The Essential Grainger

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Percy Grainger's Kipling Settings

By

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For Kay Dreyfus,
consummate scholar,
mentor, and friend

Rudyard Kipling, 1892. Bourne & Shepherd Studio, Calcutta.

> “Till now I’ve had to rely on black and white, but you do the thing for me in colour.”
> —Rudyard Kipling to Percy Grainger, 1905

Percy Grainger wearing towel clothes of his own design, 1941. Grainger Museum Collection, University of Melbourne.

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FOREWORD

It is, I suspect, a universal human instinct to be drawn not only to contemplate great works of art, but also then to want to know more about the artists themselves. Ever since we have been both willing and able to attribute significant cultural artefacts to particular creators we have also wanted to explore their life stories. What were the particular and peculiar interests and influences that encouraged them, even compelled them, to create in the way they did? How might we better understand the links between a particular creative mind and a particular creative act?

Such questions will certainly be familiar to those of us who share a particular love for the music of Percy Aldridge Grainger, not least because Grainger was so interested in exploring them himself. But we are also aware that Grainger's own claim to greatness is by no means universally recognized or settled. His compositions and arrangements, while unquestionably original, also frequently display qualities that can seem antithetical to more commonly accepted notions of musical value, something that Grainger himself well recognized. He once said, for instance, of the modernist composer Ferrucio Busoni that he "impressed people immensely, but pleased few, [whereas] I was able to please almost everybody, including Busoni, but impressed nobody."[1]

Superficial support for those keen to amplify a suspicion that Grainger might not deserve too much close attention can also be found in the fact that his life outside music similarly challenged commonly held notions of propriety and convention. On the other hand, this is one reason why understanding his music and life more completely, as well as more critically, is also so important. Teresa Balough (who has already made several major scholarly contributions to Grainger studies), has therefore done us all a great service by writing such a rich and detailed study of Grainger's engagement with the life and works of Rudyard Kipling. As she powerfully demonstrates, a closer knowledge of Grainger's settings of this quintessential poet of the British Empire can help us better to understand

[1] Percy Grainger, handwritten collection of autobiographical jottings c. 1949–1954 entitled "Grainger's Anecdotes," Grainger Archives, White Plains, New York, quoted in John Bird, *Percy Grainger*, rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 92–93.

issues in Grainger reception and reputation formation in deeper, better, ways.

We quickly discover that Grainger occupied himself on and off with Kipling settings across almost his entire active creative life, and he also considered one of them—the *Jungle Book Cycle*—to be one of his finest creative achievements. That would be reason enough for a book-length study such as this. But, as David Josephson had flagged as early as 1973, many of the problems we have today with properly understanding (let alone appreciating) Kipling are nigh-indistinguishable to many we also find with Grainger. Simply put, he suggests, we "are not provided with the proper critical tools."[2] The art of both men can, for instance, seem to us too commonplace, even kitsch, certainly when compared to the literature and music of their more overtly "modernist" contemporaries. Worse, hanging over both of them is a lingering suspicion that they were also too accommodating of the faux glories and racially motivated moral failings of the British Empire.

As Balough powerfully documents, however, we are then at risk of seriously underestimating the full aesthetic (and indeed political) ambition of both men. Their shared foregrounding of the commonplace, for instance, was far from some mere accommodation with their world as they found it. More often than not it led them, instead, to a direct criticism of it. What Kipling found through his poetic rendering of the lives of the ordinary subjects of Empire in India, and what Grainger similarly found in his musical settings of those renderings (alongside his equally deep interest in British and European folk traditions) was a world that was, if anything, antagonistic to the social and political status quo. Their art was in no small part created as a direct response to both the excesses of Empire and the growing impact of industrial modernity more generally. Both also sought to honour what they considered to be a continuing need for a sense of community and ritual midst a time of immense social upheaval.

Balough reminds us, too, that biographical parallels between Kipling and Grainger are also numerous. Both were born on the geographical fringes of the British Empire, something that Grainger thought made Kipling "something like an Australian," no less.[3] Both then experienced major geographical dislocations from a young age, and both seemed to have been drawn to the literary imagination as one way through which they could reconcile themselves with such dislocations. True, there still remains aspect

[2] David S. Josephson, "Percy Grainger: Country Gardens and Other Curses," *Current Musicology* 15 (1973): 59–60.
[3] Percy Grainger, *Comrades in Art: The Correspondence of Ronald Stevenson and Percy Grainger 1957–61* (London: Toccata, 2010), 101.

of both men's work that will continue to trouble us. Grainger himself once wrote that as a result of his encounter with Kipling "I became what I have remained ever since, a composer whose musical output was based on patriotism and racial consciousness."[4] But even those aspects invite further investigation alongside our condemnation. Midst Grainger's undeniable (albeit also eccentric and contradictory) interest in racial identity as a feature of his art can also be found a deep interest in and concern for what the composer himself described as "the tragedy, not the splendours of imperialism," no less.[5]

For these reasons, not least, *The Essential Grainger: Percy Grainger's Kipling Settings* stands as a significant and valuable contribution to Grainger and Kipling scholarship. It will surely help encourage and sustain further interest in the lives and artworks of both.

