

PERCY GRAINGER – PIANO PEDAGOGUE

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Paper presented for the 5th Singapore International Piano Pedagogy Symposium,
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore

Wednesday, June 22, 2011

This paper explores the pianism and teaching of Percy Grainger that reflect both a style of training based on teaching principles of the late nineteenth century, as well as an individuality of approach to the keyboard that is the hallmark of all great piano geniuses. Many of Grainger's highly individual piano techniques, as well as his musical philosophies, are equally valid in today's teaching environment and can form the basis of creating unique, inspired and thoughtful technique and musicianship.

This paper is submitted for publication in the 5th Singapore International Piano Pedagogy Symposium 2011 (June 20-24) Proceedings

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Introduction

Percy Aldridge Grainger was one of the most celebrated pianists of the early twentieth century. He was later to become Australia's first internationally recognised composer. Born in Melbourne, Australia in 1882, his early piano studies were with his mother Rose Grainger, then with Louis Pabst¹ (1892-94) and briefly with Miss Adelaide Burkitt² (1894-95). At the age of 12 after many successful fund-raising concerts in Melbourne, Grainger, together with his mother, sailed to Frankfurt, Germany, where the 13 year-old Percy would study piano with James Kwast and composition with Ivan Knorr at the Hoch Conservatorium. In Frankfurt, the young Grainger mixed with a group of other young British composers, namely Cyril Scott, H. Balfour Gardiner, Roger Quilter and Norman O'Neill, who collectively became known as the Frankfurt Gang. From 1901 Grainger pursued a successful international concert career based from London, before heading to the United States of America in 1914, where he became an American citizen and joined the US army as a bandsman. America remained Grainger's home for the rest of his life. Grainger died in White Plains, New York in 1961.

¹ Louis Pabst – German pianist (b. 1846), former student of Anton Rubinstein, son of composer Auguste Pabst. Moved to Melbourne 1884, returning to Europe in 1894. See John Bird. *Percy Grainger*. (Currency Press, Sydney, 1998), p.23

² Student of Pabst, who took on most of Pabst's students when he returned to Europe.

Grainger is justly remembered today as one of the finest arrangers of folk-songs of his era³ and he saw it as one of his musical missions to try to preserve, what remained of a rapidly declining folk-song tradition. He made several extended trips around the British Isles, as well as in Denmark and Norway, collecting and transcribing folk songs, that he would get the locals – often quite elderly – to sing for him. Whilst he considered himself primarily a folk-song arranger and a composer of original music, Grainger's initial successes were as one of the most successful and sought-after concert pianists of his era. His reputation was garnered through performing the works of Bach, Schumann Chopin, Brahms, Grieg, Debussy and the like, rather than through performing his own music.⁴ His unique playing style naturally translated effortlessly into his own highly individual piano compositions and justly celebrated folk-song arrangements. So distinctive is Grainger's compositional style, it is often said that scores of his music are visually the most instantly recognisable of any composer.

Grainger – Music Educator

Alongside performing, conducting and composing careers, Percy Grainger pursued a keen interest in music education, publishing numerous articles, essays and broadcasting on a range of musical subjects related to music education. Many, but not all, of these articles and publications relate of course specifically to piano playing. Of particular interest to the piano student are Grainger's published editions of works by

³ Interestingly there was minimal contact between Grainger and his counter-part Hungarian Bela Bartók. Though their ethnomusicological aims were similar, their folk-song arrangements are vastly different in style. This of course relates partly, but not exclusively, to the nature of the folk music that they collected.

⁴ A collected edition of Grainger's complete 78-rpm solo recordings from 1908-1945 has just been reissued by Appian, (London, 5 CDs). APR7501

other composers, which provide detailed notes on pedalling, fingering and tone production.⁵

Grainger began teaching piano privately soon after arriving in London in 1901 and continued to do so for much of his career, though it was never to dominate his working life. He did however give masterclasses regularly at several summer schools, notably at the Chicago Musical College (1919-30) and at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan (1937-44). Grainger was also Head of the Music Department at New York University, also lecturing in composition during the academic year 1932/33.

Grainger and the Piano – The Middle Pedal

All accounts of Grainger as a teacher stress the importance that he placed on pedalling, and there can be little doubt that it was his advice on this aspect of piano technique that formed the most valuable and unquestionable part of his teaching⁶. This can be seen throughout Grainger's many editions of published music, in his own scores and in the numerous annotated scores that he used for his own performances or for teaching that are currently housed in the Grainger Museum, at the University of Melbourne.⁷

⁵ See Bibliography: Edited works by Grainger

⁶ John Douglas Todd, 'Grainger the Pianist' *Studies in Music*, No 16 (1982), p.105

⁷ The Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne holds a large collection of these annotated scores which were largely prepared during 1920 and 1921 for Mrs Lotte Hough, Grainger's teaching assistant during these years.

Whilst Grainger's thoughts on the use of the left and right pedals are interesting, and the detail in which he notated these in his own piano works is extremely helpful to performers today, it is his advocacy for the use of the middle pedal that remains of most interest to us today.

'The growing realization of the advantages to be derived from the liberal use of the sustaining (or "sostenuto" or "middle") pedal has in recent years developed, extended and perfected piano playing more than any other single factor; so much so that in the near future a pianist not availing himself of the advantages of this truly wonderful American invention⁸ will be as much an anachronism as is today a pianist making no use of the damper pedal ... Enlightened pianists employ the sustaining pedal, and I would strongly advise all pianists hitherto unfamiliar with its mechanic to acquire the "sustaining pedal habit" as soon as possible'⁹

The possible uses of the middle pedal are many and varied. For Grainger however, its principal function is that of 'raising ... (the) standard of harmonic cleanliness'.¹⁰

Furthermore,

'The object of a lavish use of the sustaining pedal is the attainment of greater tonal clarity, and the result of this clarification is a strong influence in the direction of refinement and subtlety of performance, purging the student's playing of "banging" no less than of "blurring," if rightly applied and understood.'¹¹

In its most basic function Grainger employs the middle pedal to sustain a single-note pedal point below a harmonically changing texture. Here in Grainger's

⁸ The middle pedal, as we know it today, was first invented by Montal in 1862, though the idea behind it had been first mooted and experimented with in the 1840s by the French firm Blanchet et Roller. This device was improved upon, if not perfected, to a stage whereby in 1874 the American firm Steinway and Sons was able to patent the middle (or 'sostenuto') pedal for square pianos. One year later patents were taken out for upright and grand pianos.

