, at Coral Gables, Florida) is based on the English folksong 'The Duke of Marlborough' as collected by Miss Lucy E. Broadwood from the singing of Henry Burstow (of Horsham, Sussex, England) - one of the very finest of all English folksingers. In my setting the tune is heard twice. The first time (behind the platform) it typifies memories of long-past wars - vague, far-off, poetic. The second time (on the platform) it typifies war in the present - fast-moving, close at hand, debonair, drastic."

Percy Grainger's '*Duke of Marlborough*' Fanfare takes its inspiration from an 18th-century broadside ballad probably written relatively close to the event it portrays - namely the Battle of Ramillies (1706) between the English and French.

In the ballad the duke lies 'on a bed of sickness, . . . resigned to die'. He thinks back on his deeds of valor and in his imagination exhorts 'you generals all and champions bold' to 'stand true,' as he had done in the past:

We clim'ed those lofty hills away,  
With broken guns, shields likewise;  
And all those famous towns we took,  
To all the world's surprise...

The sun was down, the earth did shake,  
And I so loud did cry,  
'Fight on, my lads, for England's sake,  
We'll gain the field or die...

In majestic, long-measured tune of this ballad is said to be quite unlike the general style of an English folk song, being together more artfully conceived. One would suppose that it took its origin in the 'polite' tradition of the formally composed music heard in English pleasure gardens and playhouses of the early Georgian era. Grainger's dissonant harmonies are much in keeping with the stridency of its military theme."  
(Stewart Manville, White Plains, New York)

### 13. Country Gardens

Between 1949-1950, Grainger rescored several of his most popular compositions for an orchestral recording conducted by Leopold Stokowski. One of them was a completely new and inventive version of *Country Gardens*. In this version, the folk tune is restored to the order which Cecil Sharp notated, as opposed to the form of Grainger's original piano solo version. While Grainger had earlier composed several settings of this piece, he did not score it for band until May 1953, when he made a setting of the version he had prepared for Stokowski. Ironically, it proved to be one of Grainger's last works for band, and was not published until 1990. While the scoring demonstrates the composer in his full maturity, the approach is quite different from the earlier settings. Colors are more transparent, the percussion are used to their best effect, and the blendings carefully elicit optimum contrasts. The setting is autobiographical. Grainger seized the opportunity presented by Stokowski to fashion an ironic, jolly/bitter personal statement. His last *Country Gardens* is both frolic and harshly biting satire. A few well-placed wrong notes show the pain he associated with his music. Near the end, the composer (via the trombones) conclusively sticks out his tongue at the world, and then quietly fades away. (Dana Perna, Syosset, New York)

### 14. The Power of Rome and the Christian Heart

Grainger described his thoughts concerning this work as follows:

Just as the early Christians found themselves in conflict with the power of ancient Rome so, at all times and places, the Individual Conscience is apt to feel itself threatened or coerced by the Forces of Authority—and especially in wartime. Men who hate killing are forced to be soldiers, and other men, though not unwilling to be soldiers, are horrified to find themselves called upon to fight in the ranks of their enemies. The sight of young recruits doing bayonet practice in the First World War gave me the first impulse to this composition which, however, is not in any sense program music and does not portray the drama of actual events. It is merely the unfolding of musical feelings that were started by thoughts of the eternal agony of the Individual Soul in conflict with the Powers That Be.

Program notes compiled by Leroy Osmon (Houston, Texas, May 1992)



Leroy Osmon, Noe Marmolejo, Rolf Stang



Conductor Eddie Green  
During a recording session

# University of Houston Wind Ensemble

## Piccolo

Pablo Ocañas Houston, TX

## Flute

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Laurel, NE

Kim Easley Lake Jackson, TX

Elizabeth A. Rose

Clear Lake City, TX

Laura Lucas Pasadena, TX

Krista Carothers

Corpus Christi, TX

Melissa Guerra Humble, TX

## Oboe

Drue E. Terry Pasadena, TX

Thad Coverdale Massillon, OH

Vanessa G. Collier Alvin, TX

## English Horn

Vanessa G. Collier Alvin, TX

## Bassoon

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Mary Ellen Henderson

Sugar Land, TX

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Tamra L. Faulk Houston, TX

Jo Lena Trout Groveton, TX

Gloria Martinez Pasadena, TX

Michelle Dupree Alvin, TX

Amy Anderson

Clear Lake City, TX

Veronica Duran Houston, TX

Cathy Switzer Deer Park, TX

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Michelle Haynes Texas City, TX

Chad Collins Humble, TX

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Jason Whitmore Sante Fe, TX

## Alto Saxophone

Steve Silva El Paso, TX

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Kristina Levias Beaumont, TX

## Baritone Saxophone

Jason Whitmore Sante Fe, TX

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Kristi Daley Baytown, TX

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Scott Thornton Richardson, TX

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Keely Fitch Pearland, TX

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Jon McDonald Houston, TX

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Percy Grainger with unidentified child during the summer of 1948 or 1949  
at The National Music Camp in Michigan.



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|---|-------|
| 1. Molly on the Shore<br>Lincolnshire Posy  | 4:09  |
| 2. I. "Lisbon" (Sailor's Song)  | 1:31  |
| 3. II. "Horkstow Grange" (The Miser and His Man: A Local Tragedy)                                 | 2:56  |
| 4. III. "Rufford Park Poachers" (Poaching Song)   | 4:28  |
| 5. IV. "The Brisk Young Sailor" (Returned to Wed His True Love)                                   | 1:46  |
| 6. V. "Lord Melbourne" (War Song)   | 3:18  |
| 7. VI. "The Lost Lady Found" (Dance Song)   | 2:31  |
| 8. Colonial Song  | 5:45  |
| 9. Blithe Bells   | 5:15  |
| 10. Irish Tune from County Derry  | 4:04  |
| 11. Shepherd's Hey  | 2:05  |
| 12. "The Duke of Marlborough" Fanfare ("The British War Mood Grows.")<br>Noe Marmolejo, Conductor | 2:24  |
| 13. Country Gardens (1953)<br>(Recorded live, San Antonio, TX., T.M.E.A. February 11, 1986)       | 2:15  |
| 14. The Power of Rome and the Christian Heart<br>(Recorded live, Pasadena, TX., October 27, 1986) | 12:14 |

