



OBJECTS OF FAME

NELLIE MELBA & PERCY GRAINGER



poco mos.

RALLEN.

MASSIMO RIT.
LENTO. (Don't hurry the tempo)

SOPR. FL. CLARS. OB. 4 HORNS. BASS. TENSOR. FL. 2. CLARS. BASS. HORNS 1, 2.

Handwritten musical score for woodwinds and strings. Includes dynamic markings like *mf*, *f*, *p*, *pp*, *ppp*, *dim*, *mf espres*, and *molto*. A circled "65" is visible in the string section.

HARP solo VIOL. SOLO. 2 viol. soli. 2 viole soli. 2 cello soli. CELLO solo. The rest. c.B.

Handwritten musical score for solo instruments and strings. Includes dynamic markings like *f*, *dim*, *ppp*, *mf*, *pp*, *ppp*, *dim*, *mf*, and *ppp*. A circled "15" is visible in the string section.

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Acknowledgements

Published in association with the exhibition:

Objects of Fame: Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger

Grainger Museum
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This collaborative exhibition between the Grainger Museum and Arts Centre Melbourne would not have been possible without the shared commitment, creativity and dedication of many people within, and in support of, the two organisations.

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We applaud the patient, flexible and creative work of exhibition designer Megan Atkins, who has been able to integrate these two historic collections, and shine the spotlight of fame on Melba and Grainger in the unique environment of the Grainger Museum.

From the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, we would like to thank Suzanne Robinson, Elizabeth Kertesz and Pat Millman for their expert support. Thanks and congratulations go to postgraduate University of Melbourne composition student Lewis Ingham for his inspired soundscape. We are also grateful to contributors to public programs, including Greta Bradman, Bernard Caleo, Anna Cordingley, Cleo Lee-McGowan and Tom Griffiths.

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Heather Gaunt and Margaret Marshall

Curators, *Objects of Fame*

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Forewords

Arts Centre Melbourne is pleased to have collaborated with the Grainger Museum at The University of Melbourne for this important project. This exhibition pays tribute to two internationally famous talents, Dame Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger, and explores the personal and professional connections between these Melbourne-born performers.

The project highlights Arts Centre Melbourne's internationally acclaimed Australian Performing Arts Collection, the nation's leading collection documenting Australia's circus, dance, music, opera and theatre heritage. Among the founding acquisitions of the Collection were costumes and accessories worn by Dame Nellie Melba, which were generously donated from 1977 onwards by her granddaughter Pamela, Lady Vestey.

Nellie Melba was Australia's first international star of the stage. She experienced fame like no other before her. Unquestionably, there are strong parallels between our Collection and the Grainger Collection in telling the stories of prominent Australian performing artists. We are glad of the opportunity to once again showcase some of our stunning Dame Nellie Melba costumes and archives, and to increase access to the Australian Performing Arts Collection by showing it in a different context at the Grainger Museum.

We are thrilled that the Collection, now comprising more than 680,000 items, will play a major role in the Reimagining of Arts Centre Melbourne and its adjacent precinct. A new permanent Gallery will be established to showcase the Collection, providing remarkable experiences for all visitors.

We are grateful to Jo-Anne Cooper (Manager, Special Collections and Grainger Museum) and Heather Gaunt (Curator, Grainger Museum) for their passion, effort and wonderful collegiate attitude to working on *Objects of Fame* and we hope this collaboration is the first of many such joint projects between our two organisations.

Claire Spencer
Chief Executive Officer
Arts Centre Melbourne

What a privilege to be involved in a project that compares the lives of two extraordinary and preternaturally talented Australians, Dame Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger. There are so many aspects of this exhibition that will fascinate, intrigue, surprise and stimulate the visitor. One such intrigue might be a question about the odds of a small British colony at the bottom of the world producing two internationally famous musical icons 20 years apart. Perhaps less statistically impressive, but nonetheless interesting, is that they knew each other through the business dealings of their respective fathers.

Treading the world stage in the first decades of the twentieth century, they were both proud to be identified as Australian. Melba and Grainger wore their nationality as a badge of pride. Incredible success in the theatres and concert halls of the world, performing in front of the 'great and the good' did not diminish their enthusiasm for performing in more modest venues in their homeland.

We have the chance in this exhibition to celebrate their achievements and reflect on their hard-won fame and enduring legacies. Contrast this 'fame' with that of today: often an ephemeral personality-based celebrity, where the possibility of a meaningful legacy for future generations to build on, in the manner of Melba and Grainger, seems unlikely.

I would like to thank Claire Spencer, the Chief Executive Officer of Arts Centre Melbourne, for the opportunity of working with her collegiate and highly professional staff. Special thanks to the co-curators, Margaret Marshall from the Australian Performing Arts Collection and Dr Heather Gaunt from the Grainger Museum. Throughout the project they have both displayed great passion for their respective subjects and collections, good humour and an unwavering spirit of cooperation. We hope such rewarding partnerships with Arts Centre Melbourne will continue in the future.

Jo-Anne Cooper
Manager, Special Collections
and Grainger Museum



OBJECTS OF FAME: NELLIE MELBA AND PERCY GRAINGER

Heather Gaunt | Curator, Collections and Exhibitions, Grainger Museum, The University of Melbourne
Margaret Marshall | Curator (Theatre), Australian Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne

Percy Grainger, 1904
Painting by Rupert Bunny
Paris-based Australian painter Rupert Bunny painted Percy Grainger in his first years in London. Artist Jacques-Emile Blanche, a friend of Bunny who also made a portrait of Grainger in this period, described meeting the young musician in 1902. 'Stupified' by the encounter, Blanche characterised Grainger as a 'steely-eyed archangel with the most admirable profile, a lopsided mouth, red as a cactus, and golden hair'.



Dame Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger were two of the most famous Australians of their time. Both achieved success on the world stage and became household names in their country of birth. Coupled with extraordinary musical talents, they each had ambition that propelled them into the public spotlight.

Melba was Australia's first international opera star. She became a high-profile celebrity of the glittering Belle Époque and remained one of the most famous women in the world until her death in 1931. Grainger's famous persona was built on his brilliance and panache as a concert pianist, and the popularity of compositions such as 'Country Gardens'. His career shone most brightly in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

These two Australians present fascinating case studies in the creation and exploitation of fame as it existed a century ago. Drawing on material culture held in the Australian Performing Arts Collection and the Grainger Museum, this exhibition explores the ways in which Melba and Grainger sought and achieved fame, and how it influenced their lives and legacies. It examines the place of each as international citizens who maintained patriotic connections to Australia and embraced profile-raising technological innovations of their day. In addition, it considers the contribution of each towards their own enduring fame.

Importantly, the lives of Melba and Grainger intersected both personally and professionally on their roads to fame. Their families were initially linked through their fathers, David Mitchell and John Grainger, who were prominent participants in the Melbourne building industry during the late nineteenth century.¹ The connection between the two families continued over the following decades, with Melba commissioning John to design her home in the Yarra Valley. Melba became a key point of contact between Grainger family members, providing updates when in Australia on John's deteriorating health due to syphilis.

Melba's association with the Graingers, and her musical experience in Australia and abroad, made her a natural mentor for Percy, who was just one year older than her own son George. Percy's mother, Rose, sought Melba's advice on a suitable teacher for him as they planned their move to Europe (advice which was not taken).



Nellie Melba, c.1902
Photograph by H. Walter Barnett
Henry Walter Barnett created this elegant portrait of Melba at the height of her fame. Barnett was a Melbourne-born photographer who established a studio in London around the turn of the twentieth century. He became a much sought-after photographer of the Edwardian era and his clients included artists, performers, writers and members of high society and royalty.

Programme for Melba–Grainger Concert in aid of the Red Cross, Pittsburgh, 20 January 1916

Both Melba and Grainger dedicated considerable time and money to fundraising during the First World War. This concert featured alternating performances by the two, including Grainger playing his own ‘Shepherd’s Hey’ and Melba singing ‘Addio’ from *La Bohème*.



Sterling silver cigarette box with engraved signatures, c.1910

This cigarette box is engraved with the signatures of both Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger. Also represented are musicians Pablo Casals, Ada Sassoli, Leopold Godowsky, John Philip Sousa and John Lemmoné.

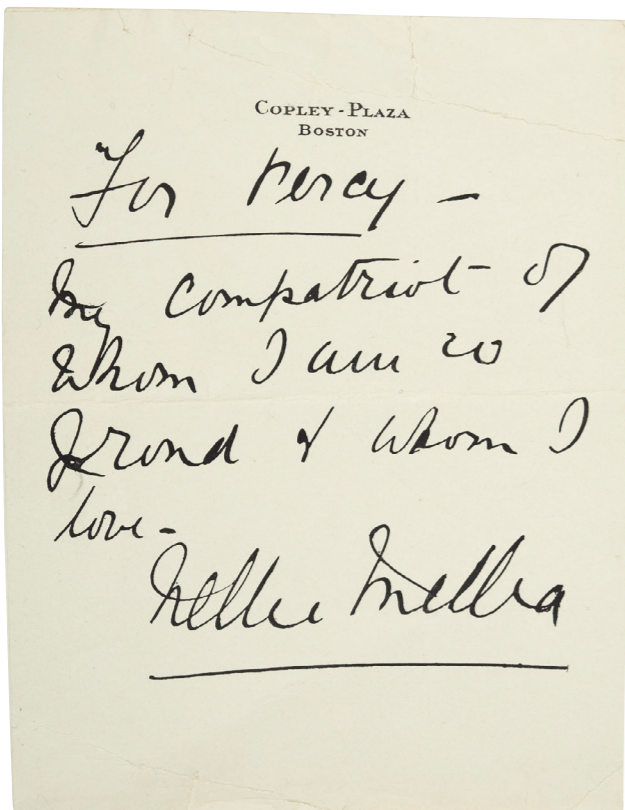


Melba offered friendship and practical support when Rose and Percy settled in London, inviting them to her home and sending tickets to her opera performances. In October 1901, Melba publicly supported Grainger in his first solo recital, taking seats with her entourage in the front row of the theatre.

Melba encouraged Grainger throughout his London period, and later in the United States. In 1916, Melba and Grainger performed together, in Boston and Pittsburgh, to raise funds during the First World War. The following year, Melba sang Grainger’s ‘Colonial Song’ from the audience during a Red Cross concert with her pupils in Melbourne. In a similar vein, she suggested that Grainger set a patriotic poem, *The Flag*, *A Choral Ode* by John Sandes, to music for her – a task he never fulfilled.