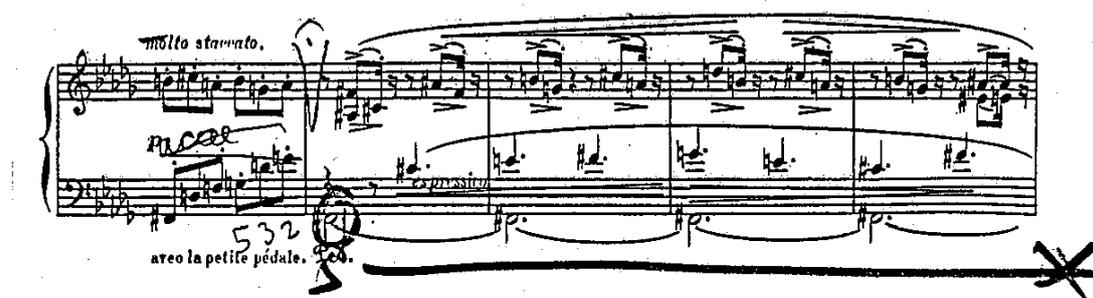
⁹ Norwegian Bridal Procession: Master Lesson by Percy Grainger' *The Etude*, Vol. 38 No 11, (Nov. 1920), p 742. Recently re-published in *Piano Lessons in the Grand Style From the Golden Age of The Etude Music Magazine*, (Dover, ed. J. Johnson (2003).

¹⁰ *Guide to Virtuosity*, (New York: G.Schirmer, 1923), p.vii.

¹¹ Norwegian Bridal Procession: Master Lesson by Percy Grainger', p 742

annotated score of Albeniz's 'El Puerto',¹² a low F sharp is held with the middle pedal, leaving the two hands free to negotiate the shifting harmonies above.

Example 1: Albeniz – El Puerto, bars 88-92



This simulates what might be called a 'three-handed effect'. To sustain the F sharp with the right pedal would result in a certain gentle harmonic blurring. The middle pedal provides the interpreter with that option of attaining greater harmonic clarity. It should be noted that having the activated the middle pedal, the right pedal can continue to be used freely, in its usual manner.

In his 1920 Master Lesson on Grieg's Norwegian Bridal Procession published in *The Etude* magazine¹³ Grainger recommends the middle pedal for sustaining a bag-pipe like open-fifth drone throughout the opening 24 bars. Given that in the preface, Grainger notes the 'striking likenesses' between much of Grieg's music and 'certain' characteristics of Scottish Song¹⁴, the bag-pipelike effect seems eminently well suited to the style.

¹² Annotated score held in the Grainger Museum. Isaac Albeniz, *El Puerto (Iberia, Book 2)*, (Paris:Mutuelle, c1907). MG C1/ALB-2

¹³ Norwegian Bridal Procession: Master Lesson by Percy Grainger', p.742

¹⁴ Grainger further notes that Grieg's paternal great-grandfather, Alexander Grieg, was a Scotsman who migrated from Scotland to Norway in 1746

Example 2: Grieg – Norwegian Bridal Procession, bars 1 – 20

Dedicated to J. P. E. Hartman
NORWEGIAN BRIDAL PROCESSION
Also published by Grieg with the following title:
"NORWEGIAN BRIDAL PROCESSION PASSES BY"
No 2 from "SKETCHES OF NORWEGIAN LIFE" EDVARD GRIEG, Op. 19, No 2

Alla Marcia M.M. ♩ = about 152

As edited by Percy Grainger for study and concert performance

S.P.
sustaining pedal (middle pedal)

una corde

Grieg – Piano Concerto in A Minor

A similar double-note drone can be found in Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16, (bars 33-34). Grainger was Grieg's favoured performer of his Piano Concerto in A minor, and the two worked together on the concerto in the summer of 1907, with the intention of undertaking a European tour, with Grieg conducting, Grainger as soloist.¹⁵ Unfortunately Grieg, already in ill-health, died shortly thereafter. Fortuitously for Grainger however, many of his most important

¹⁵ In that summer of 1907, Grainger spent several weeks preparing the concerto with Grieg at the composer's summer house 'Trolldaugen'. The initial concert was to be at the September Leeds Festival. Grieg died on September 4. Of Grainger, Grieg said 'He has ... realized my ideals of piano playing ... if I had his technique, my conception of the nature of piano playing would have been exactly the same'. (Diary entry by Grieg, quoted on the sleeve jacket of Grainger's live recording with the Aarhus Municipal Orchestra, 25 February, 1957, VRS 1098)

engagements as concerto soloist arose out of this association. Importantly for us, Grainger published an authoritative edition of the Concerto, still much-used today, that incorporated both his own personal technical and interpretative suggestions, as well as those by Grieg. Here we can see Grainger using the middle pedal to a decidedly orchestral effect – directly imitating the French horns which sustain these same low Es throughout the two notated bars. Again, harmonic clarity in this passage is the primary motivation for employing the middle pedal, and this would be particularly helpful in the recording studio with a closely-miked concert grand.

