

Cultural Perspective, Overview, and Analysis of *Rufford Park Poachers*, Version B Movement 3 of *Lincolnshire Posy* by Percy Aldridge Grainger

Cultural Perspective

This third movement of Grainger's masterpiece for wind band is a treasure in the wind repertoire, as well as an original and enduring addition to 20th Century music. Commissioned in 1937 by the American Bandmasters Association, *Lincolnshire Posy* was written in a period when many visionary composers were expanding their musical resources and methods in an attempt to find a new direction in musical culture. One of the most innovative was Schoenberg's leap from the heavy chromaticism of the late Romantic tradition to his twelve-tone system. Other composers reacted against the Germanic trend of progressively more complicated techniques with music of simple humanity, notably Erik Satie and the bohemian cadre Les Six. Debussy and Ravel offered another alternative to the intellectual Germanic tradition with music of a more sensual and immediate nature. Many composers were also pushing the boundaries of artistic content. Strauss's operas *Salome* and *Elektra*, Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*, and of course Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (to name a few of many examples) are as groundbreaking in their expressive content as they are in their construction. Looking back on a century of wildly branching compositional techniques, we can see that there is no longer, and may never be, a coherent common practice. However, as in every historical period, the music that remains relevant and meaningful is that which was created out of a genuine artistic impulse. Whether the musical materials are familiar or startlingly novel, it is the artistic impulse which sparks the gap between composer and listener, and across time.¹

Percy Grainger was inspired by the music and lives of simple rural people. He saw a more human art in the idiosyncratic oral tradition of the folk singers he

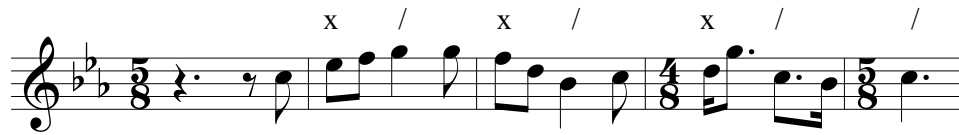
¹ Grainger spoke of musical novelty and universality in a letter to Douglas Charles Parker in 1916. "I don't especially value 'originality' in art, as I consider the communal development of folk songs is no whit inferior to the original achievement of a great outstanding 'original' genius. It is the *universal* that pulls me in all matters & I am more thrilled by these points that all people have in common than in the special achievements & specialness of individuals."

encountered than in concert singers and their “slavish obedience to the tyrannical behests of composers” (Grainger, *Lincolnshire Posy* score, Program note). Grainger’s priority in composing *Lincolnshire Posy* was to portray not only the six folk songs, but the personalities and lives of the singers. He accomplished this through a unique synthesis of the folk song, the musical habits and personality of his subjects, and his own musical voice. The resulting composition reflects a sympathetic bond between composer and folk singer that is not only musical, but personal. Grainger had a love for the real and idealized aspects of the culture of these singers. *Lincolnshire Posy* is not so much a concertized setting of the superficial aspects of the songs, but a brotherly participation in the culture in which they were created, albeit through the medium of wind band. This music is therefore an original work created out of a genuine artistic impulse utilizing a medium that was (at the time) relatively unknown in the serious art music culture. These six musical portraits, particularly *Rufford Park Poachers*, bend musical convention to the breaking point in their faithfulness to the style and character of the subjects. From the first notes of this third movement, we are plunged into an aural landscape that is a startlingly novel. The sound is as musically original yet universal as any major 20th Century masterpiece, largely due to Grainger’s masterful and idiomatic writing for wind instruments. His uninhibited and adventurous exploration of the sonic extravagance and variety of textures possible from a wind band blazes a trail into fertile territory for generations of important composers who otherwise might never have considered writing for the medium.

Overview of Expressive Elements

This movement is based on the singing of Mr. Joseph Taylor, transcribed by Grainger in 1906. Grainger’s pioneering use of Edison cylinders to record Mr. Taylor and other folk singers allowed him to capture not only the melody but also the expressive nuances and inflections that are at the heart of folk song, and make it so rewarding to play. Grainger let Taylor speak through this setting of *Rufford Park Poachers*, and let Western music notation conform to his gloriously unique craft. Because folk song is an oral, not a written tradition, the result is a dramatic departure from Western musical convention.