In her letters, Melba frequently expressed pride in Grainger’s achievements, and offered advice such as ‘you must continue to work very hard & you will see what success you will have – you have great talent – & there is no reason why, with perseverance, you should not be one of the great ones of the world.’² For his part, Grainger admired Melba’s technical brilliance, and in particular the character of her voice, associating it with ‘the searching, continuous, trancelike vibrations of the middle-distance blues in Australian upcountry-scapes’.³ In 1908 he confided in a private letter that he ‘liked her personality’,⁴ although in biographical notes written after her death he contradicted this, writing ‘I never liked Melba at all’.⁵

Note from Nellie Melba to Percy Grainger, Copley-Plaza Hotel, Boston, c.1915
‘For Percy – My compatriot of whom I am so proud & whom I love – Nellie Melba’



INTERNATIONAL CITIZENS

Melba and Grainger were born in Melbourne, in 1861 and 1882 respectively, and exhibited early musical talents. After taking lessons locally, each travelled to Europe to continue their studies and pursue professional careers – Melba as a determined young mother and Grainger as a child prodigy. Influenced by key mentors, with success measured by prestigious performances, they each experienced fame and led increasingly international lives.

‘I had visions of conquering London, of singing before vast audiences, of waking up to find myself famous.’⁶

NELLIE MELBA

Born Helen Porter Mitchell, the young Nellie Melba learnt piano and organ before studying singing. In 1882 she married Charles Armstrong in Mackay, Queensland and gave birth to their son, George, the following year. Returning to Melbourne, she resumed singing lessons with Italian tenor Pietro Cecchi, and from 1884, billed as Mrs Armstrong, performed in concerts, initially in an amateur capacity and then as a professional.⁷

When her father was invited to London in 1886, the ambitious Nellie saw an opportunity to advance her career. She auditioned for several singing teachers, but was turned down by all of them, including Sir Arthur Sullivan. Demonstrating her resolve, she travelled to Paris to sing for Mathilde Marchesi, Europe’s



Nellie Melba as Ophélie from *Hamlet*, c.1889
Melba’s earliest performances as Ophélie in Ambroise Thomas’ *Hamlet* were at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels in April 1888 and for her debut at the Paris Opéra in May 1889.

leading vocal teacher. Marchesi’s purported exclamation, ‘At last I have found a star’, has become part of the Melba legend.

Under her mentor’s guidance, Nellie adopted the stage name of Melba in honour of her home city and made her professional operatic debut as Gilda in *Rigoletto* in Brussels in 1887. With it came her first real taste of fame. By the early 1890s she was the reigning prima donna at London’s Covent Garden, helped by influential patron Lady Gladys de Grey, and had conquered other major opera houses of Europe, including the Paris Opéra and La Scala in Milan. She also sang regularly at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York and was one of the key stars temporarily enticed away by

entrepreneur Oscar Hammerstein for his rival Manhattan Opera House, which opened in December 1906.⁸

Melba performed with other leading opera singers of the day, including Enrico Caruso, and studied operas directly with composers such as Charles Gounod, Jules Massenet and Giacomo Puccini.⁹ In addition, she premiered the title roles in Herman Bemberg’s opera *Elaine* (1892) and Camille Saint-Saëns’ *Hélène* (1904).



Bonnet worn by Nellie Melba as Mimi in *La Bohème*, c.1924
Made by Pauline et Cie
Melba's portrayal of the ill-fated Mimi in Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* helped to make the opera famous. She studied the role with the composer and enjoyed particular success singing opposite Enrico Caruso as Rodolfo.



Portrait of Nellie Melba, inscribed to Mathilde Marchesi, signed Paris, 1890
Photograph by Walery, London
Melba's relationship with her teacher was close and affectionate. The inscription on this photograph reads: 'To my dear, good friend & Mamma, Madame Marchesi from her loving & ever grateful pupil, Nellie Melba'.

*'My dearest Madame, I am sure you will be glad to know that I have conquered another country ...'*¹⁰

NELLIE MELBA

As an international star, Melba's professional life and social circle brought her into contact with members of royalty, high society and the artistic elite, including actress Sarah Bernhardt and playwright Oscar Wilde. She sang frequently before English and European royalty, including for special occasions and in private. She was dressed, both on- and off-stage, by leading French couturiers and honoured by the creation of the dessert Pêche Melba by chef Auguste Escoffier. Her letters and memoirs tell of elaborate dinners and parties, engaging conversations and cherished gifts. Melba's fame grew beyond the opera stage; her luxurious lifestyle, influential associates and glamorous fashion made her a celebrity of the Western world.

Such was Melba's popularity that she experienced frenzied fan behaviour. In 1891 she was summoned to St Petersburg, together with brothers Jean and Edouard de Reszke, to sing before Tsar Alexander III at the Imperial Theatre. One night while surrounded by crowds demanding programmes be signed, a young man took her pencil and bit it into pieces, distributing it among his excited friends.¹¹ In 1900 she wrote to Marchesi from Vienna:

When I left the opera house last night there were hundreds of people in the street all trying to kiss my hands, one woman asked for a flower & I gave her a bouquet

whereupon the crowd fell on her & nearly crushed her to death. I was obliged to get out of my carriage & throw all my bouquets to the crowd & rescue her otherwise I believe she would have been killed.¹²

Melba also occasionally felt in danger herself. Her 1893 debut in Milan was marred by a series of anonymous letters threatening her safety unless she leave immediately.¹³ She also received intimidating letters in Dublin in the 1920s that necessitated the employment of a bodyguard.¹⁴ During the First World War, a series of accidents in the United States, including one that left her with a broken wrist and injured leg, made her believe German spies were involved.¹⁵

The many years of relentless travel required to perform internationally took their toll on Melba. While in the United States in 1910 she wrote to a friend: 'I wonder if you realise what it is to live in a private car for 2 months - of course it is luxurious & one has an excellent chef & servants: but oh! the monotony of travelling & singing is sometimes more than I can bear and the noise in the railway stations is sometimes too awful'.¹⁶

Melba's fame and career also came at a cost to her personal life. During the early 1890s she had an affair with Philippe, the Duc d'Orléans, the young heir to the abolished French throne. When Charles Armstrong named him in a divorce petition, the risk of scandal ended the liaison.¹⁷ The following year, Armstrong took 10-year-old George to Texas and the great diva lost custody of her son. It was not until George turned 21 that they were reunited.



Cloak (with detail) worn by Nellie Melba as Elsa in *Lohengrin*, c.1891

Designed by Jean-Philippe Worth
This 'cloak of angels' was worn by Melba to perform before Tsar Alexander III in St Petersburg. During the journey there, customs officials stopped the train and searched the passengers' luggage. To Melba's dismay, the cloak was thrown into the snow; she rushed outside, desperately trying to explain its importance. After the performance, the Tsarina admired the costume, stroking it and saying 'How perfectly lovely this is!'

Gold wreath brooch presented to Nellie Melba, c.1905

Made by Tiffany and Co.
Engraved on each leaf of this brooch are names of North American cities to which Melba toured, including Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, Montreal, Philadelphia, St Louis, Toronto and Washington.



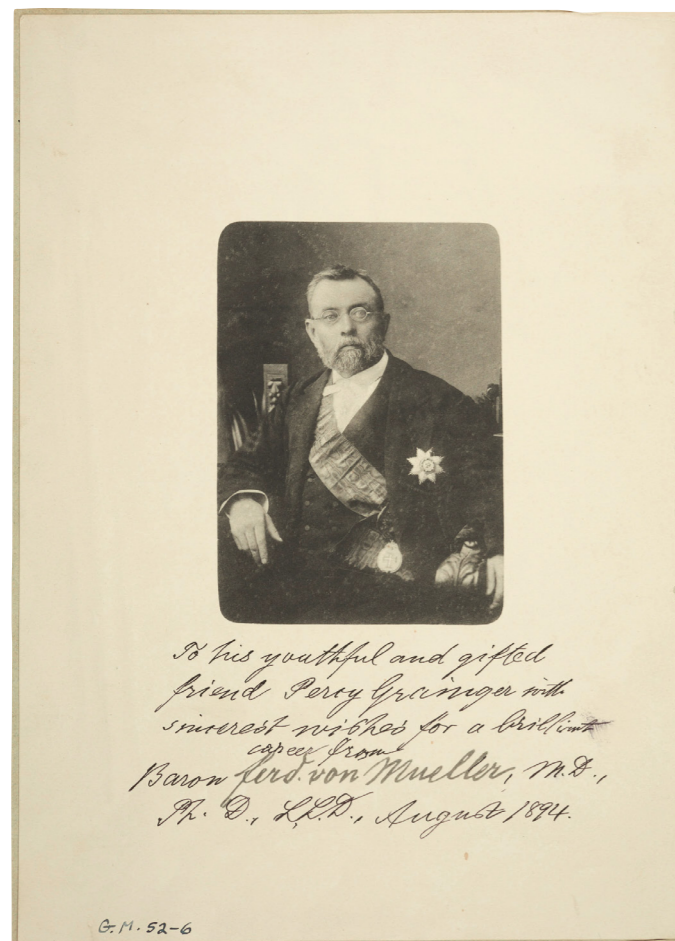


Pendant presented to Percy Grainger by Edith Bolling Wilson, c.1916. Made by Galt & Bro., Washington. Grainger received this memento from the First Lady of the United States in recognition of his performance at the White House during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson.

Presidential portrait of Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, inscribed to Percy Grainger, 1894. Von Mueller was one of many high-profile Melbournians who supported Percy's nascent career. *The Herald* 'Ladies Gossip' column for 18 May 1895 noted: 'Society turned out to assist at the concert given by Percy Grainger, the boy pianist ... Baron von Mueller and Herr Carl Pinschof were in front seats; members of the musical profession, dilettanti were everywhere.'

*'How did I make the start which began my career? I can hardly say; it seemed to come by degrees, for one thing led to another. I think my dear mother helped most, for I was always so deep in work that I had little thought for anything else.'*¹⁸

PERCY GRAINGER



Rose Grainger was the most important practical influence on Percy Grainger and his rise to fame. He began learning piano with her, then from the age of 10 with Louis Pabst, a distinguished professor of piano and founder of the Academy of Music in Melbourne. After two years, Pabst recommended international study and Percy was presented in a series of recitals in Melbourne designed to raise the necessary funds for mother and son to move to Germany. Rose wrote to influential supporters, such as Baron von Mueller, the highly respected botanist and founder of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, to publicly support the recitals. Percy's farewell concert took place in the Melbourne Town Hall in May 1895.

