



G R A I N G E R

PERCY GRAINGER UNDERSTOOD THE POWER of the photograph to entice and persuade an adoring public and to document significant events. The Grainger Museum Archive includes close to 15,000 photographs. The majority of these are images of people, including many signed portraits gifted to Grainger by eminent musicians and intimate associates. Numerous photographs detail the composer's social milieu as well as his physical being.

With his arrival in London in 1901, Grainger moved into a world where the photograph — specifically the sophisticated studio portrait — was currency within an intricate game of social positioning. The inscription of a fashionable photographer's name on promotional material added a certain gloss to the performer's image. Grainger was photographed by one of the most fashionable and innovative photographers of the Edwardian era, Baron Adolph de Meyer.

De Meyer was both an artist and a professional photographer. His photographs reflect the prevailing characteristics of art photography of his day. Negatives and prints were heavily manipulated and photographs were often taken using soft focus. Detail was stripped away and the quality of light on surfaces, as well as the modulation of shadows, became as much the subject as the sitter. A portrait of de Meyer by his contemporary, Gertrude Kasebier, is a graphic composition of light and shadow as well as being a portrait of the Baron of Saxony.

In 1913 Grainger's fiancée, Margot Harrison, ordered a very expensive present for her lover: a portrait of herself by H. Walter Barnett. Despite his humble beginnings alongside a youthful Tom Roberts (the "Heidelberg School" artist) in the studio of Stewart & Co. in Melbourne, Barnett combined a brilliant business mind with an extraordinarily gifted photographic eye, to become one of the most sought-after society portraitists in Melbourne, New York and London respectively. Jack Cato (who worked for Barnett) records in his book *The Story of the Camera* in Australia, that in 1909, a single portrait sitting with Barnett cost £37.



PHOTOGRAPHS

BY BRIAN ALLISON

After World War I, Frederick Morse, a young professional photographer, built a house next door to Percy and Rose Grainger in White Plains, New York. He produced many of Grainger's promotional photographs during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s as well as informally documenting the Grainger household and Percy's eclectic pursuits. Their association became close, with Morse periodically working as Percy's secretary and as an occasional wrestling partner.

In complete contrast to the imagery of Percy Grainger's public life, the photographs in the Grainger Collection's "Lust Branch" (Grainger's title) provide insight into an undercurrent of erotic tension in the composer's private world. The collection includes over 200 professionally produced erotic photographs ranging from ubiquitous "naughty postcards" to hand-enlarged 8 x 10 inch black and white photographs that blur the boundaries between erotica and art photography.

From early adulthood, Grainger taught himself elementary photographic techniques to document aspects of his own sexual expression. Initially he experimented with conventional nude photographs, but by the mid 1920s, he systematically recorded himself and his wife in the aftermath of flagellation, printing the results in a makeshift darkroom.

As an obsessive "auto-archivist" and collector, Percy Grainger compiled unedited visual evidence of his life, accompanying and illuminating his vast archive of personal correspondence, essays and sound recordings. ♦

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jack Cato, *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, Institute of Australian Photography, Melbourne, 1979.

Keith Davis, *An American Century of Photography: from dry plate to digital*, Hallmark, New York, 1995.

Bryan Holme (Ed.), *Photography as a Fine Art*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1983.

Mike Weaver (Ed.), *The Art of Photography 1839–1989*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1989.



Above:

Baron Adolph Gayne de Meyer, *Promotional Postcard of Percy Grainger*, c.1910.

Postcard.

Adolph de Meyer is considered the world's first fashion photographer. In 1914 he was hired by Condé Nast as full-time photographer at *Vogue* magazine. Grainger performed recitals at the Baron's home and became accepted within his circle.

Above, left:

Count Jean De Strelecki, *Rose and Percy Grainger*, NYC, c.1919.

Silver-gelatine photograph.

The activity this photograph depicts has never been identified — all action is outside the frame — however it appears to document Percy and his mother's legendary closeness. It also records in detail Rose's elaborate headwear, which Percy referred to as the "harvest hat".

Below, left:

Unidentified photographer, *Ella Viola Strom*, (Grainger's future wife), Berlin, c. 1913.

Silver-gelatine photograph.

continued on page 22

Gertrude Kasebier,
Baron Adolph de
Meyer, c. 1910,
London.

Silver-gelatine
photograph.

Kasebier is remem-
bered for her pho-
tographs of women
and children and the
fact that she was a
highly successful practi-
tioner in an essentially
all male world. Like de
Meyer, Kasebier was
a member of the presti-
gious Linked Ring pho-
tographic group in
London and was
invited to join the influ-
ential Photo-Secession
group in New York.



Henry Walter Barnett,
Margot Harrison,
London, 1913.

Platinotype.

This very frank portrait
of Grainger's fiancée
contrasts the soft focus
images of many of
Barnett's contempo-
raries. He has
recorded fine details of
costume and environ-
ment, and printed the
photograph as a
tonally rich platinotype,
eliciting a strong sense
of realism.

Burnett Cross, Dr Kaare Nygaard,
1980s.

Silver-gelatine photograph.

Dr Nygaard performed an unsuccessful
operation on Grainger to halt the
spread of cancer. He also executed a
series of bronze sculptures of the com-
poser. The photographer was Burnett
Cross, physicist and co-inventor with
Grainger of "free music machines".



Ruskin Studios, Percy Grainger,
Melbourne, 1926.

Silver-gelatine photograph.

Percy Grainger performed live-to-air
recitals during his concert tours. Ruskin
Studios produced a series of promo-
tional images for ABC Radio 3LO during
Grainger's 1926 tour of Australia.



Fredrick E. Morse, Rose and Percy
Grainger at White Plains,
c. 1920.

Toned silver-gelatine photograph.

When Rose Grainger committed
suicide in 1922, Percy designed
and self-published the Rose
Grainger Memorial Book — a
"visual eulogy" which contained
many photographs by Morse.





Unidentified photographer, Unidentified model, San Francisco, April 1924.

Toned silver-gelatine photograph.

This elegantly composed and finely printed photograph is one of 13 images of the same model. And although intended as high-class erotic photography, the faint evidence of a caesarean scar in some of the photographs focuses the viewer's attention on the model as an individual.



Percy Grainger, *Self Portrait*, New York, 11 January, 1942.

Silver-gelatine photograph

Grainger approached documenting his sexual expression with a methodology approximating forensic photography: he gave little consideration to aesthetics and introduced reference numbers and hand-written inscriptions into the scenes to indicate times and dates. Lesions and bruising were carefully recorded.

Arnold Genthe (1869-1942), Percy Grainger, New York, c. 1920.

Silver-gelatine photograph.

Originally a Classical scholar, Genthe developed his photographic reputation documenting San Francisco's pre-earthquake China Town, using a concealed camera. Genthe's technique in portraiture also relied on catching the sitter unaware: unposed; mid-thought.



Unidentified photographer, *The Dolmetsch Family and Friends*, mid-1930s.

Silver-gelatine photograph.

The Grainger Archive includes numerous photographs of musical ensembles and orchestras that follow a familiar formula: instrumentalists in formal attire standing/sitting in a row. This photograph of the Dolmetsch family, influential in the revival of early music, is refreshing in its unorthodoxy and the carefully structured composition, reminiscent of paintings of court musicians.

Brian Allison is the Curator of the Percy Grainger Museum at the University of Melbourne.