Many of the technical challenges in this wind band arrangement stem from Grainger's musically faithful yet idiosyncratic method for capturing the fluid, improvisatory quality of this tradition. For instance, Mr. Taylor's agogic emphasis on the second beat of the duple meter in this folk song is reproduced through the uneven time signature of 5/8 as seen in this simplified example. Another example of Grainger's



notation of folk song character is the soprano saxophone solo in the second verse. The freedom of expression achieved by Grainger through rhythms, dynamics, melodic ornaments and written instructions in this section requires a mature sense of expressive flexibility on the part of conductor and soloist. A particular challenge is the coordination of pulse between soloist and background parts within the almost continually shifting time signatures and un-metric feel of the rhythms. As with most demanding passages, a clear understanding of the construction of the music is required to achieve mastery. As seen in the below example, the agogic emphasis achieved through 5/8 time in the first verse is augmented at the beginning of the second verse melody in measure 21 (after the lead-in). The second beat here is two eighth notes longer than in the first verse. In the second and third phrases (measures 26-39), a melodic rubato is accomplished by the insertion of 3/8 time signatures every other measure, except at the ends of phrases.

very feelingly and vibrantly

p *f* *mp* *ff* *p*

reedy, raucous

Perhaps this solo more than any other aspect of the movement exemplifies Grainger's ideal of folk-song art. Written for an instrument he equated most with the expressiveness of the human voice, this solo is a manifestation of the "variety of tone-quality, range of dynamics, rhythmic resourcefulness, and individuality of style" he describes in his program note (Grainger, *Lincolnshire Posy*, score). The swelling dynamics and pulsing rhythms of the solo and backgrounds also seem to personify Grainger's concept of free music, which is inspired by the sounds of nature and an ideal he strove for all his life. Perhaps Grainger felt something like the natural sounds of waves and wind in the trees in the unconstrained ramblings of folk singers. In any case Grainger succeeded in creating an impression of rhythmic improvisation in this section. Through his respect for folk singers and their lack of concern for (or ignorance of) Western common practice, Grainger has given us a truly original musical language. In this way, Grainger accomplished with *Lincolnshire Posy* what most great 20th Century composers strove for: a meaningful and touching work of art accomplished through a unique and creative musical language. It is a composition with a musical logic that follows from its artistic goal.

Structural Overview

As with the other five movements in *Lincolnshire Posy*, the form of *Rufford Park Poachers* follows the simple strophic repetition of folk song. There are five verses of the same basic melody, each with uniquely expressive textures, orchestration, and tonal areas that place this movement in the category of modified strophic form. However, the modifications to each strophe have a formal function unto themselves, and after hearing a performance of this movement, one isn't left with the impression of a strophic structure. Instead, the arc of harmonic progression, digression, and summation, as well as the evolving compositional elements behave as if the movement were through-composed, progressing in an unbroken path to the end.² Each verse gains textural and

² Because of the narrative origin of *Rufford Park Poachers*, the form behaves somewhat like a plot trajectory. There is an exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. As a conductor, it makes sense to view musical form as a plot. A narrative resonates with us on a primal level, and is how we make sense of our world. It may also be the origin and *raison d'être* for the prominence of music in our lives.

harmonic complexity as the tonal areas unfold a series of tonic-dominant (digressive and progressive) relationships. As the final tonal area is reached in measure 83, the relative simplicity of the opening canon is recapitulated, this time encompassing all of the digressive tonal areas (F-Db) simultaneously, knitting the movement together from the haunting exposition to the summative last verse.

Within each verse, there is a symmetrical arch with four phrases melodically anchored in the tonic, dominant, dominant, and tonic key areas (a b b a). The third verse is an exception to this formula, as it does not repeat the b phrase, making it a b a. In all verses, the key areas are in minor modes, either aeolian or dorian, with some chromatic variations. For instance, the phrases of the first verse gravitate to the tonal areas of c aeolian in measure one, g dorian in measures seven and eleven, and back to c aeolian in measure fifteen as seen in the below example. A complete analysis of the

The image shows three staves of musical notation in a single system. The first staff begins at measure 8 and contains two phrases: the first phrase is labeled 'c aeolian' and the second phrase is labeled 'g dorian'. The second staff also begins at measure 8 and contains a single phrase labeled 'g dorian'. The third staff begins at measure 14 and contains a single phrase labeled 'c aeolian'. The notation includes various time signatures and melodic lines with phrasing slurs.