In London, from 1901, Rose carefully manufactured a physical and social context to establish Grainger on the highly competitive professional pianist scene. She tastefully furnished their home on a tiny budget. Percy wrote that his mother 'simply wanted to help me as a composer. She thought that the "Society People" who took lessons from me & engaged me to play at their "at homes" would be more impressed (& therefore more likely to employ me) if we had some nice old furniture in our house'.¹⁹

Grainger met Edvard Grieg, the most important Norwegian composer of the Nationalist-Romantic period, in London in 1906. He impressed the older composer with his pianistic, compositional and linguistic talent – Grainger spoke to Grieg



in Norwegian, a language he had recently mastered. There was an immediate spiritual kinship between the two men, and Grainger was invited in the following year to spend time at Grieg's home in Bergen, Norway. Grainger's name was often linked to Grieg's in the press throughout the rest of his career, particularly as a result of his celebrated performances of Grieg's *Piano Concerto*.

Another early influential connection made by Grainger was with society portrait painter John Singer Sargent, who, Grainger noted, was 'always great-heartedly wanting to put well-paid jobs in my way'.²⁰ Grainger's association with Australian contralto Ada Crossley was equally significant, and his inclusion in multiple tours with her, including over 900 concerts, provided a reliable income in the first decade of his career.

In 1905 Grainger presented his first Royal Command Performance before Queen Alexandra at Buckingham Palace, London. Performances for European royalty soon followed, including the King and Queen of Denmark in Copenhagen in 1905, and the King and Queen of Norway in 1910. Grainger's reputation as a composer grew simultaneously with his reputation as a concert pianist. His first composition was published in 1911 by Schott & Co., London. In the following year he was able to write, 'Nothing in my English career has up to now made me so well-known and so praised and talked of on all sides as my compositions in the last 3 months'.²¹

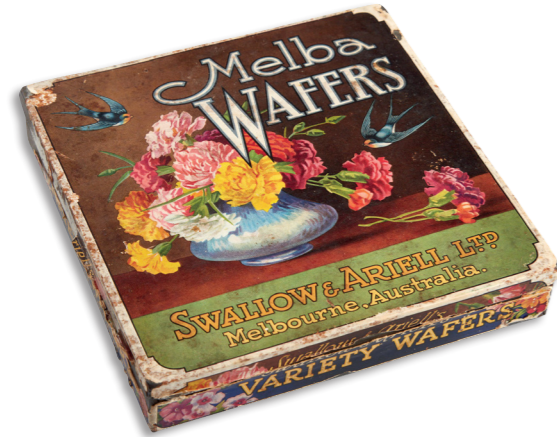
Grainger and his mother moved to live in the United States in 1914 in order to further his career. The move coincided with his exposure to the US public as a composer, when a number of performances 'by the greatest orchestras in different places ... made me very famous at a blow'.²² Grainger took on a professional concert agent, Antonia Sawyer, who found her new charismatic client easy to promote to a receptive public. In performances, Grainger took to speaking to his adoring public between pieces, giving personal perspectives and 'narrating interesting circumstances' connected with them. During his years living in the United States, he performed for three presidents: Woodrow Wilson, Calvin Coolidge and Theodore Roosevelt.

While Grainger didn't often experience the frenzy common to Melba's appearances, he did find the constant public exposure wearing. He wrote to his mother in 1916, 'After looking after baggage, after interviews & always people who talk & talk I feel the empty loneliness of the stage as a real haven of rest & quiet'.²³ Ella Grainger's devotion to her husband, after their marriage in 1928, was essential to Percy's ability to manage the demands of his career. Grainger wrote, towards the end of his life, 'I dislike all fame, including my own. It was one of the many delightfulnesses of my wife, when I met her on the *Aorangi* in 1926, that she didn't know who I was'.²⁴

Ladder-back chair (with detail), 19th century. This ornate chair, with a cushion made from a fragment of old English tapestry, was purchased by Rose Grainger to furnish her London home, between 1901 and 1914.

Ermine muff belonging to Rose Grainger, c.1910. Made by Levinsky & Co., Copenhagen. Rose Grainger probably purchased this muff and its matching satin, lace and ermine dress, while in Denmark with Percy on his 1910 concert tour, when he played for the Royal Danish Court. Ermine was one of the most desirable fashion furs around the world at this time. Even in the heat of Australia, the ladies fashion section in the Sydney newspaper *The Sun* headlined: 'The craze for ermine' in 1911.

Tin for Melba Wafers, c.1920s
Manufactured by Swallow & Ariell Ltd, Melbourne
Melba's name has been applied to many products, most famously Pêche Melba and Melba Toast. In a local culinary tribute, Australian biscuit company Swallow & Ariell created Melba Wafers.



Programmes for Grand Opera Seasons presented by J. C. Williamson Ltd and Dame Nellie Melba, Melbourne and Sydney, 1928



Coombe Cottage, 1921
Etching by Cyril Dillon
Australian artist Cyril Dillon made several etchings of Melba's home, Coombe Cottage at Coldstream in the Yarra Valley. This print shows the building designed by John Grainger. Another in the series depicts the in-ground swimming pool, which was among the first installed in an Australian private residence.



CONNECTIONS TO AUSTRALIA

Despite living the majority of their adult lives overseas, Melba and Grainger retained close links with Australia. They each returned intermittently to visit family and friends, and to perform, ensuring their fame had local relevance. Melba proudly declared her nationality and often spoke fondly of her homeland. Even though Grainger took up US citizenship in 1918, he was always dedicated to growing his reputation in the country of his birth, and maintained an intense emotional connection with the landscape.

*'If you wish to understand me at all... you must understand first and foremost, that I am an Australian.'*²⁵

NELLIE MELBA

In 1902, after 16 years away, the now world-famous Madame Melba returned to an enthusiastic reception. This visit was the first of Melba's numerous concert tours in Australia and New Zealand. In 1911 she joined forces with leading Australian theatrical management J. C. Williamson Ltd and headlined a grand opera season with a company of singers recruited from across Europe. Further seasons were presented in 1924 and 1928, again featuring principal artists from overseas, fulfilling Melba's wish 'that my countrymen could see what good music could be'.²⁶

In 1909 she purchased Coombe Cottage, which became her haven away from the glare of the international spotlight and a permanent connection to her country. Melba was visiting in 1914 when war was declared and remained



based in Australia during hostilities. She began teaching at the Albert Street Conservatorium and also applied her celebrity status to wartime fundraising efforts. These included patriotic concerts in Australia and North America, and charitable initiatives such as *Melba's Gift Book*, featuring work by Australian artists and writers. Having raised an estimated £100,000 for war charities, Melba was honoured as a Dame in 1918.



Chatelaine, purse and rosary worn by Nellie Melba as Marguerite in *Faust*, c.1924
These accessories are part of a costume worn by Melba in Australia during the 1924 Melba-Williamson Grand Opera Season.

Programme for Nellie Melba's Australian Concert Tour, Town Hall, Melbourne, 30 September 1902

Costume and headdress worn by Nellie Melba as Desdemona in *Otello*, c.1924
Made by Mary E. Fisher, London
Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* was one of the operas in which Melba performed during the 1924 Australian season. Her imported costume for the role of Desdemona included this silk crepe de chine tabard and cloak with pearl headdress.

Programme for the Second Grainger Concert, with the South Australian Orchestra, Town Hall, Adelaide, 13 April 1935



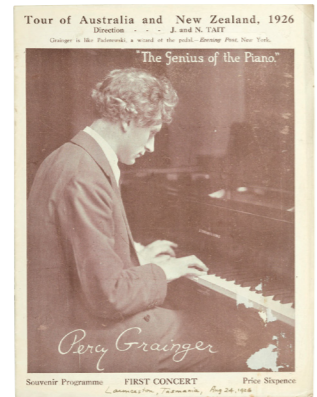
Programme for Ada Crossley's Australasian Tour, Wangaratta, Victoria, 18 December 1908



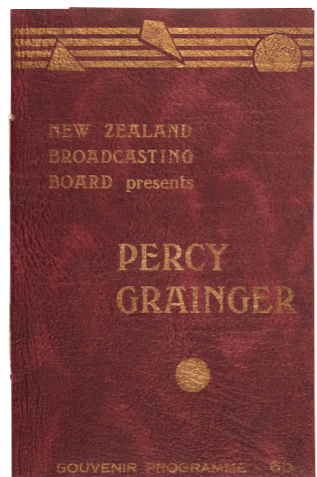
Programme for Brisbane Austral Choir guest conducted by Percy Grainger, Exhibition Hall, Brisbane, 27 and 28 September 1926



Programme for Percy Grainger's Tour of Australia and New Zealand, Launceston, Tasmania, 24 August 1926



Programme for Percy Grainger's tour of New Zealand, Civic Theatre, Christchurch, 31 October 1935

