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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, March 9th, 2013, 5:00-6:00 p.m. (2nd Saturday this month!)

Frederick Delius (1862-1934). [*Life's Dance*](#) (1898/1901/12). Royal Philharmonic, Charles Groves. Angel 63171, Tr 1. 15:21

Delius. [*Appalachia*](#) (1896/1903). Alun Jenkins, Baritone, Hallé Orchestra, Ambrosian Singers, John Barbirolli. Angel 65119, Tr 14. 38:26



Edvard Munch, *The Dance of Life*, 1899

The young Englishman watched the cigar smoke dance slowly as it dissipated into the hot, thick air. He was sitting on the porch of a cottage in an orange grove called Solano on a sleepy bank of a river named the St. Johns, a long, lazy waterway born in the southern marshes and in no hurry to creep up eastern Florida to lap, finally, into the Atlantic. St. Augustine was close by to the east, but 1884 St. Augustine was not yet a city, nowhere near a city, hardly a town. In this lonely grove by the river, in the wilderness of the Florida interior, St. Augustine could have been in Yorkshire, where he was born, for all that.

The 22-year-old lit another cigar. As the smoke melted, barely lifted by the St. Johns breeze, Fritz Delius was happy to be far from St. Augustine, far from Yorkshire, and as far from his father as he could be.

In England, Julius Delius wanted Fritz to work in the family's business, which started with wool, then expanded to other mercantile, and now added this orange plantation opportunity. Julius and his wife came from Germany to England and named their second son Fritz Theodore Albert, who'd eventually change Fritz to Frederick.

His business experience might charitably be called desultory. Apart from middling success representing the Delius firm in southern England, he had failed it in Germany, in Sweden, and in France, spending more time on occasional music studies or on French Riviera extravagances than on accounts. The Florida grove management scheme might have been Julius's idea or even Frederick's, but they both thought that a change of scenery to the New World might be profitable.

It wasn't, not for the business. But it was the wilderness experience Frederick needed to become a composer.

While he sat, and while he smoked, former slaves and the children of slaves worked the grove and worked the boats. As they worked, they sang. They sang songs he had never heard before, songs old and pure. And then they sculpted fluid improvisations out of the songs, so that he couldn't tell where the old ended and where the new began. And then, one evening, an epiphany struck him. Cigar ash dropped, unwatched, to the porch. What happened was this: He was falling in love with music. He had to make this. This is what he would do.

He left America renewed, brimming with compositional vigor. His father, relenting, supported his music study in Germany. He composed there, moved to France and composed there, honed his skills, and not ten years later wrote these two works, *Appalachia* and *Life's Dance*. He revised them numerous times, learning and crafting as he grew. *Appalachia* he called Variations on an Old Slave Song. A play by his Danish friend Helge Rode and a painting by their mutual friend, the Norwegian Edvard Munch, inspired *Life's Dance*.

The sound of Delius, the waterway of his music, is not to everyone's taste at first. He takes his time winding it along. Just as you recognize it, he twists it again. It is smoke or a long, slow river. It is English music, surely, but English born in a Florida wilderness, taking its time through the humidity, dancing slowly in the occasional breeze. "In Florida," Delius said, "In Florida sitting and gazing at Nature, I gradually learnt the way in which I should eventually find myself. Nobody else could help me."

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](#).