modal materials in this movement would include c aeolian and g dorian in the first and second verses, g aeolian, d aeolian, and g dorian in the third verse (the one tonally “progressive” verse), bb aeolian and f aeolian in the fourth verse (a tonally “digressive” verse), and a summation of f, bb, and eb dorian over a db/ab pedal, progressing to c, f, and bb dorian over the same db/ab pedal, and back again in the final verse (summarizing all of the digressive tonal areas as mentioned above, as the narrative summarizes the tragic story).³ The first, second, and fifth verses begin on the tenor (or fifth) tone of the mode as seen below and encompass an octave from final to final (tonic

melody begins on g, the 5th scale degree
or tenor

The image shows a single staff of musical notation starting at measure 8. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 3/8 time signature. The melody begins on the note G (the 5th scale degree of the mode) and encompasses an octave from final to final. The staff is labeled 'c aeolian' below it.

³ See accompanying analysis chart.

tone) plus the sub final below, putting the a phrases in the authentic position of the mode. The b phrases fall in the same range as the original mode, although they are anchored in the tenor (dominant) note as mentioned above, and are chromatically inflected in the dominant key of the a phrase. Verses three and four have a similar range, however their a phrases don't start on the tenor, but the final, as seen below.

melody begins on the 1st scale degree
or final

50

g aeolian

Analysis

Version B of *Rufford Park Poachers* opens with the 5/8 melody in canon, starting on the tenor and cadencing on the final in measure 6. The leader of the canon is an earthy, haunting sonority of piccolo and alto clarinet three octaves apart. The follower is similarly voiced with the oboe three octaves above bassoon 1. The canon spans five octaves from top to bottom, leaving the third octave empty. It is generally understood that the tempo marking of ♩=132 is an error, as the pulse should be in the eighth note.⁴ This is confirmed by the recording of Grainger's harmonium performance of this movement, which fluctuates from ♩=138-148. At this tempo, the canonic melodies have an undulating ebb and flow and reinforce each other with a mesmerizing effect. The metric cadence of the basic 5/8 folk song in this verse is short-long (2+3) with a "rushed" second beat on the third measure of each phrase, notated by Grainger as 4/8. It is inadvisable for a conductor to perform this movement without the experience of playing both melodies on piano, or playing and singing, as phrasal leadership is needed to achieve the desired texture.⁵

⁴ Begian, Harry. "Remembering How Grainger Conducts Lincolnshire Posy." *The Instrumentalist* 47 (1992): 17

⁵ Grainger spoke of his own music and that of composers he admired (Chopin and Bach among others) as having a genius for texture, and that other compositional features were secondary. The textures of this and the other five movements of Lincolnshire Posy are an almost palpable feature, one whose grating polyphonic dissonances, softly sighing question marks, and sonic tidal waves can only be accomplished by the intimacy, power, and collection of sound textures in a wind band.

The first and second verses are joined by the first of six interludes, occupying measures 18 and 19. It is marked by an offbeat harmonic ostinato, which is a tension element lending an uneasiness that seeks resolution. The following verse is marked by a building passion accomplished by the harmonic ostinato and two other tension elements, a five octave c pedal and the various whole step and half step “leans” stretching the half diminished chord of the ostinato into various harmonies.⁶ The soprano saxophone melody is a different variant of Mr. Taylor’s singing. This melody begins the narration of the poachers in Rufford Park (after the narrative exposition in the first verse), and the style is more profound in its agogic emphasis of certain melodic cadence notes, accomplished by the insertion of 3/8 measures as detailed above. Also introduced in this verse are the mournful chromatic appoggiaturas, first heard as an echo of the melodic cadence in measure 25⁷, and later contributing their voices to a harmonic doom before and after the third verse. The effect is a chorus commentary on the story that later takes over in an emotional interruption.

As the soprano saxophone melodic verse ends in measure 43, the tension elements, unresolved, continue to build in this interlude as the wailing pathos of the chromatic appoggiaturas layer in voices of the g# diminished seventh chord (fully formed by measure 49) that resolves in a dramatic half step descent to the g minor chord that is the harmonic goal of this section. In addition to the masterful harmonic pivoting, in the last three measures (48, 49, and 50) there is ascending chromatic movement from f to f#, and finally to g. Another important event in this interlude is the movement of the five octave c pedal that has sustained thirty measures from the resolution of the first verse to measure 48. Here it moves from C up a minor third to an Eb, snapping the listener out of the growing mesmerizing daze of the building tension, and triggering the final cadence of this section. The effect of this shift should not be

⁶ The harmonies used in this and other movements in Lincolnshire Posy are not all necessarily intended to be functional in a traditional sense. Grainger wrote the parts of this work first, and then assembled the score. This composition is a rare pleasure to all performers in that all parts are given individual melodic consideration. The harmonic analysis has been supplied for the homophonic portions of Rufford Park Poachers because although Grainger composed individual parts, he always considered the harmonic result of the resulting combination. The beautiful grating harmonies and sonorous scoring are intended aural effects, but do not necessarily function in relation to a tonality. The result is a sense of coinciding melodic cadences and tensions: a sort of synced-up melodic harmony. It is a very independent homophony or a harmonically oriented polyphony.