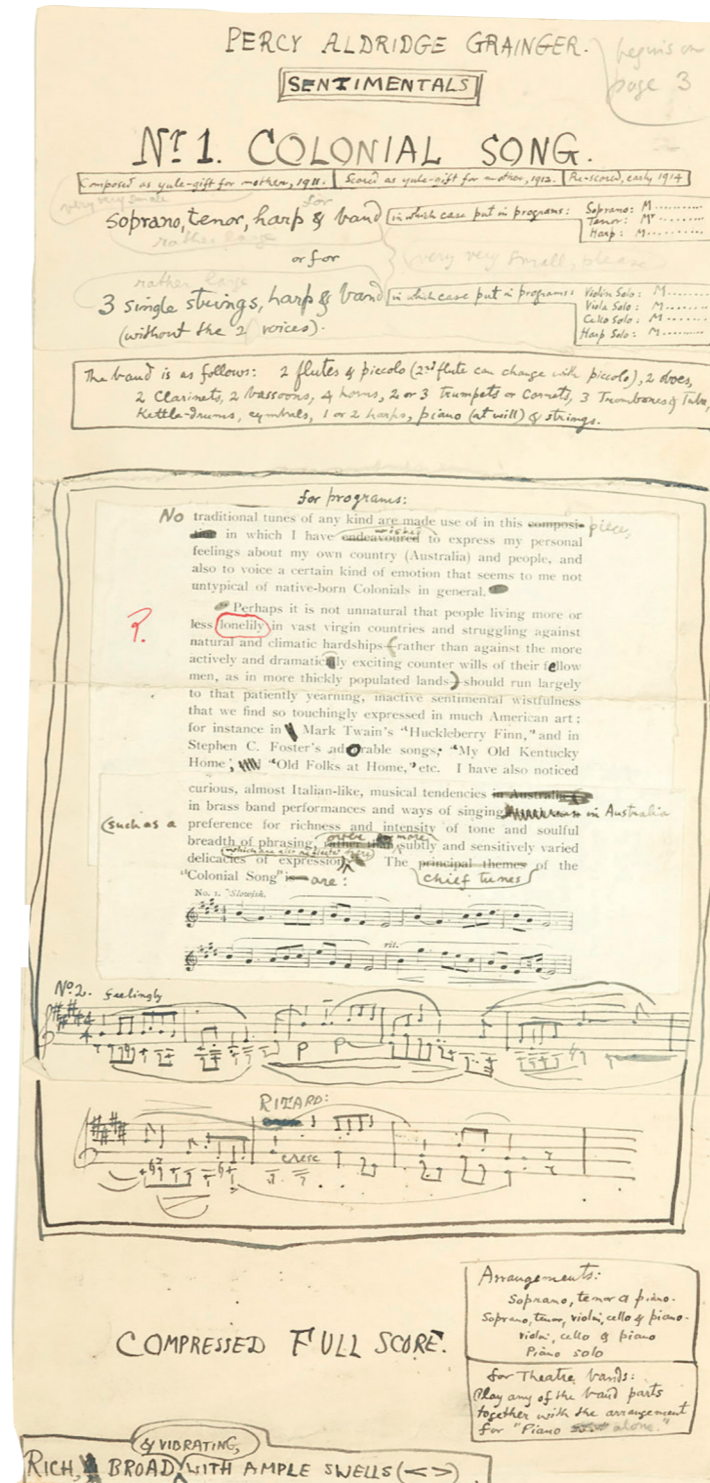


*'I must think of Australia's fame & the brightness of my adored mother's memory before all else.'*²⁷

PERCY GRAINGER

Grainger returned to Australia seven times between 1903 and 1956, for a total period of around five years. Grainger's first two visits, in 1903-04 and 1908-09 with Ada Crossley's tours, took him to multiple large cities and smaller towns across Australasia and exposed him to the intensity of celebrity. He wrote how 'the enthusiasm aroused by Ada in Australia, New Zealand etc. was positively frenetic'.²⁸ Grainger sought respite from the crowds by taking side-trips and walking tours into the countryside at every opportunity, often hiking great distances between concert venues.

In 1926 he undertook a solo lecture-recital tour throughout Australasia, using four specially built Steinway pianos which were taken from city to city. The Australian public took much pride in their returned son, 'fresh from his great triumphs in England, America, and Europe',²⁹ and critics were impressed with performances marked by 'extraordinary, epic virility'.³⁰ Grainger considered that on this tour 'I was at the height of my powers ... I knew it was the first time that a truly begetsome ((creative)) tonewright ((composer)) had kindled the flame of his own tone-art ((music)) before the very public eye'.³¹ Visits to Australia in the 1930s included concert and lecture tours, as well as the creation of his museum in Melbourne.



Manuscript for *Sentimentals* no.1 'Colonial Song' by Percy Grainger, 1914

Percy and Ella Grainger in Australia, 1934

Composed as a gift for his mother, Rose, 'Colonial Song' was written to express Percy's 'personal feelings about my own country (Australia) and people'. When Melba sang it unannounced at a First World War fundraiser in Melbourne, the local press reported that 'the effect was electric, and enthusiasm knew no bounds'.



Gramophone record featuring Nellie Melba singing the Mad Scene from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, recorded 1907; reissued c.1913. Manufactured by The Gramophone Co. Ltd



Brochure advertising Victrola gramophones, c.1914. This illustrated brochure features leading opera singers being welcomed into the home. They include Nellie Melba (in blue), Luisa Tetrazzini and Enrico Caruso.

Gramophone record of the Cadenza, 1st movement, *Piano Concerto Op. 16* by Edvard Grieg, played by Percy Grainger, 1908. Manufactured by The Gramophone Co. Ltd, London

Grainger recorded over 100 tracks on 78-rpm records between 1908 and 1945. He did not record many of his own pieces, instead focussing on other artists such as Grieg, Debussy and Chopin. Grainger's first recording of his own music, 'Shepherd's Hey' and 'Mock Morris' was made in July 1914.



FAME IN THE MODERN WORLD

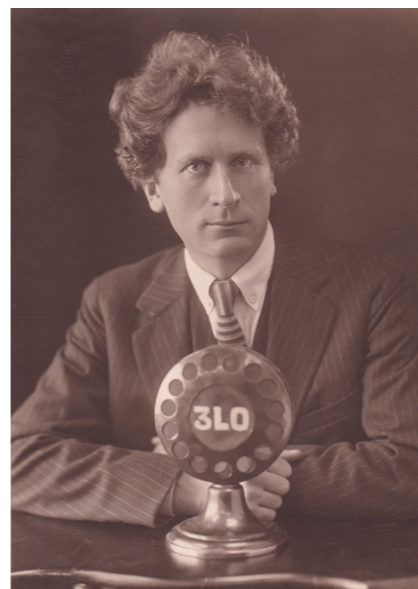
Technological advances of the day provided Melba and Grainger with ways to expand their reach far beyond the stage. Sound recording and transmission, mass production of promotional imagery, and the rapid dissemination of news through telegraphic communication, led to an increasingly connected world, and changed what it meant to be famous.

*'I have also sung for the gramophone (this took 5 days).'*³²

NELLIE MELBA

Sought out by the Gramophone and Typewriter Company (later His Master's Voice), Melba was among the earliest singers to make gramophone recordings. Aware of the reputational risk involved if the new technology failed to accurately capture the quality of her voice, she apparently insisted the first attempts be destroyed.³³ Her first commercial releases were recorded in her London home and issued in March 1904, featuring an exclusive lilac label. The same year the company named a gramophone in her honour. Melba went on to make over 100 records, both in the United Kingdom and the United States, vastly increasing the number of people who could hear her sing. Following her death, *The Voice* magazine praised the prosperity she had brought to the early gramophone industry, noting that many people were won over by the faithful reproduction of her voice.³⁴

In 1920 Melba's voice was also heard around the world during the first concert on radio broadcast by the Marconi Company.³⁵ Three years later, an estimated 40,000 people heard her sing the role of Mimi in *La Bohème* in two performances with the British National Opera, broadcast by radio station 2LO. These were among the earliest broadcasts of opera and reportedly led to a sudden increase in sales for crystal set receivers.³⁶



*'Tuesday at the Gramophone Co. was fun. I like making records.'*³⁷ PERCY GRAINGER

In 1908 Grainger made his first recording in a studio, with the Gramophone Company in London. One of his early records featured a cadenza from Grieg's *Piano Concerto*, with which Grainger was so closely associated. In 1915, the newly-formed Duo-Art Company exclusively contracted Grainger to make piano rolls, and from 1917 he recorded with the Columbia Graphophone Company. Grainger's New York publisher, G. Schirmer, used the new movie industry to promote its star client, creating a silent studio film in 1920 of Grainger playing his hit 'Country Gardens', and conducting to an invisible orchestra. The film featured in the weekly news, seen by cinema-goers across the United States.

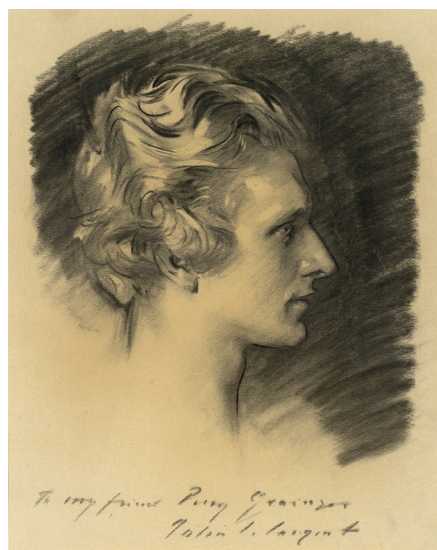
Like Melba, Grainger exploited the reach of public radio broadcasting. He made his radio debut in 1923 in the United States, and was a frequent guest artist on various networks throughout the rest of his career. While in Australia in 1933-35, he was heard in 158 broadcasts with the newly established Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation),³⁸ where he performed music and gave 'explanatory remarks'. In a shared emotional experience, radio listeners heard the 'rounds of enthusiastic applause which greeted every item'.³⁹



Percy Grainger posed with the 3LO Melbourne radio station microphone, 1926. Photograph by Ruskin Studios, Melbourne

Nellie Melba as Juliette from *Roméo et Juliette*, signed 1911. Photograph by Dover Street Studio Ltd, London. The Dover Street Studios in London specialised in theatrical photography. This portrait of Melba as Juliette is an almost life-size print and an imposing example of the depiction of stage characters within the photographic studio.

Nellie Melba as Marguerite from *Faust*, 1896; signed 1900. Photograph by Aimé Dupont, New York. Belgian-born Aimé Dupont was the official photographer for the Metropolitan Opera Company.



Percy Grainger, 1908
Charcoal drawing by John Singer Sargent
Sargent depicted Grainger – who was by this time well established in London as a pianist on the concert stage and in the homes of the wealthy – in heroic profile. Grainger thought Sargent's drawing was 'quite excellent'.

Percy Grainger, c.1906
Photograph by Hana Studios, London
Grainger's charisma, captured in many photographic studio portraits, helped to launch and sustain his performance career. Outwardly suave, he was internally conflicted about his public profile. He wrote in 1947: 'Unluckily, I do not have the gift of PERSUASION ... I have never learnt the art of showmanship, or the technic of PLEASING. Curiously enough, I do have the gift of FAME: audiences want to go to hear or see me...'



*'I feel sure we live in times in which the composer himself must push his works by his own presence, personality ...'*⁴⁰

PERCY GRAINGER

Grainger patronised many of the same photographers as Melba in London, New York and Australia. Grainger's awareness of the value of the iconic image is evident in his exploitation of the portrait drawn by Sargent. Grainger had the image photographed, and reproduced commercially on posters in 1908, to take when he toured Australia with Ada Crossley. The Sargent image reappeared in many contexts over the following decades, on postcards and programme covers, and in media reports.

*'Everybody who has known fame has also known the agonies which fame has brought.'*⁴¹

NELLIE MELBA

Melba's celebrity status was reflected in press interest throughout her career. Details of her performances, her homes and travel, social interactions and personal relationships, were reported both in Australia and abroad. Like many other famous individuals, she experienced a precarious relationship with the press, which could both enhance success and provoke scandal. She was simultaneously the subject of enthusiastic praise, intense national pride, fanciful stories and unkind rumours. While Melba's strength of character helped her overcome negative press reports, she privately expressed concern about gossip.

