The Journal of the Pianola Institute

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**The aims of the Institute**

A small number of pianola owners and musicians have been concerned for some time at the unnatural break between the world of music rolls and the world of music. Few members of the musical public know much about player pianos, and the Institute aims to bring about a better understanding and appreciation of the instrument in a number of ways.

The Institute publishes a regular journal, puts on public concerts, and has plans for a lending library of rolls, a travelling exhibition, and in addition a roll and information archive, with a small collection of player pianos for listening and study purposes.

The Pianola Institute will endeavour to preserve, research and document the pianola’s history, to improve the instrument’s present standing, and by the commissioning of new compositions, to ensure that it remains an important musical force for the future.

**The directors of the Institute are:**
Louis Cyr, Keith Daniels, Mike Davies, Denis Hall, Rex Lawson, Claire L’Enfant,

It is possible to support the work of the Institute by joining the Friends of the Pianola Institute. The Friends subscription includes a copy of the journal. Membership enquiries should be sent to Mike Davies, The Granary, Wharf Road, Fenny Compton, Southam, Warwickshire, CV47 2FE, England. Annual subscription rates are:
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Editorial

We player piano enthusiasts are indeed living in fortunate times. Today, first class copies of rolls are more freely available than at any time since the original companies went out of business around the beginning of the second world war. Since that time, there has been a demand, albeit minimal in commercial terms, for rolls which has been met by a number of small manufacturers with products sometimes of variable quality. With the destruction of the original master rolls, except for the Ampico stencils currently used by Richard Groman, these manufacturers have been forced to use production copies of published rolls as their sources, and in pre-computer days to design clever, and sometimes complex, pneumatic and mechanical readers and perforators. But however sophisticated these machines were, without exception they introduced errors. Nevertheless, those of us who were collecting at that time were extremely grateful for any copy which would play reasonably well!

With the coming of computers, the horizons have been broadened, and a new generation of enthusiasts has tackled roll copying from a different angle. No longer has 'pretty good' been so acceptable, and roll copies where the slot lengths are accurately reproduced have now been available for quite a number of years. Rolls such as these will give a perfect performance every bit as good as an original roll, and we have to thank people like Richard and Janet Tonnesen and Thomas Jansen for providing a splendid service. To reproduce rolls which were originally duplicated on a 'one-to-one' basis, e.g., Pleyel or Welte, such a process cannot be improved upon.

However, where the production rolls were manufactured from masters, there is additional information which should not be ignored; in particular, the rate at which the roll perforator advanced the paper when the production copy of the roll was being cut, and the pattern of the perforations. Computer roll scanning, as developed among others by Wayne Stahnke, has for some years made it possible to record this information, but only a very few folk have produced perforation-perfect copies. One who has been achieving this for a number of years is Dave Saul with his recuts of late Ampico 'B' rolls. More recently, the Rollscanners group, initiated by Richard Stibbons, has been working towards the same goal, but with a view to making possible perfect copies of a wider range of rolls. Active in this project have been Spencer Chase, Warren Trachtman, Anthony Robinson, Terry Smythe and Julian Dyer and, I am sure, others. Within the last few months, these people have achieved perfect copies of Duo-Art and 88-note Aeolian rolls.

As well as enabling player piano owners to have access to fine new copies to enjoy, we are now in a position to be able to preserve for future generations the unique library of music contained in this format. We are indeed very lucky.
The electronic production of musical instrument sounds is not new, but in recent years, the application of computer technology has advanced the process to a point where it can be taken very seriously. In particular, the sound of various high quality acoustic pianos can be heard simulated in a way which is acceptable even to musicians, and in most circumstances is far more convenient than having a 9' grand piano in one's home. This in conjunction with the accurate scanning of reproducing piano rolls is starting to interest computer buffs as a means of producing recordings of the old rolls without so much as a real piano anywhere to be seen or heard!

