

# Rethinking Percy Grainger: Networks of Support

Our exhibition looks at Percy Grainger's early career, focusing on the networks of people and relationships that supported his musical development. Although Grainger is widely recognised as one of Australia's most important musicians, his success was not the result of individual talent alone. Instead, it was shaped by a range of personal, professional, and cultural connections, especially those formed with his mother Rose Grainger and the singer Ada Crossley.

The display brings together ten objects, including musical instruments, personal archives, and materials connected to Rose Grainger and Ada Crossley. These objects are organised into three themes: sound and experimentation, self-construction, and social networks, which together trace Grainger's path from musical practice to public recognition. Rather than focusing on individual achievements in isolation, our exhibition shows how different aspects of his career were closely connected, including his musical practice, public identity, and professional opportunities.

Taken together, the objects trace Grainger's transition from an emerging musician to a recognised public figure. They show how his career developed through collaboration and exchange, rather than through individual effort alone. By focusing on these relationships, the exhibition challenges traditional ideas of artistic genius and encourages visitors to think about how creativity is shaped by support, opportunity, and the wider social and cultural environment.

Curated by Haili Mei, Xinyu Qiu, Yuyan Xie, Oh hyun Kwon

# Case 1

## 1. Unknown maker

Japan

### Visiting Card Case

late 1800s

iron and silver

01.0221

This visiting card case, produced in Japan in the late nineteenth century, is decorated with a vine and grape motif. Its compact, convex form, along with a semi-circular cut at the top, reveals its practical function of holding visiting cards. Visiting cards were essential tools of social interaction, used to establish introductions and maintain networks across both local and international contexts. Such objects were closely linked to practices of etiquette, mobility, and communication. Within this exhibition, the card case highlights the material culture of social exchange that underpinned artistic development, emphasising how relationships and networks shaped cultural identities.

## **2. Meissen Porcelain Factory**

Europe, Germany, Saxony, Dresden (established 1710)

### **Meissen Monkey Orchestra figurines collected by Rose Grainger (selection)**

1800s

porcelain with enamels, glaze, and gilding

01.0262

Created in 1753 by Meissen, the first European manufactory to produce true hard-paste porcelain, the Monkey Orchestra is still one of the most beloved items among porcelain collectors to this day. The monkeys are clothed in the style of the late seventeenth century and feature lively facial expressions, gestures, and postures. The Monkey Orchestra was originally composed of 22 musical figures including violinists, harpists, backpiper, and drummer, and it is believed that Rose Grainger once owned the entire set. These figures show a whimsical aspect of Rose Grainger's deep passion for - and knowledge of - music, and its power to captivate and delight.

### **3.Percy Aldridge Grainger**

New York, U.S.

#### **Scrapbook “Brooklyn / Piano Programs / 1915-16-17-18-19-20-1931 / June.”**

1915-1931

scrapbook containing paper ephemera

2017/34/1/7

This scrapbook includes documents relating to Percy Grainger’s performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in New York, USA, from 1915 to 1931. At that time, BAM was the venue for various public piano recitals and concerts. Percy Grainger appeared not only as a pianist but also as a guest conductor with the Symphony Society of Brooklyn, and performed his own compositions at BAM. The scrapbook page on display shows promotional articles on the first piano recital Grainger held at BAM, including his handwritten annotations, giving us a glimpse of Percy’s passion for documentation and archiving of his career.

## **4. William A. Crawley (editor)**

Australia

### **Australasian Stage Annual 1901 (features Ada Crossley)**

1901

work on paper

2020/30/1/1

The Australasian Stage Annual is an annual magazine published in Melbourne during the early 20th century. The publication, edited by W. A. Crawley, recorded major figures and events across the theatre, music, and performing arts industries of the time, and was highly appreciated by both the public and the press. It is a vital primary source providing a comprehensive record of the performing arts scene in Australia during the Federation era. The 1901 issue, featuring Ada Crossley on its cover, reflects Ada's status as a world-renowned contralto and a leading figure in the Australian cultural scene of the time.

