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## Percy's Harmonium Prepares for a Spring Concert

*If I were forced to choose one instrument only for chamber-music – forced to discard all other instruments than the one chosen – I would choose the harmonium (reed-organ) without hesitation; for it seems to me the most sensitively and intimately expressive of all instruments. Its gusty, swelling emotionality resembles so closely the tides of feeling of the human heart. No other chord-giving instrument is so capable of extreme and exquisitely controlled pianissimo. It is unique as a refining musical influence, for it tempts the player to tonal subtleties of gradation as does no other instrument. Both in chamber-music and in the orchestra it provides the ideal background to the individualistic voices of the woodwinds. For all these reasons, let us spread the use of this glorious little instrument to ever wider fields.*

Percy Aldridge Grainger, "To Conductors" ("Foreword") to Jutish Medley ("elastic scoring" version)

When Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein, professor of physiology at Copenhagen, invented the reed organ in the eighteenth century, little did he know that the "tonal subtleties" of his invention would inspire composers well into the twentieth century.

Prof. Kratzenstein's invention reached the height of its popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was especially popular in small churches where a pipe organ would be too large, too cumbersome, or just



plain too expensive. For example, in the funeral-in-absentia scene from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom notes that the church procured a "melodeum" (a conflation of the names "melodeon" and "harmonium") for the occasion. Distribution by Sears, Roebuck & Co., with its famous catalogue, assured widespread sales and use in many modest homes of the day.

At the peak of the harmoniums' popularity around 1900, a wide variety of styles were produced. One manufacturer, Adler Organ Company, located at Chestnut & NW Corner 29th St., Louisville, KY was a prolific producer. The Grainger House harmonium is a simple Adler Organ, but an instrument could range from a small model with a plain case and only four or five stops, to large instruments with ornate cases and dozens of stops. In the US and UK, a reed organ with pressure bellows is nearly always referred to as a "harmonium;" in Europe, any reed organ is

called a harmonium regardless of whether it has pressure or suction bellows.

The invention of the electronic organ in the mid-1930s ended the harmonium's reign, and its popularity as a household instrument began declining in the 1920s as musical tastes changed. The Hammond organ arrived and it was common for manufacturers to patent the action mechanism used on their instruments, thus requiring any new manufacturer to develop their own version; as the number of manufacturers grew, it led to some instruments having hugely complex arrays of levers, cranks, rods and shafts, which made replacement with an electronic instrument even more attractive. As harmoniums aged and spare parts became harder to find, more and more were scrapped.

“These days, the cases are the most valuable part,” says Tony Meloni, of Meloni and Farrier, Organbuilders, “The mechanism is simple, really like a giant harmonica with air being sucked over reeds.” Mr. Meloni notes that there are many similar harmoniums available, but the fact that Percy Grainger owned this particular instrument gives it some notoriety—and panache. “So many were left on porches, out in barns, disregarded really, as the piano took over in the parlor,” he noted, “the Grainger House has preserved its Adler Organ as part of a music legacy really.” Mr. Meloni assures us that the bellows will be repaired first, followed by the action parts and keyboard. All will be ready and in place for the Spring Concert.



In addition to admiring the highly expressive tone of the harmonium (reed-organ), Grainger felt that its virtues, from a pianistic point of view, are unique: “Harmonium (reed-organ) playing gives to piano students the legato – ear and legato-fingers they otherwise usually so sadly lack. Moreover, massed harmoniums (reed-organs) add a glowing, clinging resonance to the orchestral tone, while massed pianos (the more the mellower) provide brilliance, rhythmic snap and clearness of chord-sound. In determining how many pianos and harmoniums (reed-organs) should be used in a given orchestra we must really use our ears, our sense of balance: It is absurd to use only one piano, only one harmonium, in a large orchestra (having 16 first violins, for instance), when common sense listening tells us at once that three or six or eight pianos, and the same number of harmoniums, would be required to keep the proper tonal balance in such a big tone-body!”

A number of Grainger’s compositions include the harmonium as part of an instrumental ensemble or as an “ad lib.” instrument. It was his hope that the harmonium would come to be ever more recognized as a suitable instrument for chamber music and orchestral performances. “We are so pleased to restore this particular harmonium,” notes Barry Peter Ould, International Percy Grainger President, “We hope that it will be enjoyed by many in the coming years.”

**List of works for harmonium (solo, 4 hands [duet] and 2 harmoniums**

Anonymous            Faeroe Island Dance Tune “Let’s Dance Gay in Green Meadow”  
arranged for three players at one harmonium (1932)

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Bach, J. S.            Fugue No. 1 in C major from Book II of the WTK (1927)  
arranged for 2 harmoniums

Grainger            Early one morning  
arranged for 4 hands at one harmonium

Grainger            Early one morning  
arranged for 2 Solovoxes and reed organ

Grainger            The immovable do  
arranged for harmonium solo

Grainger            Tiger-Tiger  
arranged for 4 hands at one harmonium (1905)

Grainger            Walking Tune  
arranged for 4 hands at one harmonium (1932)

le Jeune, Claude    La Bel’Aronde  
arranged for 2 harmoniums  
arranged for harmonium solo

da Palestrina, G. P.    Mori quasi il mio core  
arranged for 2 harmoniums

*It is quite possible for some of the Grainger’s organ and piano solo works to be performed on the harmonium as well.*