There is a danger in this in letting enthusiasm get the better of good judgement. As yet we have not heard a completely satisfactory solution, i.e., the process of interpreting the electronically scanned roll in exactly the same way as would have been done by an original reproducing piano, and then getting the simulated piano to reproduce the same effect. An obvious way to approach this is to take suction measurements of the performance of a representative selection of original pianos as they play, and then to compare that data with the roll perforations as they are read at the tracker bar. With this information, the writing of the necessary computer program can be addressed.

Now is a good time to start working on this project, while there are still a number of reproducing pianos around in good working order, for there must come a time when those instruments made between 1905 and the Second World War will have decayed to the point where they can no longer be restored, and without them, the play-back system will have been lost. One can only want to encourage any serious means of preserving the reproducing piano library long term. What would we not give to be able to hear how Bach or Mozart played? We should not risk losing a more recent, but equally valuable, facility.

2003 - Fifty years since the death of Serge Prokofiev. The year is being marked by many festivals and concerts, including one by ourselves, our first at the Purcell Room for six years. While Prokofiev was not one of the most celebrated Duo-Art artists, he was sufficiently interested to make recordings over a number of years. The repertoire he chose to play for his piano rolls has a special value in that it includes compositions other than his own music as well as a selection of his own shorter pieces, whereas his many disc recordings from the 1930s restricted themselves to his own works. Rex Lawson has been researching Prokofiev's dealings with the Aeolian Company, and his findings appear in his article, 'Prokofiev and the Player Piano'.

Since the publication of the last Pianola Journal, we are saddened to report the death of one of our members, Trevor Watkins. Trevor was a strong and very valued supporter of the Institute since its inception, and we shall miss his quiet and sensible input to our activities. Rex Lawson writes his appreciation.
Prokofiev and the Player-piano

Rex Lawson

Biographical Background

Serge Prokofiev's ten-year association with the Duo-Art reproducing piano not only provides an insight into the composer's own recording activities, but also serves as a fairly typical example of the ways in which the Aeolian Company dealt with its roll artists.

Serge Prokofieff

SERGE PROKOFIEFF was born on the Sontsovka Estate in the South of Russia, in 1891. He received his earliest musical instruction from his mother and a little later studied with Gliere and Taneieff in Moscow. In 1903 he was sent to the St. Petersburg conservatory, where he became a pupil of Mme. Essipoff in piano playing, of Liadoff and Rimsky-Korsakoff in composition and of Tscherepnin in conducting. He was graduated from the conservatory with the highest honors, having won the Rubinstein prize. He began to compose when only six years old and had written a symphony before he was twelve. With prolific industry, in the course of his student days in St. Petersburg, he produced no fewer than one hundred compositions. These were not published, however, as he realized their immaturity.

Prokofieff's published works include two operas, a ballet, a symphony, symphonic poems, sonatas, concertos, a large number of compositions in the smaller forms for pianoforte and songs.

Mr. Prokofieff records his interpretations only for the Duo-Art Piano.
We are particularly lucky that in Prokofiev's case we have not only the evidence of the music rolls themselves, but, thanks to the farsightedness of his family, much of the correspondence surrounding the various recording sessions that he undertook. In this connection, the Pianola Institute is very grateful to Sviatoslav Prokofiev, the composer's surviving son, and to Noëlle Mann and the Prokofiev Archive at Goldsmiths' College, London, for all their help in providing information, advice and illustrations for this article.

In passing, we were especially pleased that Sviatoslav Prokofiev and his own son, also named Serge Prokofiev, took the trouble to come and listen to their forbearer's music rolls during the recent Prokofiev Festival organised by the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra.

**List of Recordings**

The introductory note in 'Duo-Art Piano Music', the illustrated catalogue published by the Aeolian Company in New York in 1927, puts Prokofiev's early life and works into the perspective of the time. The total number of Prokofiev's Duo-Art rolls that have survived is seventeen, though not quite all of these were published during his lifetime.

