

## Features

### *“Facing Percy Grainger”*



The eventful life of Australia's first international male celebrity, Percy Grainger (1882–1961), was revealed with the exhibition *Facing Percy Grainger* that opened at the National Library on 6 July 2006.

Percy Grainger was a virtuoso pianist, inventor, folk song collector and arranger, composer of salon music and experimental free music, musical theorist, and social commentator. He was also an obsessive autoarchivist, he left a diverse and internationally recognised collection numbering over 100 000 items.

The exhibition contained over 200 works from the Grainger Collection, the University of Melbourne and the National Library's collection. Modified musical instruments, emotive letters, quirky clothing, rarely seen paintings, revealing photographs, and surprising memorabilia are gathered together to reflect Grainger's talents, extreme ideals and intricate contradictions.

Director-General, Jan Fullerton AO said the exhibition was an exceptional opportunity for Australians to re-evaluate one of Australia's neglected but fascinating cultural icons.



Exhibition opening – *Facing Percy Grainger* at the National Library of Australia

“*Facing Percy Grainger* was a colourful diverse exhibition that shed light on a complex and highly talented individual. Most of the objects on display had a personal resonance because they were collected by Grainger himself. I am delighted that items from the National Library’s collection can complement those from the Grainger Collection held by the University of Melbourne to give a complete picture of the man,” she said.

The son of John Grainger, a well-known Melbourne architect and Rose Aldridge, who was to become the dominant influence throughout his life, Percy Grainger was a child prodigy. He gave his first public recital in Melbourne at age 12, and soon after went to Germany with his mother to further his training as a pianist and composer. Between 1901 and 1914 they lived in London, where Grainger’s talents flourished.

While in London he befriended the Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg,

whose love of national music inspired Grainger to look closely at English folk music. With the aid of a phonograph he collected folk songs from which he made many famous arrangements.

In 1914 Grainger and his mother moved to America, where he lived the remainder of his life. Although he always described himself as Australian, Grainger became an American citizen. During a brief spell in US army bands he wrote the song ‘Country Gardens’, which many people now equate with his name.

After World War I, Grainger continued his hectic life of concert tours and lectures, which included visits to Australia in the 1930s. During this time he designed and took an active role in building the Grainger Museum in the grounds of the University of Melbourne. In 1922 Rose Grainger committed suicide, leaving him devastated. In 1928, Grainger married the Swedish artist, Ella Ström.



Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe spoke at the exhibition opening

An original thinker, and ahead of his time, Grainger did much to publicise medieval European music and the music of other cultures. Towards the end of his life he worked on producing ‘free music’—music not limited by time, or pitch intervals. The free music

machines he created are regarded as the crude forerunners of modern electronic synthesisers. Percy Grainger died in New York aged 78 and is now buried in the family grave in Adelaide, South Australia.



*Facing Percy Grainger Exhibition – National Library of Australia*



Guests at the Exhibition launch were treated to a musical performance

*Facing Percy Grainger* was co-curated by ANU musicologist Dr David Pear and Brian Allison, Curator Exhibitions and Partnerships, the University of Melbourne with the assistance of Martin Terry, Exhibitions Curator, National Library of Australia.

Also celebrating Grainger's multifaceted life is a superb book, edited by Dr David Pear. Beautifully illustrated and containing essays by distinguished Grainger specialists including Brian Allison, Malcolm Gillies, Michael Piggott, Barry Peter Ould and Eleanor Tan, *Facing Percy Grainger* makes a significant contribution to the scholarship surrounding this contradictory character. RRP \$24.95. Available through the National Library Bookshop and online at [www.nla.gov.au/onlineshop](http://www.nla.gov.au/onlineshop)

A dedicated website found at [www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/percygrai](http://www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/percygrai) nger accompanied the exhibition and details Grainger's life and his world as

a performer, composer, theorist and collector.

Brian Allison writing in the University of Melbourne's "University News" described *Facing Percy Grainger* as a 'warts and all' view of Grainger's life. The majority of exhibition items within the 400 square metres of exhibition space have been sourced from the University of Melbourne's Grainger Collection, with additional material sourced from the collections of the NLA and the National Gallery of Victoria.

The project has been three years in the making with creative decisions and logistical details being hampered by the tyranny of distance between Melbourne and the nation's capital.

Project planning for this exhibition was no small undertaking. It is not a neatly packaged show of framed artworks. Instead, ungainly pianos, decorative arts, furniture, costumes and bizarre 'free-music' machines were

despatched to Canberra under the watchful eye of the exhibition's

Assistant Curator and Registrar, Astrid Krautschneider.

*With thanks to Astrid for the press releases, images and invitation to the opening. Congratulations on a wonderful exhibition!*

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### *The Divine Burlesque, a review*

*Lizzy Marshall*

#### **The Divine Burlesque: The Art of Rosemary Valadon Macquarie University Art Galley 6 March - 20 April 2006**

This survey exhibition traces the past 15 years of Rosemary Valadon's extraordinary work, ranging from her early portraits through to recent work that explores her interest in feminine rituals of identity.



Rosemary Valadon at the launch of *The Divine Burlesque*

We remember our childhood dolls but we don't remember defacing them...

In Freud's 1901 essay "Forgetting Things" he provides the explanation, albeit an overly simplistic one, that forgetting is the summation of suppressed discordant memories. Moreover, it is the (sometimes) distant subconscious association of everyday

elements that cause us to forget. If we are to believe this psychoanalysis - then within Rosemary Valadon's paintings we are surely going to remember. It is this seminal displacement of evocative triggers, which are found in her paintings that audiences find effecting. They cause us to confront ourselves and they entice us to remember. This is not a