Example 3: Grieg - Piano Concerto in A minor, 1st mvt, bars 33-34



A further example of an orchestral-like effect with the middle pedal can be found in Robert Schumann's *Etudes Symphoniques*, Op. 13, which Grainger recorded in 1928. In Variation VIII, a French overture-like variation that opens the second half of the work, Grainger takes all the lowest bass notes in the middle pedal, thereby bringing a new 'orchestral' dimension to the texture. Here the held bass notes, which are surely intended to imitate a sustained double bass line, can be sustained effortlessly with the middle pedal, while enabling the clarity of the middle texture arabesque-like moving parts to be maintained. Without the middle pedal there would

either be a muddying of the texture through the right pedal, or a subsequent loss of the important bass line.

Example 4: Schumann – Etudes Symphoniques, Opus 13, Variation VII, bars 1-6

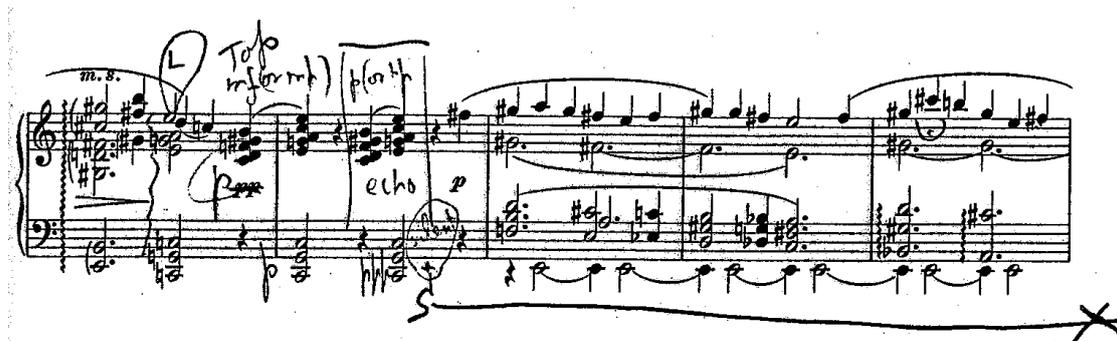
VARIATION VII

The musical score for Variation VII consists of three systems of two staves each. The first system (bars 1-2) begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 80 and the instruction 'Sempre marcatissimo'. The right hand starts with a 'Pedal' marking. The second system (bars 3-4) continues the dense texture. The third system (bars 5-6) concludes the passage with trills ('tr') in both hands. The score is annotated with various performance instructions such as 'sf', 'Pedal', and specific fingering numbers.

Because the mechanism of the middle pedal sustains all notes that are depressed at the moment it is activated there are occasions when selected notes need to be ‘silently’ prepared in advance. Such an example can be found in Gerard Bunk’s arrangement of Delius’s On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring. Here the low E is

prepared half a bar in advance, and textural clarity can be maintained while the gently gentle pedal-point underpins the gently shifting harmonies.

Example 5: Delius (arr. G. Bunk) - On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring



In Debussy's 'Bruyères', from Book 2 of the Preludes (bar 45), Grainger silently prepares a low E flat two bars in advance.¹⁶ In this instance there is no convenient place to activate the middle pedal without including some trace of an 'intrusive' note – in this instance the treble C. But here, both the high register and the soft dynamic of the high C mean that it will be barely heard during the succeeding bars.

¹⁶ Debussy, C ' Bruyères' (from *Préludes Book 2*, Paris: Durand, 1913). Annotated score held in the Grainger Museum. MG C1/DEB-9. Notably in Book 2 of the *Préludes*, Debussy's exploration of new piano textures across the range of the keyboard often necessitated three staves. Such textures would often seem to lend themselves well to the advantages of the middle pedal, yet there would seem to be no documentary evidence of Debussy ever explicitly requiring or suggesting its use.

Example 6: Debussy – Bruyères, from Preludes Book 2, bars 44-51.

The image displays a musical score for Debussy's 'Bruyères' from Preludes Book 2, bars 44-51. The score is written for piano and includes several handwritten annotations. In the first system, a circled '45' is placed above the first measure, and a circled 'lent' is written below the second measure with an 'X' over it. The second system features 'più p' above the first measure, 'pp' below the second measure, and 'sans lourdeur' below the third measure with an 'X' over it. The text '(... Bruyères)' is written at the end of the second system. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *p doucement soutenu*, and *pp*. Performance instructions include *doux*, *En retenant*, and *sans lourdeur*. The score is in G-flat major and 3/4 time.

In addition to facilitating interpretative intentions, the middle pedal can often be used to a more essentially practical end. Just as it can create what has previously been described as a ‘three-handed’ effect, the middle pedal can also create a simulated ‘two large hands effect’ for the pianist with small hands. In many of his teaching scores, Grainger notates an alternative distribution of the hands or alternative pedal pattern for pianists with small hands. In Charles Griffes’ *The White Peacock*, the asynchronization of the initial chord enables the middle pedal to sustain the left hand octave, thus freeing the left hand to take the lower notes of the succeeding chords in the right hand.

Example 7: Griffes – The White Peacock, bar 58



Of course the three pedals need to be activated by just two feet and thus a certain curiosity here is Grainger's 'Left Foot Study', designed so as to facilitate operating two neighbouring pedals with one foot. This is an exercise that Grainger particularly recommended to his female students who complained that their feet were too narrow to operate both left and middle pedals with the left foot.¹⁷ Grainger was to declare that 'the simultaneous use of the soft and the sustaining pedals by the left foot is a constant necessity in modern music and an indispensable adjunct to modern pianism'¹⁸ and that the mastery of this technique was 'an absolute necessity to modern pianism'.¹⁹

¹⁷ Interestingly there are only three instances in all of Grainger's annotated scores held at the Grainger Museum, which require the simultaneous use of all three pedals.