A particularly aggressive attack on Melba appeared in Melbourne's *Truth* newspaper on 28 March 1903, just prior to her return to England. Written by John Norton as an open letter to the singer, it referenced her divorce and relationship with the Duc d'Orléans, accused her of discourteous behaviour and, most damagingly, of excessive drinking. The latter false allegation threatened to tarnish Melba's reputation for the rest of her life.



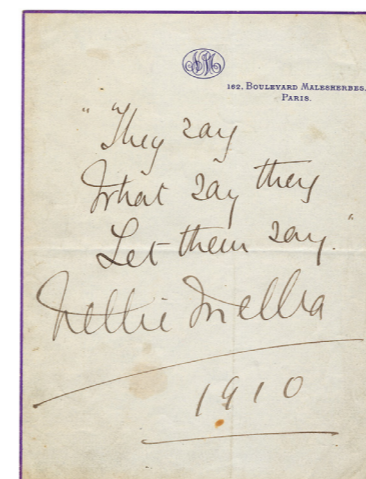
Percy Grainger 'In the Round', 1933

Note handwritten by Nellie Melba, Paris, 1910
Melba adopted the Scottish phrase 'They say, What say they, Let them say' in response to gossip and damaging press reports.

*'The press, like all the rest of us, lack Corage ... It takes corage to write coldly of works warmly welcomed by a large audience.'*⁴² PERCY GRAINGER

'Grainger Scores Another Triumph', Western Union telegram advertisement created by Antonia Sawyer, 1926

Wallet of news clippings relating to Percy Grainger, c.1900s–1930s
Grainger was the subject of vast amounts of press coverage through the course of his career. His mother Rose, relatives in Australia, and later, his wife Ella, collected great quantities of these, and compiled them into publicity books, folded them into wallets, and inserted them into programmes. They were ultimately deposited into the Grainger Museum, where they are testament to both Grainger's notoriety and to an obsessive documentation of fame.



Grainger was well aware of the power of the popular and serious press in furthering his career and international reputation. Rose ensured that news of her son's success was communicated to the papers back in Australia: his appearance before the King and Queen of Norway, for example, was reported across the continent, from Launceston to Echuca, and Armidale to Rockhampton. Later, in the United States, his agent Antonia Sawyer exploited the quirkier side of her client, preparing detailed copy with stories, such as 'SQUARE MEAL IS INSPIRATION SAYS MUSICAL GENIUS', and 'EXCLUSIVENESS OF EUROPEAN ART DUE TO CLASS DISTINCTION SAYS SENSATIONAL MODERNIST PIANIST'.⁴³





Card case featuring 'NM' monogram, c. 1920s
Made by Cartier
This card case was given to singer William Brownlow (Lord Lurgan) by Nellie Melba. She encouraged him in the early stages of his career and became a friend and mentor.

Dame Nellie Melba (fourth from left), Fritz Hart and students from Albert Street Conservatorium, Melbourne, 1927
Photograph by The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd
Melba made a generous bequest to the Albert Street Conservatorium for a scholarship to train young opera singers 'in the hope that another Melba may arise'. In 1956 the institution was renamed the Melba Memorial Conservatorium of Music in her honour.



LEGACY OF FAME

In the last decades of their careers, Melba and Grainger gave consideration to their own personal legacies. While the level of fame experienced by each differed markedly towards the end of their lives, both desired that their influence carry on to future generations.

*'Tonight I have to say the hardest word in my life – Farewell.'*⁴⁴

NELLIE MELBA

Teaching at Melbourne's Albert Street Conservatorium from 1915, Melba imparted her musical knowledge and experience to young female students. In 1926, in collaboration with Conservatorium staff members Fritz Hart and Mary Campbell, she published a book of vocal exercises titled *Melba Method*, which drew on techniques learnt from Mathilde Marchesi.

Melba also mentored several promising singers, providing private lessons and performance opportunities. Among these were Americans Elena Danielli (Helen Daniels), Elizabeth Parkina (Parkinson) and Peggy Center, along with Stella Power

from Melbourne. Power was promoted as the 'Little Melba', a title that acclaimed yet simultaneously diminished her talent.⁴⁵ In the end, none of Melba's protégés reached the operatic heights of their mentor. Melba's remarkable achievements were a combination of unique vocal abilities, social position, strength of character and sheer tenacity. Her talent and her fame would never be easily replicated.

Reluctant to withdraw from the spotlight, Melba undertook an extensive series of farewell performances between 1924 and 1928 in London and Australia, prompting the colloquial phrase 'More farewells than Nellie Melba'. She continued to travel, including to Egypt in early 1930, after which she suffered prolonged ill health. In Australia the following year she was eventually diagnosed with septicaemia.

Dame Nellie Melba died in Sydney on 23 February 1931, the news making headlines around the world. A special train, fitted with a glass plate window to reveal her coffin, made stops along the way to Melbourne to enable members of the public to pay their respects. At The Scots' Church in Collins Street, 5,000 people came to view her coffin before her funeral. The cortège travelled to Lilydale cemetery with grief-stricken mourners lining the route. The epitaph on Melba's tombstone takes a phrase from her famed role of Mimi in *La Bohème*: 'Addio, senza rancor' ('Farewell, without bitterness').



Percy Grainger outside the Grainger Museum, 1938
Photograph by Richard Fowler
Most of Grainger's earnings from his 1934–35 tour of Australasia went to fund building the first stage of his museum at the University of Melbourne. He returned in 1938 to continue work on the second stage. The museum officially opened on 10 December 1938, for 250 invited guests to view the building and display of 'manuscripts of musical works, musical instruments, paintings, and personal effects of composers'.

*'It is not that Americans, Australians & Englishmen do not bow to fame – they bow low to fame as long as it is strictly nowy, for sample: to a living King, a wide-liked movie star. But they are not aware of the worth of long-timey fame.'*⁴⁶ PERCY GRAINGER

Grainger's relationship with fame changed in his later years. While believing that his pianistic skills were in decline, he nevertheless continued the arduous life of a performer, his primary goal being to ensure that his compositions remained in the public eye. His last appearance in public was on 29 April 1960, conducting his own *The Power of Rome and the Christian Heart* at Dartmouth College, Hanover, United States.

Out of the spotlight, Grainger's private life was devoted to teaching, his experimental music, and the design and creation of his Free Music Machines. The ongoing work fitting out the Grainger Museum with his personal memorabilia and collections was always at the forefront of his drive to create a permanent and useful legacy in the country of his birth. Grainger died in America on 20 February 1961. His funeral, in contrast to Melba's, was simple and private. Ella Grainger brought his body to Australia, and he was quietly buried in Adelaide in the family vault.

Since their deaths, Melba and Grainger have each been the subject of several published biographies, with details of their lives exposed and examined (with varying degrees of accuracy). Both have had their stories told on film and television and through stage productions, reflecting an ongoing fascination with their achievements and complexities.⁴⁷

Today, Melba's image features on the Australian \$100 note and her name – now better known than her operatic achievements – is applied to a range of places and products. She is honoured as a woman whose success on the world stage broke new ground for Australians and made her famous. This fame itself is inextricably linked to Melba's legacy and her place within history. Grainger's fame and ongoing reputation is sustained through the tangible legacy of his compositions, which are played regularly across the globe, and the Grainger Museum itself, which continues to provide a stimulating window into the world of this very singular man.

Duo-Art pianola roll of 'Country Gardens', played by Percy Grainger, 1919
Manufactured by the Aeolian Company, New York

Conductor's baton presented to Grainger by the Bridgeport Oratorio Society, 1924
Grainger conducted a successful program, including his own works and those of Delius, Grieg, and Rachmaninoff, in 1924 in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He wrote afterwards, 'I do not ever expect to be a great ... or an inspiring conductor. But the concerts have made me feel that I have it in me to present fine and difficult works with good accuracy, and with the power to make the importance of the works given felt by all ...'



MORE THAN 15 MINUTES OF FAME: CURATING LEGACIES OF LIMELIGHT

Ashley Barnwell | Ashworth Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Melbourne

In 2018 we are no strangers to the cult of celebrity. We have all seen public personas unravel when the unhappy details of their private lives bubble up via a social media confession, leaked phone record or scandalous sex tape. We understand the machinations of self-branding and the highly orchestrated performances whereby stars shed one guise to emerge in another. In the age of the internet, celebrities are becoming more adept than ever at shaping their own image, as they invite us into their carefully curated 'lifestyles' via their Instagram feeds to see behind-the-scenes snaps, #workoutchallenges or the first glimpse of a bizarrely named baby.

Nellie Melba as Marguerite from *Faust*, c.1922

Photograph by Baron Adolf de Meyer

Melba often gave signed photographs to friends and associates. This print was a gift to her friend, magazine columnist Tommy Cochran, with the inscription: 'Au revoir dear Tommy, "à bientôt", Nellie Melba' (Goodbye dear Tommy, see you soon, Nellie Melba).



We might assume that such happenings are unique to the celebrity-obsessed, media-saturated arena of today. But as *Objects of Fame* displays, stars of the early twentieth century, such as Dame Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger, were also highly proficient at the arts of self-mythologising, bespoke branding and harnessing the available technologies of mass circulation. Both musicians provide intriguing examples of curating celebrity 100 years ago. Melba and Grainger are rightly remembered for their bold musical talents and their unique personalities. But their skills in the practices of self-presentation should also be acknowledged. To fan the flames of one's own fame is a work of artistry in and of itself.

Objects of Fame also maps the longevity of fame and offers us a precious glimpse into the afterlife of Melba and Grainger's often self-fashioned memorabilia. The exhibition inspires us to meditate on how artists live on through the hallowed icons and cult myths that fuel celebrity's eternal glow. Brimming with evidence of creativity and accolade, the personal archive becomes a technology of fame, and of immortality. As narrative scholar Paul John Eakin argues, 'Autobiography is not merely something we read in a book; rather, as a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell about ourselves day in and day out, autobiography structures our living'.¹ Drawing on a range of mediums, including correspondence, diaries, photographs, records, clothing and keepsakes, Melba and Grainger used material culture to craft their autobiographies within their own lifetimes and with an eye to posterity.

In 1927 Percy Grainger wrote in a letter to his wife Ella, 'I am hungry for fame-after-death'.² His consciousness and hope of a future audience for his life and works can also be seen a decade earlier, when he mocks his Danish girlfriend Karen Holten for thinking their (very salacious) correspondence is private.