⁷ The scoring of this first chromatic appoggiatura for english horn and muted trumpet 2, both marked “nasal,” reinforces the wailing effect.

overlooked by the conductor, who should maintain an attitude of slowly building tension until this moment when the “floodgates open” and the awesome cadence is given its expression. The g minor chord is a sonorously scored flexing of the wind band’s muscles⁸, whose profound depth of sound is not possible through any other medium. This moment should not be artificially rushed through in a misguided effort to maintain a (antithetically to folk song) steady tempo, but permitted to speak as the capstone of a gradual building that started in measure 18. When seen in the context of this thirty two measure unit, the length should feel natural, as should the separation at the breath mark.

The truncated third verse functions as a bridge between the harmonic goals in measure 50 (g minor) and 67 (Gb Major). The tension accumulated through prolonged building dissonance, unresolved rhythmic energy, and sustained tones in the second verse is released through the chromatically descending harmonies, triple tonguing, and aggressive texture of saxophones and cylindrical brass. The textual violence in this verse⁹ is manifest in the orchestration as well as the texture, as the descending harmonies described above oppose the oppressive melodic variant in the conical brass (minus horns) and woodwinds (minus saxophone quartet). The melody in g aeolian, d aeolian, and g dorian is the only progressive tonal area in the movement. It is given full expression in a simplified style (the folk song is simplified to a steady 3/4, 2/4 with one 3/8 measure functioning as a breath between the first and second phrases) set in five parallel octaves. This is sonically the biggest section of the movement, which suggests to the listener that the resolution just heard in measure 50 is not final. Reinforcing the impression of unfinished business, the melodic cadence on G in measure 63 is undermined by clinging E naturals in horns that demand further resolution. This is accomplished with another interlude similar to the one in measures 44-50, which again layers in voices of a diminished chord (this time e diminished) with chromatic appoggiaturas. The harmonic motion at the resolution of this interlude is a surprising leap upward a diminished third to a first inversion Gb Major chord, which is given a

⁸ Measures 49 and 50 are the first point at which all instruments are playing together, after a gradual accumulation of voices.

⁹ The keepers went with flails against the poachers and their cause,
To see that none again would dare defy the rich man's laws.
The keepers, they began the fray with stones and with their flails,
But when the poachers started, oh, they quickly turned their tails.

sense of finality through offbeat repetitions that recall the origin of this tension element in measure 18.

If the music of the third verse embodies the violence of its text, the fourth verse embodies the sorrow of the aftermath.¹⁰ The melodic areas of bb aeolian and f aeolian are a digression from the first verse. The somehow “moral” sound of the saxophone, horn, and baritone is again regularized (not asymmetrical) into 3/4, with two measures of 2/4 at the ends of phrases similar to the third verse. The complicated moral aftermath of the tragic tale is reflected in the polyphonic texture of this section. There are chromatic harmonies as in the third verse, although of a more subdued character and more varied in the part writing. The inner voices are more independent, with an ornamental improvisatory quality that fights for the attention of the listener. We start to sense a coincidence of melodic harmony in measures 79-82 as a circle of fourths (digressive) progression is implied, culminating in a series¹¹ in measures 81-82 that summarizes the digression from the opening c to the final Db key areas. We also hear the final echo of the offbeat rhythms, putting to rest the tension elements that have been present since the second verse.