¹⁸ Norwegian Bridal Procession: Master Lesson by Percy Grainger', p 742

¹⁹ *Guide to Virtuosity*, p.viii

Example 8: Grainger – Left Foot Study

LEFT FOOT STUDY

The diagram shows a sequence of six notes, numbered 1 through 6. Note 1 is a quarter note. Notes 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are also quarter notes. Below the notes, there are two horizontal lines representing pedals. The first line is labeled 'S.P.' (Sustaining pedal) and has an upward arrow pointing to note 2. The second line is labeled 'U.C.' (Soft pedal) and has a dotted line connecting it to note 3. Asterisks are placed below notes 3, 5, and 6. To the right of the notes is a repeat sign with the text 'Repeat many times' written vertically next to it. On the left side, a bracket groups the notes with the text 'Count 1', 'Sustaining pedal', and 'Soft pedal'.

Grainger and Fingering

Grainger's general advice regarding fingering was to avoid working out fingerings prior to learning a piece.²⁰ It was preferable, he suggested, to allow the fingers to negotiate the music instinctively, thus evolving, what would be in all likelihood be the most natural fingering.

It is in some of Grainger's fingering practices that we witness some of the quirkiness and individuality of Grainger's often free-wheeling keyboard style.

One fingering innovation was his use of so-called 'bunched fingering'. This involved 'bunching together' either the first three fingers (for the white notes) or the first four fingers (for the black keys) and striking successive notes, usually of a melody, with the same hand formation. Although Grainger used such fingerings in soft passages, it is seen to its best advantage in 'fortissimo' passages such as in this excerpt from Grainger's arrangement of an Irish Dance by Stanford – March Jig

²⁰ John Douglas Todd, 'Grainger the Pianist', *Studies in Music*, No 16 (1982), p.106

(Maguire’s Kick). Here the left hand plays the black key *molto pesante e marcatisimo* melody with the four-finger ‘bunched fingering’ in order to achieve Grainger’s *fff* dynamic indicated in the previous bar.

Example 9 – Stanford- Grainger – Maguire’s Kick

Another fingering innovation included using the fist, not just for single notes, but also for double notes. Here, in the concluding line from Country Gardens²¹, once again in an *sfff* context, we can see Grainger suggesting playing the single right hand B flat with the fist, followed quickly in the same bar by a B flat - E flat pairing, played by the thumb and the side of the fist for extra volume.

²¹ English Morris Dance Tune. Concert Version. As with all of Grainger’s British folk-music settings, it is ‘reverently dedicated to the memory of Edvard Grieg’

Example 10: Grainger - Country Gardens (Concert Version) bars 67-70.

Another of Grainger's fingering principles, especially for his small-handed students, was the concept of 'non-stretch' fingering. In the following example from Chopin's Ballade No 1 in G minor, (bar 246), Grainger suggested the second, non-stretch' fingering rather than the more traditional version of the left. Such substitution of 'frequent small groupings or divisions of fingering for less frequent larger groupings of fingering'²² avoided a cramping of the hand which might result from its repeated extension, thus increasing 'reliability of performance'²³

Example 11: Chopin - Ballade No 1 in G minor, (b.246).

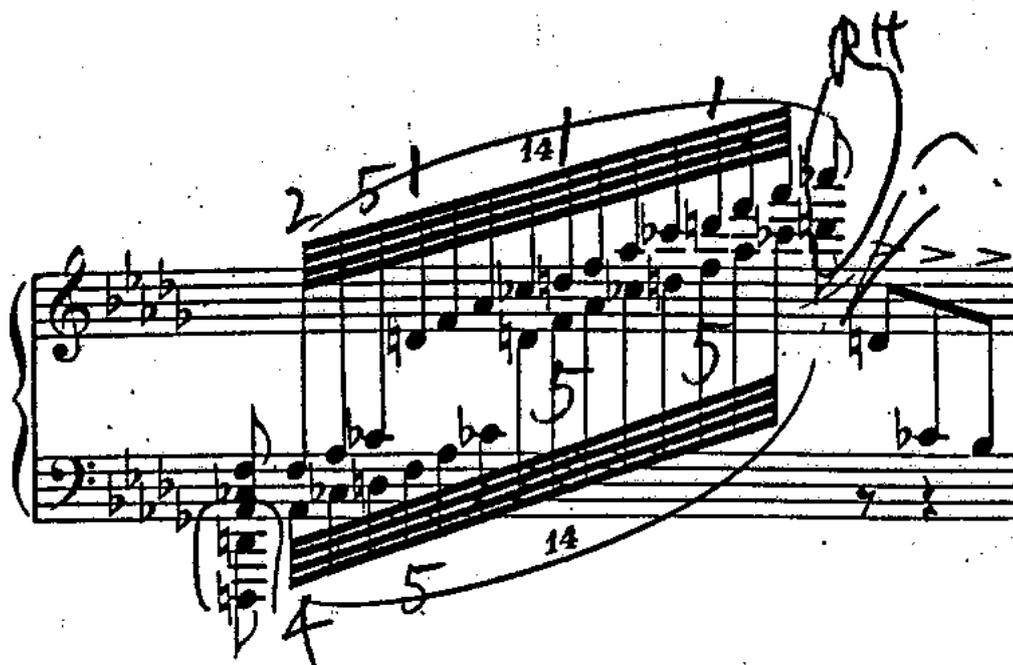
In the following example from Tchaikovsky's Concerto No 1 in B flat minor, (bar 41) again for reasons of securing a more massive sound (greater tone-strength) Grainger uses the less-legato but dynamically stronger 1235 hand position 3 times,

²² Percy Grainger, Norwegian Bridal Procession: Master Lesson by Percy Grainger' *The Etude*, Vol. 38 No 11 (Nov 1920) P.742

²³ loc.cit.