## 5. Unknown photographer

Cape Town, South Africa

### **Ada Crossley with her musicians including Percy Grainger (fifth from left), on the deck of a boat during the Crossley tour, Cape Town, South Africa**

c. 1904

albumen print on card

99.4700.5

This photograph documents Percy Grainger's participation in opera singer Ada Crossley's international touring network. As a member of Crossley's party, Grainger appears here within a group rather than as an individual figure, reflecting how his early career was shaped in part by interpersonal relationships and professional opportunities. Through this partnership, he was able to participate in international tours, gaining performance experience and expanding his professional network. Rather than being the result of individual talent alone, Grainger's development was closely shaped by these structured social relations, which enabled him to gradually gain wider musical recognition and establish the foundation for his later career.

## 6. Unknown maker

place unknown

### **Ada Crossley Presentation Book**

1904

leather, gold, silk, cardboard, paper, ribbon

01.2039

This ceremonial presentation book, produced during Ada Crossley's 1904 Australasian and South African concert tour, captures a pivotal moment in Percy Grainger's early career. As a member of Crossley's touring party, Grainger performed alongside one of the most prominent Australian contraltos of her generation. The tour significantly expanded his performance experience, broadened his international networks, and introduced him to a wider audience. Created to honor Crossley's celebrity, this book also reveals the conditions that enabled Grainger's growing visibility, shaped not only by his musical ability, but also by access to key relationships, resources, and professional opportunities at a formative stage of his career.

## **7. Postcard, inscribed from Percy Grainger to Rose Grainger**

1 February 1908

ink on postcard

2016/8/5/10.24

This postcard, written by Percy Grainger to his mother Rose Grainger, offers a glimpse into one of the key relationships that shaped his early musical development. Rose was more than an emotional support; she was his first piano teacher, she played an active organisational role in his music education and early career decisions, and had a key role as Percy's first Manager as he established his European career, helping to establish the conditions that enabled his artistic growth. Correspondence such as this reveals how his development was sustained through ongoing guidance and support.

## 8. F. Lorée

France (1881 to present)

### Oboe

1910

African blackwood, silver plate, metal and cork

00.0090

This modern orchestral oboe, manufactured in 1910 by the prestigious Parisian firm F. Lorée, exemplifies the instrumental standards of the early 20th century. Constructed from African blackwood with a complex silver-plated key system, it features the “Gillet System,” a pre-modern covered hole mechanism characteristic of the era. The instrument is comprised of three distinct sections, each bearing the maker’s inscription and the “Reynolds” model designation. This oboe speaks to Percy Grainger’s belief in “the truly immense potentialities of the concert wind band as an emotional musical medium” (*Metronome Orchestra Monthly*, November 1918), and his far-reaching innovations in compositions for these instruments.

## 9. Buffet Crampon and Cie

France

### Soprano Saxophone

early 20th century

brass, cork, ebony, and metal

00.0086

This brass Soprano Saxophone, featuring a distinctive tapering bore flaring into a basal bell, is a testament to the intricate craftsmanship of the renowned French maker Buffet Crampon and Cie. The instrument possesses a complex key system and an ebony-carved mouthpiece, bearing the inscription “Beuscher Elkhart Incl.” Notably, the bell is marked with the maker’s signature alongside details of the distributors “Evette & Schaeffer” and “Carl Fischer.” Probably played by Percy Grainger himself, this instrument reflects his lifelong fascination with instrumental color and his dedication to preserving the evolving history of musical technology in his museum.

## 10. Unknown maker

France

### Accordion

mid-19th century

wood, mother of pearl, leather, cloth, metal and paint

00.0098

This mid-19th-century wooden accordion features twenty-three intricate mother-of-pearl keys. The main body is elaborately decorated with pink and aqua lacquered paint. Percy Grainger collected diverse folk and orchestral instruments to study their unique mechanical structures and acoustic properties. He integrated folk-inspired sonorities into many of his compositions, reflecting his lifelong commitment to expanding the traditional boundaries of Western musical performance and instrumental orchestration. Grainger was interested in the sonority of free-reed instruments (which include accordions, harmoniums and reed organs) and he integrated parts of these instruments in some of his Free Music experiments in the 1940s-50s.