The complete list is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roll No.</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6153</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Prelude, Op. 12, No 7</td>
<td>May 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6160</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Marche, Op. 12, No 1</td>
<td>Jun 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6198</td>
<td>RACHMANINOV</td>
<td>Prelude in G minor, Op. 23, No 5</td>
<td>Nov 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6210</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Sarcasms, Op. 17, Nos 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Dec 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6253</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Gavotte, Op. 12, No 2</td>
<td>Mar 1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6344</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Rigaudon, Op. 12, No 3</td>
<td>Oct 1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6377</td>
<td>GLAZOUNOV</td>
<td>Gavotte in D, Op. 49, No 3</td>
<td>Dec 1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6391</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Toccata, Op. 11</td>
<td>Feb 1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6477</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Love of Three Oranges - Intermezzo</td>
<td>Oct 1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6512</td>
<td>SCRIBIN</td>
<td>Prelude, Op. 45, No 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Winged Poem, Op 51, No 3</td>
<td>Mar 1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6591</td>
<td>MUSSORGSKY</td>
<td>Pictures from an Exhibition - Bydlo, Ballet of Chickens in their Shells</td>
<td>Jan 1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6774</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Scherzo, Op. 12, No 10</td>
<td>Jly 1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6826</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Tales of the Old Grandmother, Op. 31, No 3</td>
<td>Dec 1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7001</td>
<td>RIMSKY-KORSAKOV</td>
<td>Scheherazade - Fantasia, trans, Prokofiev</td>
<td>May 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7029</td>
<td>MUSSORGSKY</td>
<td>Pictures from an Exhibition - Promenade, An Old Castle</td>
<td>Jly 1926*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7388</td>
<td>MIAISKOVSKY</td>
<td>Grillen (Whims), Op. 25, Nos 1 &amp; 6</td>
<td>Mar 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8018</td>
<td>PROKOFIEV</td>
<td>Love of Three Oranges - March</td>
<td>Dec 1965**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Roll 7029 does not appear in the Duo-Art monthly roll bulletins for 1926, but it does appear in the annual catalogue, so following the lead of Charles Davis Smith, in his complete Duo-Art catalogue, it has been dated by reference to rolls bearing adjacent and similar numbers.
**The last-named of these rolls survived as a single unissued copy in the collection of W. Creary Woods, the chief Duo-Art recording producer in New York, which collection later became part of the International Piano Archive at the University of Maryland. During the 1960s it was borrowed by Gerald Stonehill and Gordon Iles in Great Britain, who copied and issued it in limited quantities on a subscription basis.

**First Recording Contract**

Prokofiev travelled to the USA in 1918, making his New York debut in November of that year. The issue dates of his piano rolls begin in 1919, and indeed it was at the beginning of that year that he signed his first Duo-Art recording contract with the Aeolian Company in New York. The agreement was dated 25 February, and was signed for Aeolian by W.V. Swords, at that time Vice-President and General Manager of the Company, later to resign under something of a cloud, after mishandling labour relations with the Company’s workforce. The witness for Aeolian was Edwin Votey, Vice-President, and of course inventor of the Pianola and leader of the team that developed the Duo-Art.
The photograph overleaf was taken at Aeolian Hall in New York in November 1922, about three and a half years after the signing of Prokofiev’s contract, and a number of the Aeolian men who dealt with him can be clearly seen. From left to right they are:

1: Thomas H. Fletcher, Retail and Advertising manager
2: Hermann B. Schaad, Company Secretary
3: William H. Alfring, Wholesale Manager
4: Edwin S. Votey, Vice-President
5: Harry B. Tremaine, President
6: William V. Swords, Vice-President and General Manager
7: Frank W. Hessin, Treasurer
8: C.D. Beattys, General Counsel
9: Francis L. Young, Director

Although it was W.V. Swords and Edwin Votey who signed the initial contract, it was in fact Hermann Schaad, who was in charge of the Duo-Art Recording Department, who was to become the most important contact as far as Prokofiev was concerned.