So the little sweetie thinks she can take all my extremely interesting letters to the grave with her, if she dies. My letters shall be admired by a yet unborn generation; can't you see that I always write with an eye to a possible public? [...] I always hope that my letters will be handed over to immortality one day.³

As Grainger notes here, fame offers a way to live on after death, to be remembered and adored. It promises to satisfy the desire to leave traces, to preserve personal memories, philosophies and affections, and to position oneself as a figure of history.

Percy Grainger holding a copy of 'English Dance', 1929. Photograph by Frederick Morse. This promotional photograph shows Grainger holding his 'English Dance', composed and scored between 1899 and 1909, and finally published in March 1929. The photograph, taken by family friend Frederick Morse, includes in the background a framed portrait of Rose Grainger, alluding to her crucial role in Grainger's compositional success.



Plaster cast of Percy Grainger's hands, n.d.

While museums usually direct the visitor's gaze to what hangs on the walls, it is worth noting that for this exhibition the walls themselves are a vital exhibit, and perhaps the boldest example of Grainger's fevered self-curation and bid for perpetuity. Grainger built and funded the Grainger Museum as a monument to musical composition, and to his own art and life. Fearing he would die before realising his dream of founding the museum, he sent a revised will and a blank cheque to his friend and fellow composer, Henry Balfour Gardiner, imploring him to use the money to publish his compositions and establish a museum where his personal items, cultural collections and family relics could be displayed. Underscoring the self-fashioning aims of the museum, he wrote: 'You understand the general need of bringing out everything ... that, together, could place me a[s] Australia's 1st great composer & make Australia & my mother's name shine bright'.⁴

Opened in 1938, the Museum retains (in good humour) Grainger's intended spirit of self-celebration. It preserves a larger-than-life

bronze bust of Percy's head, a golden plaster cast of his piano-playing hands – and rumour has it, if he'd had his way, the collection would also feature Grainger's skeleton.

Melba had less trouble enlisting others to cast her in the limelight she craved. Today her face adorns Australia's \$100 banknote. Her name is memorialised in parks, recital halls, civic buildings, a suburb of Canberra, and a tunnel of Melbourne's Eastlink freeway. You can enjoy the delicious tastes of Peach Melba and Melba Toast in her honour. And her lavish public funeral – where her mourning fans lined Collins Street in their thousands to watch the funeral procession – is unimaginable for an Australian entertainer today.

But Melba too commanded artistic control over her public image. In her 1925 autobiography, *Melodies and Memories*, she wrote: 'The first rule in opera is the first rule of life. That is, to see to everything yourself. You must not only sing, you must not only act; you must also be stage manager, press agent, artistic advisor.'⁵ And true to her dictum, Melba spun her own epic mythology – from a young woman destined for glory to a beloved heroine tragically fallen and mourned.

In *Melodies and Memories*, she recounts a fairytale-like encounter that offered 'an amazing prophecy' of her world fame.⁶ As the story goes, 10-year-old Melba and two friends were wandering in the bush when they stumbled upon a cottage. A young woman invited them in for a glass of milk. The host revealed she was a fortune teller and offered to read the three girls' palms. Gazing over Melba's upturned hand, with 'a furrowed brow', she augured: 'Little girl, you are going to travel a very great deal. You will visit almost every country in the world. Not only that, I see you everywhere in great halls, crowded with people. And you are always the centre of attraction – the one at whom all eyes are directed.'⁷

Bookending her artistic life on a similarly mythic scale, Melba even curated her own deathbed in thespian style. While still alive she had a photograph taken of her portraying Shakespeare's Juliet, lain on a bed of velvet

having just drunk the poison of a broken heart, purportedly to be published following her death.⁸ The same source suggests Melba left strict instructions that before anyone could see her body she was to be embalmed, her make-up applied by a beautician, and her deathbed reconstructed like the Juliet photograph, right down to the details that her face be sheathed in tulle, the bedspread be strewn with fresh frangipanis, and her pillow be adorned with white roses.⁹ From cradle to grave, Melba wove for herself a tale of destiny and grandeur.

Curating fame, Grainger built a museum to exhibit his life and polymathic genius, and Melba sealed her brand with autobiographical stories and photographic displays. In *Objects of Fame*, we also see the finer details of how these artists used material culture to fashion their images and secure a legacy. Melba was known to give out tiepins and brooches as gifts to her servants and friends, all bearing her own monogrammed logo. Encased in a gift box, one example of these elegant pins is topped with the letter M, curved in Art Nouveau style, and set in shiny blue enamel. At the centre of the heart-shaped initial sits a tiny diamante. These monogrammed gifts anchor the value of the object not only in its function and beauty, but in its link with Melba and her fame. Melba gave the gift of Melba.

The act of giving of oneself was also crucial to Grainger, who believed that his whole self, including intimate aspects of his family and personal life, should be collected and displayed.¹⁰ Grainger wrote in a 1908 letter to Karen Holten that, 'I particularly adore *privacy* & all things hidden'.¹¹ He understood that the intimacy of personal objects draws us closer to the celebrity and ensures ongoing fascination. As a precursor to the Instagram feed and Tumblr confession, catalogued within the material archive may be snippets of romance, secrets and gossip, evidence of failures and disappointments, and objects betraying sentimentalities and obsessions. In Grainger's 'Lust Branch', we can see how

the curator of the personal archive can shape a private persona just as carefully as they promote a public one. As an example of his self-curation, Grainger deposited a locked chest containing his collections of whips, erotic literature and annotated photographs of his sadomasochistic practices in a bank with the instructions that it not be opened until 10 years after his death. The chest was labelled 'PRIVATE MATTERS'.¹² We can muse over whether Grainger intended to protect his privacy or cultivate his mystery by embargoing this material. In either case, he saw that to achieve 'fame after death' required insight into both public and private aspects of the self; knowledge of outputs, but also of drives. In crafting a holistic self-portrait, he willed himself to be remembered as an icon rather than just a musician.

Both Grainger and Melba harnessed the technologies of fame to share their music, to write themselves into cultural memory, to craft mythologies, and to live beyond the grave. Walking through *Objects of Fame*, we can examine the methods by which these great artists created not only their major works but their very personas, and muse upon the link between the celebrity cultures of their age and our own.

Tiepin featuring 'Melba' monogram, c.1919
Made by Hardy Bros Ltd
This tiepin was given by Melba to her personal maid, Miss Blow. Melba had a number of these pins made in three different styles with varying combinations of gold, platinum, rubies and diamonds.



PERFORMATIVE TRAVEL: CELEBRITY BODIES AND THEIR BAGGAGE

Jacqueline Dutton | Associate Professor in French Studies at the University of Melbourne

Nellie Melba with her niece, c.1904



Blazing a trail for Australian musicians to follow, Dame Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger left their homeland and travelled abroad to master their arts with an aim to perform. Their first steps were formative, as they each hoped to learn more about music than colonial Melbourne could ever teach them.

In Paris, Mrs Charles (Nellie) Armstrong met her 'maker' in Madame Marchesi, a renowned teacher who embraced her talent and gave her a name: the exotic soprano Melba from Melbourne was born. At the tender age of 12, Grainger crossed the world with his mother Rose, to invest his teenage years in studying piano and composition at the Hoch Conservatorium in Frankfurt am Main. Life in these cosmopolitan cities gave both musicians a more vibrant, challenging context in which to develop their musical talents, and a window to the world in which they would find appreciative audiences.

Their next steps were performative, akin to leaping onto a train that required the delivery of constant concerts to maintain momentum. Musicians had to keep playing and singing wherever they were booked, in order to avoid a career hiatus or crash. The Hungarian pianist/composer Franz Liszt and Genovese violinist/composer Niccolò Paganini were early nineteenth-century role-models for musicians who sought fame.¹ Contemporary German writer, Heinrich Heine, coined the term 'Lisztomania' to describe the frenzied audiences that welcomed Liszt at hundreds of concerts around Europe, and Paganini's charisma on the stage was likened to the mystical dark arts. Their extraordinary touring schedules allowed them to avoid the tedium of teaching to earn a living, while at the same time guaranteeing them cult-like renown through the global press coverage of their concerts. They were the first travelling celebrities and cultural ambassadors for the masses, in the sense that anyone who could afford the price of a ticket could share in the enjoyment of their performances.

Mobility and celebrity were therefore interdependent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fame was only possible for Melba and Grainger – or any other performer – via a combination of talent *and* travel. Critical accolades and personal connections were the key to booking the next public concert or private salon and, as opportunities were pursued



Ada Crossley and her musicians, including Percy Grainger (fifth from left) during her Australasian tour, c.1904

all over Europe and across the Atlantic, travelling was essential to performing. In the early years of their careers, Melba and Grainger were obliged to keep moving, but the costs of doing so were significant in both financial and physical terms. Melba advised young musicians that £500 a year would be required to get started in London, while fellow Australian singer, Ada Crossley, emphasised the need for good health and a strong constitution to manage the incessant demands of travelling.² Thrilling and rewarding as performing in a different city each night might be, its effects on the travelling body were potentially damaging, as were the challenges posed by one's material and cultural baggage.

The travelling bodies of Melba and Grainger were not just physical manifestations of the self; they were finely tuned instruments trained to delight the ears, as well as the eyes, in an era when disembodied audio recordings were in their infancy. The young tomboy Melba had identified one of the only ways that a woman could become the independent, international and celebrated being she longed to be. Her voice was the part of her body that liberated the rest of it to travel and perform, but the whole of



Travel sewing kit belonging to Rose Grainger, c.1915

Postcard from Percy Grainger to Rose Grainger, Ayr, Scotland, 1 February 1908



her needed to be cared for and adorned in spectacular fashion to inspire audiences to attend her concerts, and critics to exalt her talent. The material baggage required to cleanse, comfort and clothe her travelling body included at times over a dozen trunks, a full vanity wash basin, along with her many elegant costumes and accessories. With this volume in mind, the vision of mobility turns into a scene of encumbrance. Melba's travelling body was not physically free but instead weighed down by all of these *things* she deemed necessary to support her performance.

It was, in turn, Melba's cultural baggage that required her to indulge in such inconvenient trappings. She had made her escape from Australia to become a global star. She represented both Australia and the world; the national and the cosmopolitan. Wherever she was, and even if she was not performing, her status as the world's best soprano demanded consistent embodiment through her physical appearance and voice. This cultural baggage meant that whether she was travelling around Australia raising funds for the soldiers during the First World War or travelling abroad on a concert tour, her needs were essentially the same. She was Melba from Melbourne, the symbol of song, and always had to look and sound the part. The strain that travelling with such material and cultural burdens placed on her voice and body was an immeasurable risk, yet the dictates of mobility for her continuing celebrity could not be denied.