—PETER TREGEAR

[4] Percy Grainger, "John H. Grainger (1956)," in *Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger*, ed. Malcolm Gillies, David Pear, and Mark Carroll (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.

[5] Percy Grainger, program note to *The Widow's Party* (1939).

PREFACE

This work is a study of Percy Grainger's Kipling settings, with particular reference to his *Kipling "Jungle Book" Cycle.* It has been attempted here to show that his settings of Kipling texts reveal not only his development as a mature composer but also reflect the philosophic roots of his art and mirror his essential stylistic traits. In this study, Grainger's Kipling settings are taken as a microcosm of his works as a whole and the catalyst and genesis for his art.

The work is divided into two parts. Since Grainger's *Jungle Book* settings represent both his earliest mature works and his last original composition, they have been analysed in some detail, from both a musical and a literary standpoint. The remaining Kipling settings, including works from *The Light That Failed*, *Barrack-Room Ballads*, *The Seven Seas*, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, *The Day's Work*, *Life's Handicap*, and *The Five Nations*, have been looked at as a group in the light of their significance to his total compositional output.

The individual studies of the *Jungle Book* settings have each been divided into three sections, e.g., "general musical considerations," "literary aspects," and "musical and poetic interaction," in order to discuss both the musical and literary aspects of each setting and their correlation to each other. To arrive at an understanding of the philosophical significance of each work, an analysis of the symbolism inherent in the texts has been undertaken, followed by a study of the musical means used by Grainger to translate this symbolism into musical terms.

Although a detailed biography of either man has not been attempted, a background chapter dealing with pertinent aspects of their lives is included to provide a starting point for a general understanding of their professional relation to one another. A chronology of Grainger's life in relation to the development of his Kipling settings is included as well. The bibliography, though not exhaustive, aims at being as complete as possible within terms of direct use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was originally undertaken as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a PhD in musicology from the University of Western Australia; and I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance and support of my two supervisors, Professor Sir Frank Callaway of the Music Department and Professor Leonard Burrows of the English Department of the University of Western Australia. They both facilitated the writing and enjoyment of this study to a high degree. Special thanks are also due to Sir Frank for suggesting the subject matter of the dissertation and providing the title. I wish also to thank Dr. David Symons of the Music Department for his perusal of the text and his many helpful suggestions regarding musical analysis. To Dr. Kenneth Wright, Emeritus Professor of Music of the University of Kentucky, go thanks for helpful criticism and many discussions regarding the musical aspects of the text. To Mrs. Muriel Stanley thanks for insights into the life and teachings of Carl Gustav Jung and to the Perth Analytical Psychology Club (Jung Society) thanks for the opportunity to express and receive feedback on my views regarding Jungian symbolism in Kipling's *Jungle Books.* Thanks to Dr. Kay Dreyfus, Ms. Rosemary Florrimel, and Lauren Davis of the Grainger Museum and the University of Melbourne for providing copies of manuscript and musical examples, to the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library of the University of Cape Town for allowing access to their Kipling Collection (and to Professor Lionel Bowman for his assistance in bringing microfiche from that collection to Australia), and to the Kipling Society of London for information regarding musical settings of Kipling texts. Thanks to Rochelle Fleming for drawing the manuscript musical examples. I wish also to thank Professor Emeritus David Tunley of the Music Department of the University of Western Australia for his encouragement and support of this project. Thanks to Dr. Sarah Kirby of the Grainger Museum for assistance with the museum collection. My deepest thanks to Dr. Suzanne Robinson for her meticulous copyediting and indexing.

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NOTE ON LITERARY AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS TERMS USED IN THE TEXT

Part A: Literary Terms

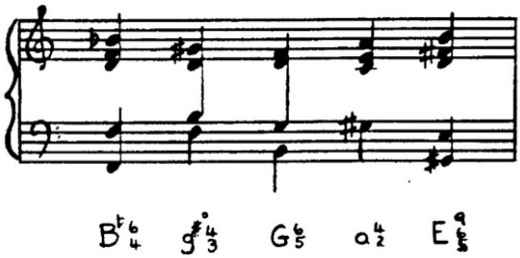
In order to describe the symbolism and underlying layers of meaning in Kipling's text, three sets of literary terms have been borrowed from Robin Skelton's *Poetic Truth* (Harper and Row, 1978). These are: short, long and total focus; linear and spatial relationship; and extensive and intensive manifold. Although Skelton does not advocate the use of these terms as a new form of poetic analysis, in this case they are helpful in making clear the ramifications of the texts. Skelton's terms have been used for clarification of the symbolism in Kipling's works.