The last verse recalls the mood and character of the first, with a couple important differences. The lingering Db/Ab drones that are the product of a long, digressive harmonic journey lead us to hear this section in the light of the tension, violence, and tragedy of the preceding verses. The melodies are no longer in parallel octaves, but in fifths summarizing the digressive elements of the overall harmonic progression of the movement: f, bb, and eb, with the Ab and Db drones anchoring this quintal structure. There is also no empty octave in the middle of the parallel melodies, whose quintal orientation puts a fifth between voices, with an octave between the bb leader and bb follower. The texture is therefore closer and harmonically richer and less hollow. Grainger took great care with the texture of his music, and the textural differences between the hollow, almost inhuman character of the first verse and the harmonically inclusive, denser last verse depict a journey. Like any good plot, the character remains,

¹⁰ Of all that band that made their stand to set a net or snare
The four men brought before the court were tried for murder there.
The judge he said, "For Roberts' death transported you must be,
To serve a term of fourteen years in convict slavery."

¹¹ C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, and finally Db

but is changed by the events and ordeals unfolded. Thus the moral journey of the text is reflected in the musical journey. Someone who has no knowledge of the lyric content of *Rufford Park Poachers* will come away from hearing this movement with a similar emotional effect and subconscious moral feeling as one who hears the song with words. What clearer example of compositional mastery can there be? In this and the other five “musical wildflowers” in his posy, Grainger has given the world a depth of feeling and humanity married to a compositional technique perfect for the expression of its content, which is the art of natural folk song, and the soul of its singers. And just as the song cannot be separated from the singer in that tradition, *Lincolnshire Posy* can only be expressed through the wind medium. On every level, this composition is a masterpiece of 20th Century music. It presents its universally human themes in an inspired musical language that is innovative yet immediately accessible. Although it is ubiquitous in the wind band community, thoughtful stewardship and programming by conductors and music directors can allow this work to be further recognized in the larger context of milestone compositions that expand our musical culture.

Conducting Strategies

When rehearsing the first verse (measures 1-18), the primary goals should be to develop in the four players a sensitivity and flexibility of pulse, and an intimate knowledge of how the voices of the canon interact. This cannot be developed if the conductor takes too active a role in controlling the music. Instead, a clear and even pulse must be shown with confidence. This should be done with a simple, predictable ictus. Anything extra presented visually will take the players’ attention away from where it should be: listening to each other. In the 5/8 measures, the short-long patterns line up on both voices of the canon except in measures 6 and 14. In these two measures, the short-long of the follower (oboe and bassoon 1) should be given, and the pickup in the leader will fall in the context of the long beat. The conductor should resist the temptation to micro manage by subdividing this pickup (or any portion of this melody) for the reasons mentioned above. There are opportunities for phrasal leadership in the ebb and flow of dynamic contours and the emphasis of melodic features as demonstrated below. In this section, the resonance of parallel octaves should be cultivated through a

conductor's lifted posture (especially sternum) and demonstration of "resonant space" in torso and arms.

While the first verse is a challenge in showing what players need to see, but no more, the second verse is a challenge in multitasking. The tension elements must be maintained through a continual sustained attitude from measure 18 to the movement of the C pedal in measure 48. This means that in general, there is a thirty measure gesture of growing tension, which is a challenge familiar to any conductor who has conducted the sustained textures of Husa or Nelhybel's Symphonic Movement. One must not lose the momentum of growing tension by carelessly conducting too big or showing too much. The swelling of the offbeat clarinet harmonies can be governed through intensifying the mien or a sagittal lean. The soloist should be encouraged by demonstrating an empathy with the pathos of the melody. One multitasking challenge is encouraging the extreme dynamic ranges (often within one or two measures) Grainger wrote for the solo without breaking the sustained attitude of tension.¹² This might be accomplished by a division of labor between hands, mien, and torso. The other major concern in this verse is the chromatic descending appoggiaturas in measures 25, 41, and the final series of layered appoggiaturas in measures 46-49. These should form an independent arc of progressive tension-building, and should each be more pronounced culminating with the final climax and goal of this section in measure 50.

The gradually building tension must be dissipated in the bridge section from 51 to 63. Here is a place for more movement, powerful gestures at the apexes of the crescendos, and plenty of resonant space for the five parallel octaves of melody. The overall conducting motion in this section should be deflating to the resolution at measure 63.

More activity still is required from the conductor in the fourth verse. Dynamic climaxes should be indicated, melodic activity and appoggiaturas cued, and balance maintained between the polyphony of voices. Special care should be taken to realize the circle of fourths progression in measure 82.

The last verse requires much the same approach as the first, except there are more voices to coordinate and more of a sustained quality from the pedal tones. Again, balance should be monitored so that the simultaneous key areas are perceived.

¹² Conductor and soloist should be assured, Grainger meant every bit of the dynamic contrast indicated.