Following in her wake 20 years later, Grainger's body was also both freed and encumbered in its travelling mode. His youthful good looks, combined with his physical talents as a pianist, made him a favourite for private salons and led to concert tours that allowed him to discover and be discovered in Europe and the United States, and to rediscover his homeland Australia. With a tight touring schedule, he needed to eat well and maintain a healthy appearance in spite of privations endured in his early

days of London life. Although the travelling sometimes provoked nervous fatigue, Grainger's athletic physical state contrasted markedly with that of his mother, whose body suffered so much pain due to syphilis that she could not always accompany her son. In fact, the pianist would often walk or run from concert to concert, once covering 105 kilometres between venues in South Africa. It was on his first concert tour to Denmark that Grainger met his lover Karen Holten, beginning a new journey into sensuality for his body and mind. Later, he met his wife Ella Viola Ström aboard the S.S. *Aorangi* as it voyaged from Australia to the United States, confirming mobility as his key to pleasure.

Grainger's material baggage was evidently much lighter than that of Melba, given that he was often travelling alone in third class on trains and boats. An article in the Australian paper *Musical Courier*, dated 2 October 1924, affirms this tendency, describing his 80-mile walk from Tailem Bend to Keith across the South Australian Sandy Desert with a 42-pound knapsack containing the bare essentials he needed to eat, drink and sleep in the outback for three nights. The desire to divest himself of material baggage was very modern, but as he became increasingly interested in recording folk songs and natural sounds to inspire his compositions, he became more weighed down in his travels by his need to cart his technical devices.

This form of material baggage performed a similar supporting role for his cultural baggage as Melba's accoutrements did for her own. Indeed, just as the soprano's clothing, make-up and monogrammed merchandise preserved her culture and made her more 'Melba', Grainger's machines and recordings preserved the music that inspired his compositions and confirmed his practice as cultural collector and mediator. By travelling with such material and cultural baggage, the bodies and identities of the two were reinforced as those of celebrities, accompanied by objects and symbols that intensified their fame.

Even in death, the travelling bodies of Melba and Grainger seemed to emulate the way they lived. Melba died at Sydney's St Vincent Hospital in 1931. Pamela, Lady Vestey's moving account of the casket's journey home evokes a special train that stopped in every station from Albury to Melbourne to allow her mourning fans to pay their respects and lay wreaths: 'The list of towns where the train stopped reads like one of Melba's many concert tours'.³ As her body travelled to its final resting place, it gathered material and cultural baggage, representative of her fame. On the other side of the world, Grainger died of abdominal cancer in White Plains, New York in 1961.

Although he avoided plane travel in life, his body was flown back for burial in the family vault of his mother's in Adelaide's West Terrace Cemetery. The material and cultural baggage he amassed during his life did not join him there but became part of the Grainger Museum collection at the University of Melbourne, ensuring the 'fame-after-death' for which he longed.

The deaths of Melba and Grainger mirror their relationship with mobility and celebrity throughout their lives. Travel for them was formative, performative and transformative, a key aspect of their journeys through fame.

Portable vanity unit used by Nellie Melba, c.1895
This burr walnut vanity unit accompanied Melba to various theatres for personal use in her dressing room. Melba's maid would fill the metal-lined reservoir at the back of the unit with hot water ready for the prima donna at the end of each performance.



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FAME

Simon Kinsella | Clinical Psychologist and Director of Corporate and Personal Consulting

The psychology of fame is as unique as a person's fingerprints. It encompasses the culture, socioeconomic status, family of origin, personality, health, motivation and grit of the individual. It depends on timing and opportunity, the presence of champions, and the interest held by the community. It is shaped by the stage of career, and the type of career of the individual. Like fingerprints, and despite the plethora of factors contributing to fame, some common themes are seen in the psychology of famous individuals.

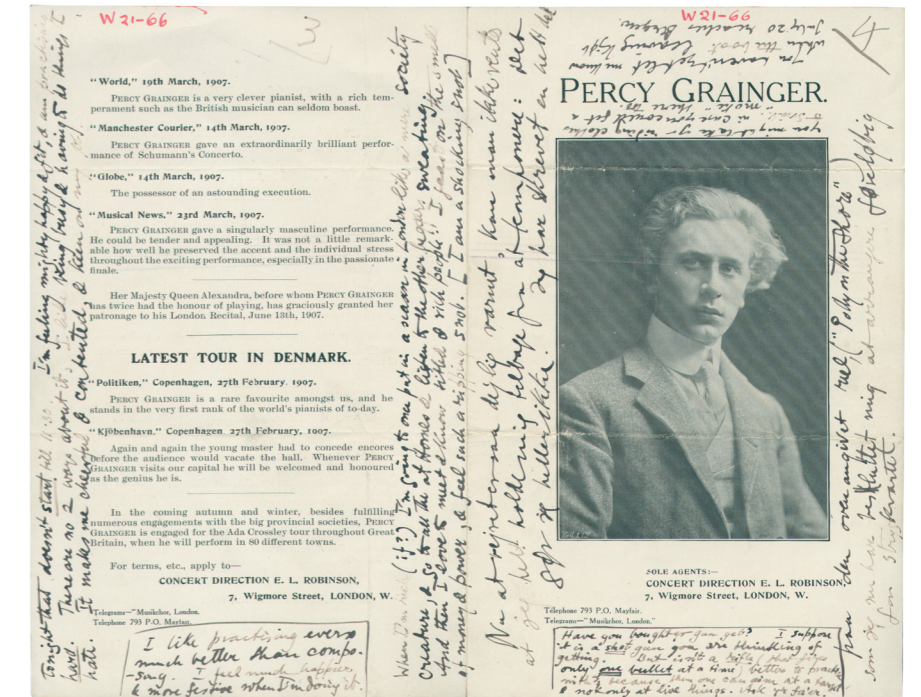


Robe worn by Nellie Melba as Desdemona in *Otello*, c.1900. Designed by Jean-Philippe Worth. Melba's star status was reflected in the high quality of her opera costumes. This sumptuous purple velvet robe was created by the House of Worth, the leaders of Parisian haute couture. Trimmed with ermine and lined with cream floral silk damask, this garment combined theatrical costuming with fashion of the day.

Objects of Fame gives us the opportunity to explore the psychological differences between Nellie Melba and Percy Grainger. Melba, with her designer clothes and luxurious artefacts, enjoyed what might be described as a more mainstream fame. Her singular focus on singing and the popularity of opera made it easy for audiences to see her, accept her and relate to her. Grainger's fame was different, created with good looks as well as musical talent. His performances did not require elaborate costumes; he didn't seek the fine luxuries of life. He was more interested in creating. He left behind his musical inventions, his compositions, his eccentric clothing designs and evidence of fetish. His was a more idiosyncratic fame.

Melba and Grainger's experience of fame had a different emotional impact on each of them. Melba summed up her growth through fame in an article she wrote for *The Herald*, entitled 'Where is happiness? Is it in fame?'.¹ She talked about her early relationship with fame, 'expecting too much of it', coping with the critics, the effort of working hard to succeed, and having to give up simple everyday pleasures to preserve some privacy. As she matured, and nearing the end of her career, she became grateful for her fame, but recognised that it had brought her both pain and pleasure. Grainger's fame seems to have been far more difficult for him. He confided to composer Edvard Grieg's wife, Nina in 1912 that 'I am not really fond of the public side of performance of compositions',² and in 1954 wrote privately: 'To know that audiences (which I hate) are looking at me disgusts & appals [*sic*] me'.³

Because I work with people building their careers, I see first-hand how fame changes them. They begin with a vision of what it will be like. No matter how much time and effort is taken to explain the reality of fame, aspirants can never fully appreciate the reality until it is upon them. Along with their vision comes a determination, a focus on being the best in their field. They learn early that they



must work hard and push through failures if they are going to succeed.

As fame builds and they start to gain recognition, they begin to experience its mixed blessings. On the positive side there is the adulation and critical acclaim. There are invitations to perform, to mix with the rich and famous, to accept sponsorships, and to speak to the media. Their egos are constantly being fed. A whirlwind of activity builds, which can be both thrilling and overwhelming. On the negative side, they can find themselves with little or no personal time, and having difficulty doing simple things in life like shop for groceries or eat in a restaurant without being constantly recognised. In her memoir, Melba referred to this issue, writing: 'One of the drawbacks of Fame is that one can never escape from it'.⁴

Then there are the critics and the haters. Critics, who are experts in the field and who give legitimate feedback, can cause great heartache.

Letter from Percy Grainger to Karen Holten, 8 June 1907. Penned on one of his own programmes, Grainger described how he loved the London season ('splendid & sensuous'), and going to At Homes to hear other musicians 'sweating away for their bread & butter'. Moving in a world of wealth far from his humble beginnings, Grainger wrote, 'I love to meet & know titled & rich people. I feast on the smell of money & power, & feel such a ripping snob.'



Rose and Percy Grainger, 1916
Photograph by Ames, New York

It's difficult to take on their reasoned criticism. Haters, on the other hand, lash out with outrageous feedback. They want nothing more than to cut the performer down. As such, they can be easier to dismiss. Self-confidence, true friends, champions, places to retreat and a very thick skin are some of the defences required to live comfortably with fame.

Fame begins in the mind of an individual. It can be a vision that something truly significant is possible. That vision could be in the mind of the person's parent, teacher or mentor. In almost all cases it begins as a passion built on an innate talent. The passionate and determined individual pursuit eventually comes to the attention of the public, and elevates the person to fame. There is a significant difference, though, between the person who is pushed into fame by an overbearing parent, and the person who runs willingly to it. Melba actively sought out fame and pursued her singing career despite her father's initial disapproval. In contrast, Grainger's mother, Rose, drove and encouraged him, and put him in front of people who could take him further.

Champions are also a necessity for the famous. Social factors are considered to be one of three pillars of the wellbeing of the person in modern cognitive behavioural theory. The bio-psycho-social model describes the reciprocal influence that biological, psychological and social factors have on each other. The presence of a champion is a form of validation. It's a third party telling you that you really do have something to offer. Melba's teacher, Mathilde Marchesi, became both a mentor and a maternal figure in her life. Melba also networked with powerful people, who appreciated and promoted her talent. For Grainger, his mother was his first champion, and Melba herself was a later one.

Passion, determination and grit are essential attributes to achieving fame.