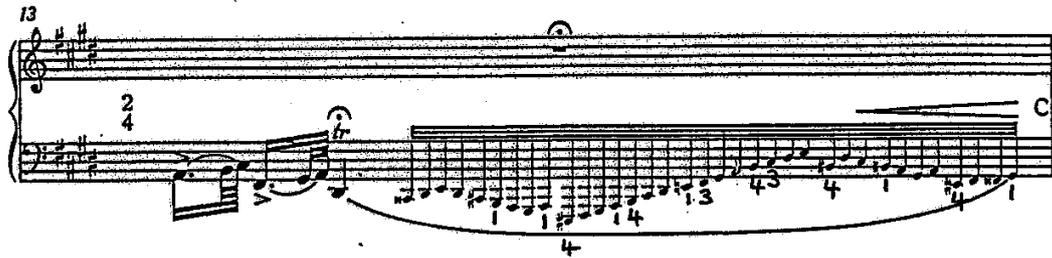
rather than the more traditional, smoother 1234 diminished seventh arpeggio fingering. Using the close position 1235 fingering rather than the more extended and structurally weaker 1234 fingering, involves less stretch and therefore less tension (especially since the passage is repeated several times at different pitches in quick succession) facilitating a stronger tone with less effort. A musical and technical win-win situation. Any possible loss of legato or smoothness is negated by the use of the pedal.

Example 12 – Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1, 1st mvt, bar 41

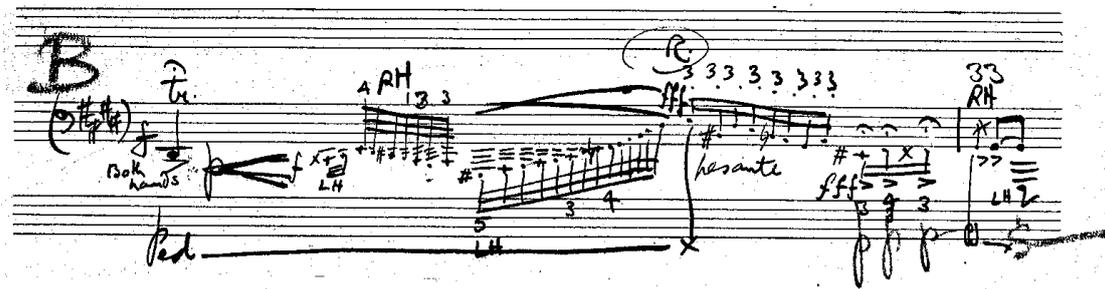


In the next excerpt from Liszt's *Rhapsody No 12 in C sharp minor*, (bar 13) we can see Grainger idiosyncratically employing two hands for a trill that commences forte but then restarts piano before increasing in volume again. We can also see at the end of the bar a further example of 'bunched fingering' to attain a true *fff*. One can compare this with Liszt's original notation, which appears to be written for left hand only.

Example 13 – Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No 12, bar 13.

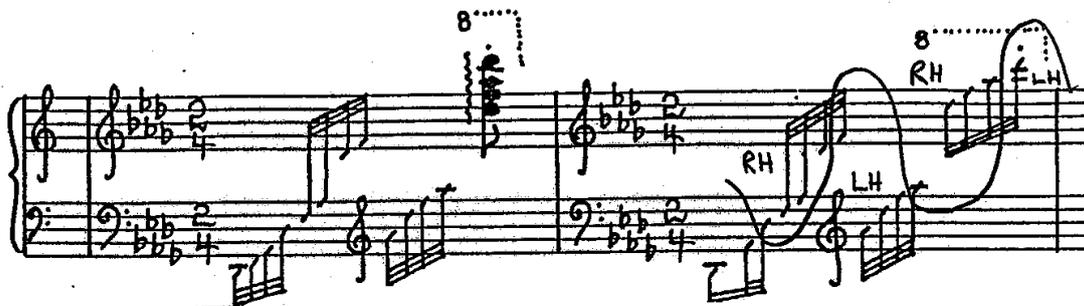


Example 14 - Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No 12, bar 13.



In other contexts we can see Grainger also re-distributing the composer's notated hand arrangement. In the same Hungarian Rhapsody Grainger re-arranges the hands so as to finish with a single note left hand flourish, seemingly for no reason other than to end with a grandiloquent gesture. Grainger after all was a performer in all senses of the word.

Example 15 – Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No 12, bar 136



Dynamics and ‘Tone Strength’

When discussing dynamic levels and ranges in his pedagogical writings Grainger refers to ‘tone strengths’. In particular, he emphasised the necessity to exploit the extremes of the dynamic range available from the most violent fff to the ‘most whispered ppp ... students should remember that all truly great performers possess *the power to exaggerate and a range of extreme contrasts* ... the mark of mediocrity is the tendency to underdo – to play louds too softly (and) softs too loudly’.²⁴

With regard to the playing of pianissimos, Grainger regretted the failure of most pianists to exploit one of the inherent advantages of the piano.

‘We should remember that the piano is more naturally adapted to the production of extremely soft sounds than most other instruments as its very softest tones do not deteriorate in quality of tone or in pitch as equally soft tones are apt to do with most wind and string instruments’.²⁵

To this end Grainger would often superscribe in his scores, a composer’s textual direction of ‘pp’ with ‘pppp’, particularly in works that he would describe as being a ‘Study in extreme pp’.²⁶ At the opposite end of the dynamic scale Grainger would similarly annotate ‘ffff’ above a composer’s direction of ‘ff’.

²⁴ *Guide to Virtuosity*, (New York: G Schirmer, 1923), p.viii.

