

Next on

Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, February 2nd, 2013, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Percy Grainger (1882-1961). [Hill-Song No. 1](#) (1902, rev. 1921/23). Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Geoffrey Simon. Koch 7003, Tr 3. 13:12

Grainger. [The Warriors](#) (1916). City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rattle. Angel 56412, Tr 15. 18:42

Grainger. [In a Nutshell](#) (1916). City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rattle. Angel 56412, Tr 1-4. 18:52



If you know Percy Grainger at all, you know [Country Gardens](#), that simple frolic every beginning pianist, every wind band, every school orchestra has assayed at one time or another. Percy Grainger knew that you would know that, and that's why Percy Grainger grew to detest *Country Gardens*.

His life was a series of course corrections. That's true of most of us, but he had the talent of switching from success to success. He enjoyed more success than most artists, but his weren't always the kind he would have chosen, so he'd change directions. He was born and raised in Australia, then studied piano and composition in Germany, where he became friends with Frederick Delius and the composers in his circle. After concertizing in Europe, he relocated to London to teach and play.

He composed all this time—*Hill-Song No. 1*, one of his favorite works, is from this period—yet he felt he needed to establish his credentials as a pianist before engaging the world with his own music. He was also busy collecting the British folk songs that would figure so greatly in his art for the rest of his life. Even though the two *Hill-Songs* celebrate vistas from around the world, they're overflowing with British sound.

Grainger composed *The Warriors* and dedicated it to Delius. It exists only because of an off-hand suggestion by the conductor Thomas Beecham for a ballet to which he, Sir Thomas, would write the story. Beecham never did, but Grainger wrote the music anyway, calling it "An Imaginary Ballet." It's unusual for a Grainger work in that it's one long movement. In a series of dances, soldiers from all ages and places meet in the afterlife, and the music honors each vigorous culture in turn.

The suite *In a Nutshell* pulls together four separate works that are closer to the popularly known Grainger. It ends with "The 'Gum-Suckers' March," hailing the nickname for Australians from Grainger's home state of Victoria, who would chew on eucalyptus leaves while hiking. The first movement's title, "Arrival platform humlet," looks like a typo, but how better to describe a little nonsense tune one hums while waiting on a train platform?

A "humlet," then, is an example of an endearing Grainger idiosyncrasy, his use of language. He knew many, including many Scandinavian ones, but he felt that a person who spoke English should use it (and, as much as possible, Anglo-Saxon) in his scores. So, he called chamber music "room-music," arrangements "dish-ups," *molto crescendo* "louden lots," and coined new tempo markings such as "Accompanyingly" and "Hammeringly."

With a world war threatening, Grainger moved from London to America and spent the rest of his life there, serving in the U.S. Army and becoming a citizen. But he always seemed to be on the move. He was a prodigious pianist who wanted to compose, a composer who wanted to educate, an educator who wanted to innovate. The popularity of his "dish-ups" tends to overshadow how brilliant his scoring is. That gift is obvious in the thoroughly original works we hear today. Unfortunately for Grainger, perhaps, it's also unmistakable in *Country Gardens*.

Brilliance of that kind doesn't always explain something that's popular, but it does explain something that lasts.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), former Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).