Grit drives people through the discipline of rehearsal, the pain of failure, the boredom of repetition, and the effort of the networking required to succeed. In order to succeed, an individual has to be imperturbable. They have to survive criticism, ridicule, hatred and competition. They require a core belief that they have what it takes to succeed in their field.

Fear of irrelevance or poverty can be a driver to achieve. These days we see celebrities scrambling to build their followership on social media. It has become a metric by which they can measure their success, and a tool they can use to negotiate deals. In a time before digital social media, both Melba and Grainger were aware of the power of press reports and the society pages in newspapers, to influence public opinion. Melba created personalised mementos as devices to help people remember her. Perhaps some of Grainger's eccentricities (such as running across the auditorium and leaping onto the stage to start a piano concert) were also encouraged by his awareness that they secured his place in the minds of his fans and the wider public.

Of course, there are also the objects of fame. In this exhibition these range from Melba's ornate costumes and programmes printed on silk for royalty, to Grainger's souvenir gift from Edith Wilson, First Lady of the United States, and the bricks and mortar of his very own museum. For modern stars the artefacts include mansions, private jets, private islands and expensive cars. Manufacturers queue up to offer their products in the hope that their brands will be associated with fame. There is no doubt that these objects affect the psychology of most stars. They are proof of their standing. They can also become burdens to maintain for stars who value the lifestyle but who have not been careful or lucky enough with their fortunes.

There is no doubt though, that fame is like a drug. The sheer high of a standing ovation



lights up the pleasure sensors in the famous brain like the fireworks on New Year's Eve. It becomes its own joy, at the same time as delivering joy to fans. It is wonderful to have, and can be difficult to withdraw from. It is the making of some, and the ruin of others. It is usually ephemeral and culture bound. It takes a particular constellation of personality traits, talents and social influences to attain and sustain fame, and to thrive as a famous person.

Mathilde Marchesi and
Nellie Melba, c.1897
Photograph by Reutlinger,
Paris

Endnotes

OBJECTS OF FAME: NELLIE MELBA AND PERCY GRAINGER

- 1 David Mitchell was a leading contractor, whose Melbourne buildings include The Scots' Church, Collins Street and the Royal Exhibition Building; John Grainger was an architect and civil engineer who designed Princes Bridge over the Yarra River.
- 2 Letter from Nellie Melba to Percy Grainger, from Hotel Majestic New York, n.d. Grainger Museum.
- 3 Letter from Percy Grainger to Rose Grainger, 11 October 1902, Grainger Museum.
- 4 Letter from Percy Grainger to Karen Holten, 20 May 1908, Grainger Museum.
- 5 Percy Grainger, 'Aldridge-Grainger-Ström Saga', 1934, quoted in John Bird, *Percy Grainger*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 80.
- 6 Nellie Melba, *Melodies and Memories: The Autobiography of Nellie Melba*, 1925, rev. edn. Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1980, p. 15.
- 7 Ann Blainey, *I am Melba*. Black Inc., Melbourne, 2008, p. 35.
- 8 Melba first performed at the venue on 2 January 1907. In 1910 the Metropolitan Opera paid Hammerstein a sum of \$1.2 million to stop producing grand opera in the United States for 10 years. Melba and other singers resumed performing at the Metropolitan Opera House.
- 9 Melba learnt the title roles of *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* with Puccini, but never performed either opera.
- 10 Letter from Nellie Melba to Mathilde Marchesi, Vienna, January 1900, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 11 Melba, p. 72.
- 12 Letter from Melba to Marchesi, Vienna, January 1900, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 13 Melba, pp. 75-6.
- 14 Letter from Nellie Melba to Tommy Cochran, Hillsborough, Northern Ireland, 1926, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 15 Letter from Nellie Melba to Beryl Fanning, Boston, December 1917, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 16 Letter from Nellie Melba to Beryl Fanning, Grand Forks, USA, 18 October 1910, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 17 Charles Armstrong divorced Melba on the grounds of desertion in 1900.
- 18 Percy Grainger, 'Percy Grainger on Ideals', c.1925, Grainger Museum.
- 19 Percy Grainger, *Grainger Museum Display Legend: From London Music Room*, 23 March 1956, Grainger Museum.
- 20 Percy Grainger, 'Call-to-Mindments about Delius *Piano Concerto*', 1941, Grainger Museum.
- 21 Letter from Percy Grainger to Karen Holten, 1 June 1912, Grainger Museum.
- 22 Letter from Percy Grainger to Evald Tang Kristensen, 27 June 1915, Grainger Museum.
- 23 Letter from Percy Grainger to Rose Grainger, 14 February 1916, Grainger Museum.
- 24 Percy Grainger, 'The things I dislike', 1954, Grainger Museum.
- 25 Melba, p. 1.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 224.
- 27 Letter from Percy Grainger to H. Balfour Gardiner, 3 May 1922, Grainger Museum.
- 28 Percy Grainger, 'A few remarks about Ada Crossley', p. 1.
- 29 'Amusements. Percy Grainger's visit. Saturday night week', *Mercury*, Hobart, 18 August 1926, p. 3.
- 30 'Percy Grainger third concert', *The West Australian*, Perth, 6 August 1926, p. 10.
- 31 Percy Grainger, 'P.G.s powers during Australian Tour of 1926', 1926, Grainger Museum.
- 32 Letter from Nellie Melba to Beryl Fanning, Buffalo, October 1913, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 33 Blainey, p. 228.
- 34 'Dame Nellie Melba', *The Voice*, Volume XV, No. 3, March 1931, p. 6.
- 35 Blainey, p. 303.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 313.
- 37 Letter from Percy Grainger to Karen Holten, 14 May 1908, Grainger Museum.
- 38 The Australian Broadcasting Commission was established on 1 July 1932 to run the National Broadcasting Service.
- 39 'Topics. Percy Grainger', *Southern Cross*, Adelaide, 26 April 1935, p. 11.
- 40 Letter from Percy Grainger to Roger Quilter, 14 February 1924, Grainger Museum.
- 41 Melba, p. 142.
- 42 Letter from Percy Grainger to H. Balfour Gardiner, 10 March 1912, Grainger Museum.
- 43 Antonia Sawyer, 'Press Articles Percy Grainger', ms, Grainger Museum.
- 44 Printed farewell message from Nellie Melba, 4 September 1924, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 45 While Stella Power received Melba's support, she was also subject to forthright instructions, including on where to buy a proper fitting corset and arrangements for her own wedding. Letters from Nellie Melba to Stella Power, Coombe Cottage, Coldstream, c.1918, Australian Performing Arts Collection.
- 46 Percy Grainger, 'Dr Russell's statement: 'It's too early. You must wait till you're dead'', 1941, Grainger Museum.
- 47 For example, Melba's story has been depicted in the UK film *Melba*, 1953; plays, *A Toast to Melba* by Jack Hibberd, 1976 and *Peach Melba* by Thérèse Radic, 1990; television mini-series, *Melba*, 1988; and most recently the musical *Melba* by Nicholas Christo and Johannes Luebberts at the Hayes Theatre, Sydney, 2017. Percy Grainger has been represented in *A Whip Round for Percy Grainger* by Thérèse Radic, 1982, and the 1999 film, *Passion: the story of Percy Grainger*, starring Richard Roxburgh, which focused on Grainger's early career and his sexual life.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Therese Radic, *Melba: The Voice of Australia*. Macmillan, Crows Nest, 1986, p. 2.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Belinda Nemic, *The Grainger Museum in Its Museological and Historical Contexts*. PhD thesis. University of Melbourne, 2006.
- 11 Letter from Percy Grainger to Karen Holten, 12 February 1908, Grainger Museum.
- 12 David Pear, 'The passions of Percy'. *Meanjin*, 2003, 62(2): pp. 59-66.

PERFORMATIVE TRAVEL: CELEBRITY BODIES AND THEIR BAGGAGE

- 1 For more details on the contributions of Liszt and Paganini, see Hannu Salmi, 'Viral virtuosity and the itineraries of celebrity culture' in *Travelling Notions of Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Hannu Salmi, Asko Nivala and Jukka Sarjala (eds), Routledge, New York, 2016, pp. 135-153; and Dana Gooley, 'From the top: Liszt's aristocratic airs' in *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi (eds), Berghahn Books, New York, 2010, pp. 69-85.
- 2 Kay Dreyfus (ed.), *The Farthest North of Humanness: Letters of Percy Grainger 1901-14*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1985, pp. ix-x.
- 3 Pamela Vestey, *Melba: A Family Memoir*. Phoebe Publishing, Melbourne, 1996, p. 243.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FAME

- 1 Nellie Melba, 'Where is happiness? Is it in fame?', *The Herald*, Melbourne, 10 September 1927. Reproduced in William R. Moran, *Nellie Melba: A Contemporary Review*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1985.
- 2 Letter from Percy Grainger to Nina Grieg, 4 July 1912, Grainger Museum.
- 3 Percy Grainger, 'The things I dislike', 1954, Grainger Museum.
- 4 Nellie Melba, *Melodies and Memories: The Autobiography of Nellie Melba*, 1925, rev. edn. Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1980, p. 123.

MORE THAN 15 MINUTES OF FAME: CURATING LEGACIES OF LIMELIGHT

- 1 Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. Cornell University Press, London, 2008, p. 4.
- 2 Letter from Percy Grainger to Ella Ström, 9 June 1927, Grainger Museum.
- 3 Letter from Percy Grainger to Karen Holten, 12 February 1908, Grainger Museum.
- 4 Letter from Percy Grainger to H. Balfour Gardiner, 3 May 1922, Grainger Museum.
- 5 Nellie Melba, *Melodies and Memories: The Autobiography of Nellie Melba*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1925.

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Percy Grainger, c.1906

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CREATIVE VICTORIA

la man. ed il mio

mio pa-ter - no re - gno e la . . . mia ma-no e il
 in my fa - ther's coun - try, the crown . . . 'tis his to
 mei = = nes Ba = = ter's Lau = = ten die Kro = = = ne tra = = ge

cor, be - ne - di - rò la sor - te se ac - cet - te - rà il mio
 wear; to yield him my pos - ses - sions
 er; mich glück = lich soll ich drei = sen nimmt er mein Gut da =

p

don, ed es - ser sol con - sor - te io vo' del
 pride, and should . . he deign to wed me, lo, I will
 hin, will er . . . Ge = maht mich hei = sen, geb' ich ihm,

pp trem. *f* *p* *f*

mio campion.

the two parts like this in the concert
Amul. Mapoleon