²⁵ Norwegian Bridal Procession: Master Lesson. P.741

²⁶ In his essay, ‘Modernism in Pianoforte Study’, *Great Pianists on Piano Playing* ed James Francis Cooke, (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1913) p.364 Grainger wrote ‘With the coming of composers such as Debussy, Cyril Scott, Ravel and others, we find a grateful return of the delicate and refined in piano playing, there is a coming again of the pianissimo. More and more artists are beginning to realize the potency of soft notes rightly shaded and delivered artistically.’ In another essay, ‘Freedom of Thought in Piano Study’, *Piano Mastery: Second Series*, ed Harriet Bower, (New York: Stokes and Co., 1917) p. 10 Grainger wrote specifically of ‘*Reflets dans l’eau*’ that it was ‘valuable as a touch developer. I find that little attention is given to the study of pianissimo effects’

In the context of a piano concerto, it was important for Grainger that the pianist be able to attain an extreme fortissimo, whether in the context of a solo cadenza or in a climactic tutti. In the brief cadenza beginning at bar 257 of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 in B flat minor²⁷ Grainger employs various means in order to achieve a more massive sound.

Example 16 – Tchaikovsky – Piano Concerto in B flat minor, 1st mvt, bar 257.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piano concerto cadenza. The score is written on two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is marked 'molto espress.' and includes a triplet. The score is heavily annotated with handwritten notes and symbols, including 'RA', 'LH', 'R', and 'L' in circles, and various markings on the staves. A large handwritten note on the left side of the score reads 'Thousand clouds on this plain' and 'LH' in a circle. The score is annotated with 'RA', 'LH', 'R', and 'L' in circles, and various markings on the staves.

Firstly by making use of the middle pedal, he is able to sustain the initial C minor chord throughout the duration of the first two bars of the example. On the fourth beat of the second bar he chooses to repeat the right hand c^{``} and e^{``} flat which otherwise would have been sustained. Also for the arpeggiated chords in bars 3 and 4 of the example Grainger adds an extra bass G[`], one octave below that notated in the score. Further, Grainger has decided to expand on Tchaikovsky's suggested arpeggiations. If we look at the hand-written annotation at the side of the example we can see that Grainger arranges the hands in such a manner, that when he strikes the final (top) note of the arpeggiated chord (with the left hand) he is also able to re-strike

²⁷ Annotated score held in Grainger Museum. MG C1/TCH-1-4

the third, fourth and fifth notes from the top (with the right hand) thereby concluding the arpeggiation with a resounding four-note chord rather than with a single note in what is approaching the weakest register of the piano.

Interestingly, Grainger not only added notes to a given texture in order to gain a more massive sound but sometimes advocated subtracting notes from a texture. Such an instance occurs at the conclusion of the same movement of this concerto where the left hand is required to play the following:

Example 17 – Tchaikovsky – Piano Concerto in B flat minor, 1st mvt, conclusion.

The image shows a musical score for the conclusion of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto in B-flat minor. The score is in 2/4 time and features a complex texture with multiple staves. A circled chord in the left hand is highlighted, showing a four-note chord with a flat sign above it. The right hand has a melodic line with a dotted line above it. The left hand has a bass line with a dotted line above it. The score includes dynamic markings like 'ff' and 'p'.

Because such an extended chord is difficult to stretch, most pianists would necessarily arpeggiate the chord from bottom to top, with a consequent diminution in the volume of sound produced. Here Grainger advocates omitting the g[♭] flat reducing the four-note chord to a three-note texture, but striking these three notes simultaneously thereby increasing the overall volume of the passage (which is

accompanied by full orchestra. ‘In passages that have to be exceptionally loud never break such chords, if avoidable’ he jotted down in the score.

In these above concerto examples, one should perhaps remember that Grainger often performed in outdoor venues such as the Hollywood Bowl before audiences of 20 000 and more, so any extra help to generate a richness of tone that carried, should perhaps not be considered an assault on the composer’s last word, but rather a sensible and practical solution to a musical necessity.

Simultaneous Tone Strength

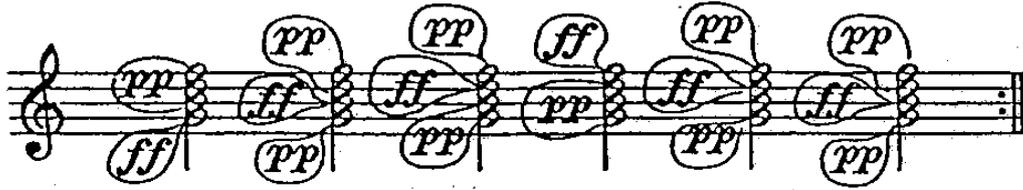
At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a much-heated debate regarding tone-production – was ‘tone’ indeed qualitative or was it (merely) ‘quantitative’? Grainger sided with the view of Otto Ortman believing that tone is quantitative. Said Grainger:

‘Those things that are carelessly or ignorantly described as contrasts of tone quality, are in fact, in reality, always contrasts of tone quantity; i.e. contrasts in sound strength between successive notes in melodies, phrases and passages, or between simultaneously played notes (the latter called “simultaneous tone-strength differentiation”)²⁸

To this end, Grainger devised his ‘Simultaneous tone-strength differentiation study’, in essence an exercise for independence of the fingers.

Example 18 – Grainger - ‘Simultaneous tone-strength differentiation study’

²⁸ Percy Grainger, *Guide to Virtuosity*, p. v.



Such an exercise, Grainger said, was practical in eliminating ‘what is called “thumping” or “harshness” [which] is due generally, to the unequal and *uncontrolled* distribution of tone-strengths in loud chords (the outer fingers are generally too loud for the inner fingers), NOT to the extreme loudness of the whole chord’.²⁹

Grainger suggested that playing the following two chords ‘in the manner indicated requires an amount of thought, hand control, far in excess of that demanded by many supposedly difficult exercises.’³⁰

Example 19 - ‘Simultaneous tone-strength differentiation study’



²⁹ *ibid*, p.vi

³⁰ Percy Grainger, ‘Modernism in Pianoforte Study’ from *Great Pianists on Piano Playing* by James Francis Cooke; (Philadelphia: Theodore Press, 1913)

In the following excerpt from the Sea Chanty ‘One more day, my John’³¹ (bars 12-14), we can see Grainger’s detailed dynamic indications that require a developed sense of tonal control, and more particularly in the softer dynamic range. One can also observe here Grainger’s use of English score directions for his own music, eschewing the traditional Italian.