An image which is clear in itself but has no background of important associations has *short focus*; that which is blurred, while having an important surround or aura has *long focus*; that in which the object is clearly seen in focus and the territory of which it is the centre is also clearly seen has *total focus*. Language which moves by means of precise denotation exclusive of all but accidental ambiguity is *linear*; but when a word operates as a unity of all its powers, it is *spatial*, it is a "portmanteau" word and contains many personal, historical and imaginative associations. The *extensive manifold* of a poem is the intellectual explanation of the work; the *intensive manifold* is how it translates phenomena into the construct system of each individual reader.[1]

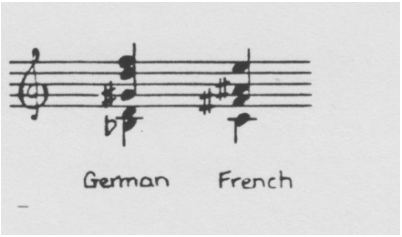
[1] Robin Skelton, *Poetic Truth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 1, 3, 6, 7, 95, 96.

Part B: Musical Vocabulary

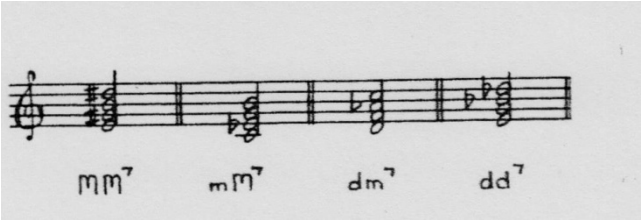
1. Chord inversions use the traditional figured bass terminology with large and small letters plus * and + symbols representing the triad qualities.



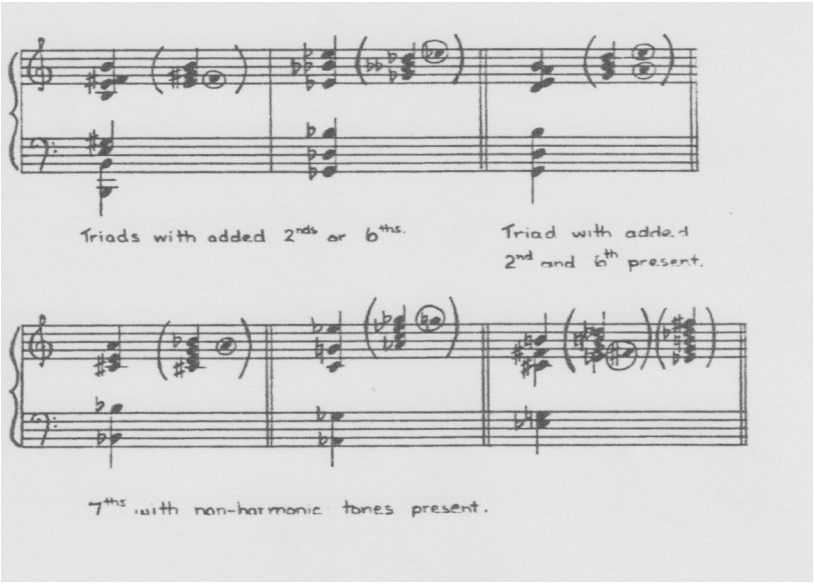
2. The augmented sixth chords are classified by their conventional names.



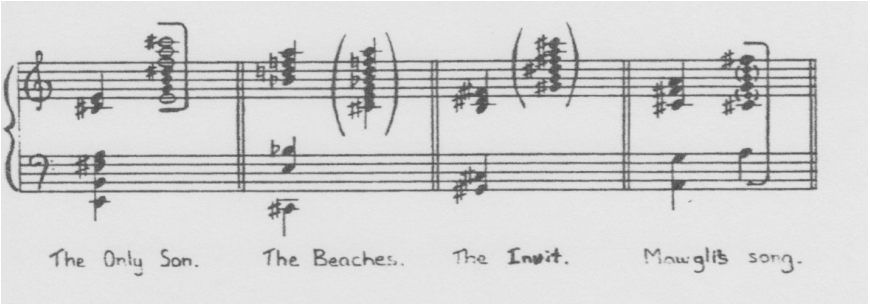
3. Seventh chord sonorities are denominated by the quality of their *triad* element followed by the *seventh* characteristic.



4. “Appoggiatura” chords are defined as conventional triads or sevenths with non-harmonic elements also present. Certain species occur often, as the following:



5. Eleventh and thirteenth chords: generally these are not present in clear form and are subject to inference.



6. Bichords: The few present are mainly by inference. An authentic one (two major triads with roots a diminished fifth apart) is in bar 21 of *The Beaches of Lukannon*.