

# GRAINGER — the Inimitable

## A Modernist Lover of the Classics to Broadcast in N.Z.

**P**ERCY GRAINGER, the Australian composer-pianist, did not create his popularity by settling in a comfortable groove and playing the well-worn masterpieces that were the almost invariable rule in the recital programmes of pianists in Victorian days. Beginning his career as a virtuoso at the age of 18, in London, he straightway blazed new trails by becoming a prophet of modernism. In various parts of the world he used his tours to spread knowledge of pianoforte music that his public had never heard before.

This artist, who arrived from Australia a few days ago, after a series of phenomenally successful broadcasts, is to tour the four main New Zealand stations. His first broadcast will be from 4YA.

It is a tribute to his critical insight that since those days of high adventure so many of these works and their composers' names have become household words to music-lovers the world over. Between 1902 and 1904 Grainger was the very first to play on the concert platform the music of Debussy and Cyril Scott in England and other lands. A little later he did pathfinder work with the compositions of Maurice Ravel and the Spaniard Albeniz.

Although Grainger is a keen modernist, he loves the classics with the same warmth. He believes in the universality of art, dislikes all aesthetic party spirit, and bewails every trend that would sunder the old from the new, the popular from the classical, the complex from the simple. He feels that time and place of origin, school or type of composition should hold no sway over our musical judgment, which should rather be grounded on one consideration alone: indwelling, instinctive musicality.

Grainger has made it his particular mission to spread music of our own race. "We have real gems of chamber-music from the 16th and 17th centuries," he says; the composers of those times wrote a more complicated and emotional type of chamber-music than the composers of the 18th and 19th centuries, when the whole of music was getting into the hands of professional players. The music of the 16th and 17th centuries was written for the pleasure of the amateurs who performed it. It is therefore more suitable for the present day, when people are beginning to make music for their own pleasure again.

With reference to the early 16th and 17th century music which he introduces to his audiences, Mr. Grainger vehemently stresses the fact that his interest in such music is in no sense antiquarian—that he enjoys the sheer

musicality of it in the same sense as he enjoys a sincere modern work. This attitude of mind he strongly recommends to his hearers. In this connection he frankly owns to his great indebtedness to Mr. Arnold Dolmetsch, of Haslemere, Surrey, and his talented family, whose life-work it has been to save the works of early English composers from oblivion, and whose festivals of Elizabethan music are the Mecca of serious-minded musicians from all civilised countries.

In his New Zealand programmes Grainger, besides a good allowance of classics, will play the works of the moderns that he has popularised in so many lands. Furthermore, at every concert he will play some of his own works, several of which, like "Country Gardens," have broken all the sales records for modern pianoforte compositions.

When Grieg first heard Percy Grainger play (in 1906) he expressed his admiration for the then 24-year-old Australian in articles that appeared in Scandinavian newspapers, making Grainger's name a household word in Scandinavia. Amongst Grieg's friends it was known that copious other statements concerning Grainger were found in Grieg's diary, but these statements never appeared in print until quite recently. One of his entries was: "Even among the very greatest pianists, I do not know one that I could compare with him."

David Monrad Johansen, in writing his monumental book about his great compatriot, had access to Grieg's letters, diaries and other documents, and has quoted liberally from these sources. The following is a translation of some of the passages in D. M. Johansen's book, in which Percy Grainger is mentioned:—

After having met Percy Grainger in London, Grieg noted in his diary, on May 21, 1906: "And finally Percy Grainger played two of my Peasant Dances (Sløater) in glorious style. Yes, he is a genius, that is sure enough. I am happy to have won such a young friend. I have never met anyone who understands me as he does. And yet he hails from Australia. With what justification, then, do the critics assail my music, as being 'too Norwegian'? It is all stupidity and ignorance, nothing



ing else." And later: "In my present (ailing) condition the memory of these performances acts upon me like the sun emerging from the clouds."

The numbers mentioned will be played by Mr. Grainger from 3YA during his tour.

A feature of Grainger's pianism is his special attention to pedalling, including the use of the sustaining (or middle) pedal found on certain makes of piano. This sustaining pedal Grainger deems quite as important as the damper (or right-foot) pedal, its proper use permitting a harmonic clearness hitherto unknown to the piano. By means of the sustaining pedal certain selected notes, chords and so forth, in all registers of the instrument, can be sustained quite independently of the other pedals and all later played notes. This, of course, is a priceless boon in polyphonic playing. Grainger was the first famous virtuoso to study this pedal deeply, and since he came to know it he has remodelled his pedalcraft thoroughly.

Mr. Grainger, whose musical enthusiasm and magnetic personality make him particularly fitted for the task, will also act as guest-conductor both in his studio and public concert appearances throughout New Zealand, and will also be heard in personal annotations of the works performed.

Such is the pianist's enthusiasm that he is reported to have haunted Australian broadcasting studios at unusually early hours of the morning. Hours at a piano without ceasing have kept his art developed to the highest pitch, and there will be abundant evidence of his skill for New Zealand listeners in the next few weeks.