Example 20: Grainger - One more day, my John’ (bars 12-14).

Musicality before Pianism

In one of his most important essays – *Guide to Virtuosity*³² – Grainger addresses wide ranging aspects of music education that are equally applicable to all instrumentalists and singers as well as pianists:

‘Students should always aim at keeping their general musical knowledge well in advance of their mere pianism. To develop the former they should daily devote some time to transposing (playing the pieces they know in all keys – the best way of attaining an actual working knowledge of harmony), to sight-reading at the piano (not only compositions for piano but also piano scores of

³¹ Bars 12-14, from ‘One more day, my John. Sea Chanty set for piano in the form of a Preliminary canter, designed to be key-shifted (transposed) into any key so as to serve as a ‘preliminary canter’ before any piece in any key.’ (Grainger program note)

³² Percy Grainger, *Guide to Virtuosity*. Preface to H. Balfour Gardiner’s *Prelude (De Profundis)* for solo piano (Schirmer, New York, 1923)

the greatest musical works, such as Bach's "Passions", Wagner music dramas, Delius nature-music, Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky symphonies, Debussy and Richard Strauss tone-poems, Stravinsky ballets etc.) and to ensemble-playing with other students (duets at one or two pianos and ensemble work with other instrumentalists and with voices). Students should also make a point of reading writings upon music by the great composers (such as Schumann's and Wagner's writings on musical subjects, Cyril Scott's "Philosophy of Modernism", etc. rather than too many books on mere piano technic. There is no better method for piano students to develop both musical and pianistic knowledge, taste and sense of style than by listening repeatedly to good player-piano and gramophone recordings by great pianists; especially it is enlightening to compare different recordings of the same composition by different *virtuosi*. This branch of training should be especially cultivated by students who are not in a position continually to witness performances 'in the flesh' by the best artists, and by music schools not situated in great music centers'.

Music Education – 'Elastic Scoring'

In one of his most important essays on general music education 'To Conductors',³³ Grainger expounds a range of diverse ideas that relate to orchestral playing in a music education context. The fundamental tenet of the essay is that music making, and in particular the symphonic orchestral experience, should be an inclusive experience, and not an exclusive one. This was Grainger wishing to 'play (his) part in the radical experimentation with orchestral and chamber-music blends that seems bound to happen as a result of the wider spreading democratization of all forms of music'.

Grainger advocated what he called 'elastic scoring', a principle whereby the numbers of players in any orchestral work could be flexible. So long as textural balance was preserved, and all voices could be clearly heard, it did not matter to Grainger whether there were '4, 40 or 400 players or any number in between'. Even

³³ Subtitled 'And To Those Forming, or in Charge of, Amateur Orchestras, High School, College and Music School Orchestras and Chamber Music Players' this essay served as a preface to Grainger's orchestral work *Jutish Medley* (London, Schott, 1930).

more significantly 'elastic scoring' embraced flexibility of tone colour. Grainger felt that his music told its story 'by means of intervals and the liveliness of the part-writing, rather than by means of tone color', an idea that was not so foreign to JS Bach. Feeling constrained by the traditional strings, woodwind, brass and percussion textures that had so dominated nineteenth century orchestral writing, (and what he termed the 'esthetic snobbery, priggishness and prejudice associated with such limiting parameters) Grainger encouraged orchestral experimentation by welcoming the use of the popular guitars, ukeleles, banjos, mandolins into the orchestra. He advocated also the use of all variety of saxophones, suggesting that they could either support or replace the brass instruments.

Of course being a pianist himself, and loathing the thought of young players locking themselves away in practice rooms practising alone and isolated from their musical colleagues for 5 or 6 hours a day, Grainger wrote works for large bands or orchestras that often include not only harmonium (reed-organ) and celeste, but also multiple pianos. Grainger also didn't mind if these were played singly, or massed, so that as many keyboard players as possible could be accommodated. The more, the merrier. Grainger also felt that pianists – 'with their alarming lack of rhythmic neatness, their inability to follow a conductor's beat, and their inability to listen while they play' were in most need of 'musical team-work'. To this end, Grainger encouraged pianists at his summer schools to take on the role of percussion players in orchestral works so that in a work such as *The Warriors* (Music for an Imaginary Ballet) it would not be unusual for Grainger to conduct a performance with maybe 18 pianists playing the three solo piano parts massed, as well as with numerous others playing some or all of the large number of required percussion instruments – timpani,

side-drum, bass-drum, cymbals, gong, castanets, woodblock, tambourine, glockenspiel, xylophone, wooden marimba, metal marimba, tubular bells, staff bells and even bar-piano!

Grainger's concept of elastic scoring is eminently practical for all amateur and educational institution orchestral ensembles, encouraging mass participation of all musicians – no matter what their instrument – in the symphonic experience.

Ironically, while trying to be all-inclusive and wishing to include all manner of non-traditional instruments into his own orchestral works, Grainger has in some ways done himself a disservice, rendering performances of his larger orchestral works extremely expensive to mount for professional orchestras. Such professional organizations rarely have full-time multiple saxophonists, ukelele-players, or harmonium players (let alone own a functioning harmonium) on their books, and thus, needing to bring in so many extra performers for what may be only a 15 minute work, is simply not cost effective, more so in these cash-strapped times. By trying to be inclusive of all musicians and of all instruments, Grainger has all but excluded his own music from the regular professional repertory.

Grainger and the Younger Pianist³⁴

One can see from Grainger's piano textures – particularly in the quick moving dense chordal textures of works such as *Handel in the Strand* (piano quartet version) and *The Warriors*, (*Music for an Imaginary Ballet*), that Grainger must have

³⁴ See *The Young Pianist's Grainger*, ed. Ronald Stevenson (Schott, London, 1967)

possessed large hands that could easily stretch tenths with notes in the middle. Sympathetic to his non-virtuoso public, Grainger occasionally provides *ossias* for smaller hands. These may involve either arpeggiation (while preserving the original large span) or a reduction in the span where Grainger felt that ‘harping’ would undermine the integrity of the rhythmic pulse and chordal integrity. The following examples are from the English Morris Dance Tune, Shepherd’s Hey.

Example 21: Grainger – Shepherd’s Hey (Concert Version) 30 – 32.

The musical score for Example 21 consists of three measures. The first two measures feature a wide interval in the right hand, with the left hand providing a harmonic accompaniment. The third measure is marked 'chippy mf' and features a more compact interval. Below the first and third measures, there are alternative bass line options marked 'Tea.*' and 'or'.

Example 22: Grainger – Shepherd’s Hey (Concert Version), Bars 63 - 65

The musical score for Example 22 consists of three measures. The first measure is marked 'don't break these' and features a wide interval in the right hand. The second measure is marked 'f' and features a more compact interval. The third measure is marked 'ff stacc.' and features a wide interval. Below the first and third measures, there are alternative bass line options marked 'Tea.*' and 'or'.

Mindful of the younger pianist however, Grainger also made several ‘small hand’ arrangements of his works. Works such as the popular Country Gardens, Shepherd’s Hey and Grainger’s free setting of Dowland’s song for voice and lute Now, O Now I

Needs Must Part, exist in both ‘concert (large-hand) versions’ and alternatively in ‘easy’ (small hand) versions, that don’t require a span of an octave.³⁵

In this example we can compare the opening lines of Grainger’s Concert Version and the Easy Version of Blithe Bells – a ‘free ramble’ on Bach’s ‘Sheep may safely graze’.³⁶

Example 23: Bach-Grainger – Blithe Bells, bars 1 - 7

PIANO SOLO
CONCERT VERSION

Quietly flowing ♩ = 76
Top voice glassy, somewhat to the fore

mp *p* *pp*

g *g* *g*

slacken ever so slightly *slacken more*

S. P.

*

³⁵ Bartók made similarly alternative versions of his Rumanian Christmas Carols for piano - a version for children which eschews octaves, and a ‘concert version’ that often requires the comfortable span of a 10th

³⁶ from the Secular Cantata ‘Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd’.

Example 24: Bach-Grainger – Blithe Bells, bars 1 - 12

“BLITHE BELLS”

EASY VERSION by P. A. Grainger, containing no big stretches

Bach-Grainger

Quietly flowing ♩ = 76
Top voice slightly to the fore

p *pp* *S.P.* *slow off* *IN TIME* *Top notes well to the fore* *p* *mf* *p*

As with the many folk-song arrangements that Grainger re-composed for varying instrumental or vocal combinations, these ‘easy versions’ are often not mere simplifications that eliminate large stretches, but are often re-conceptions that introduce new elements into the works. Country Gardens for example, in E flat major in the concert version is transposed to C major for the ‘easy version’. Its left hand also introduces new dotted rhythmic figures while Grainger also adds an interesting imitative ‘tail-piece’ (coda) in the ‘easy version’. Teachers at this conference will be

particularly interested in the small hand version of Shepherd's Hey. Incorporating glissandi – always a thrilling adventure for the younger pianist – as well as a variety of voicing, articulatory and double note textures - it makes an excellent Grade 7 or 8 teaching piece, exciting for both listener and player alike.

In conclusion, Grainger was a multi-faceted musician and personality. Whether as composer, pianist, ethnomusicologist, conductor, or music educator, while raised in the traditions of the nineteenth pianist, he promoted many innovative ideas that are equally relevant to music education, today. His wish to expand the textural possibilities of the established symphony orchestra, and the concept of 'elastic scoring' with its aim to include as many young performers on each and every instrument has a real relevance in today's educational environment. His advocacy of pianists learning to transpose, engage in score-reading, and to engage in all manner of ensemble playing (duet playing and ensemble work) is something that piano pedagogues today would most likely aim to encourage, but that too often gets omitted from over-crowded curricula. His espousal of the necessity to listen to multiple recordings of great artists playing the same works is something that not all piano teachers agree on, but that young musicians, through YouTube perhaps more than anything else, are embracing. Specifically for pianists, Grainger's use of the middle pedal, in a variety of contexts, both for modern repertoire and for repertoire composed before the invention of the middle pedal, is worthy of further investigation. The middle or 'sostenuto' pedal, unlike in Grainger's early career, is now a common feature on all grand pianos and increasingly so on uprights, yet it remains under-utilised, albeit numerous composers are now starting to write compositions that require its use and thus more fully explore all that the modern piano has to offer. In

advocating the development of general musicianship for pianists and emphasising the need for developing technical exercises that develop tonal nuance rather than velocity and endurance, Grainger embraces concepts that are equally valid, yet remain underdeveloped, today. No mere pianist, and one who despised the solitude of the practice room, Grainger was first and foremost a musician, one who embraced all musics and modes of music-making. Like many current advocates for curricular reform, he believed in the true democratization of music, and of making music in all its many varieties, accessible to all.

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Glenn Riddle has recorded numerous pedagogical CDs for Hal Leonard Publishing and for Allans Publishing, and has edited or co-edited 12 volumes of piano music for the Australian Music Examinations Board. He continues to perform as both soloist and chamber musician, and is Artistic Director and Conductor of The Grainger Ensemble, an orchestra dedicated to providing concerto opportunities to young performers.