A group at Steinway Hall, 27 October 1925 – Ernest Urchs is second from the left
Prokofiev’s witness for the contract was Ernest Urchs, Manager of Steinways’ Concert and Artists’ Department in New York, no doubt having befriended the young Russian musician as a result of his public concert activities. Urchs was a pivotal figure in the successful development of Steinways, including the company’s move to the new Steinway Hall on 57th Street in October 1925. He can be seen below left in a photograph of famous musicians and Steinway directors, taken on the evening of Tuesday, 27 October 1925, on the occasion of the first concert given in the new hall, which was broadcast live.

Prokofiev’s contract, which ran for five years from the beginning of 1919, set down that he was to record a minimum of five rolls each year, for which he was to be paid $1250, with any further rolls that might be mutually agreed upon to be remunerated pro rata, i.e. at the rate of $250 per roll. It can well be imagined that such an agreement helped towards a sense of security for the young Russian, displaced as he was from the new Soviet Union, and dependent on his musical wits for earning a living. An electric Duo-Art upright piano cost about $1000 in 1924, and grands started at $1850, so an annual fee of $1250 would buy a good electric Duo-Art - perhaps the equivalent of about $20,000 in today’s terms.

A particular feature of the contract was that Prokofiev agreed not only to play, but also to correct his recordings. Since the dynamic coding for Duo-Art rolls was not automatically recorded, it was clearly important that the pianist concerned should supervise the initial editing of his rolls, so that the end result, to paraphrase Percy Grainger, “represented him not as he actually played, but as he would like to play”.

Following the practice of both Aeolian and its competitors, Prokofiev agreed not to record for any other roll company, and not to endorse any player piano other than the Duo-Art. In addition, Aeolian was given a first option, after the expiration of the contract, of negotiating with Prokofiev for a further recording agreement. All the above conditions were fairly standard for the time, and any variations between the contracts of different recording artists had to do mainly with the size of fees that they were able to command.

**Early Recording Sessions**

The Aeolian Company was not always very speedy in completing its recorded rolls and offering them for sale to the public. By January 1923, the time when the next surviving item of correspondence passed from Aeolian to Prokofiev, there should have been twenty rolls already recorded and well on their way towards publication. These would have been the five rolls each for 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1922. However, only seventeen have survived from the whole of the 1920s, even allowing for the rediscovered March from *The Love of Three Oranges*. Much of the correspondence between Prokofiev and Aeolian
seems not to have survived, so some careful reconstruction is needed, if we are to discover just what he might actually have recorded.

Some indication that he did actually record every year for four years can be gleaned from an exchange of correspondence between the composer and Hermann Schaad, Aeolian’s Head of Recording in New York, that took place in early 1923. Prokofiev had wanted to make his five rolls for 1923 in London, since he had concert tours in Europe, and travel to the USA was not as simple as it is today. Schaad gently objects, in a letter dated 8 January, since there were tensions between the New York and London recording studios:

“In regard to you making your next year’s allotment of five records abroad, would say that if possible, I would prefer to wait until you return to America for doing this work. Our London establishment where we have recording appliances, has only recently begun recording, and they are not yet as well equipped for this difficult work as we are in New York.

“Furthermore, I believe their staff is not fully organized for finishing rolls within a reasonably short time, and as we are most desirous of having your recordings as fine as possible, for this reason, if it is in any way agreeable to you, would appreciate your deferring this work until your next trip to America.”

British and American Duo-Art practice was not easy to keep unified, especially with Reginald Reynolds, the London Duo-Art producer, working largely on his own at that stage, and without the experience of a large throughput of rolls. But Prokofiev does his best to insist, equally gently, though in the end he was to give in and wait for New York. His letter of 4 February reads:

“Regarding the postponement of recording my five rolls of this year, I would - if you allow me - object to it to a certain degree. No doubt I will be the last one to persist in making records of doubtful quality, but I think that my four years’ experience in correcting the rolls - I did that always with great interest - would enable me to attain sufficient results even with a less skilled collaborator than Mr Woods or Mr Lachmund.”

Although this exchange falls short of confirming that Prokofiev recorded every single year from 1919 until 1922, it does indicate that he had regularly helped to edit his rolls. Thus the order of their issue, especially at the start in 1919, does suggest that a mixture of his own and other composers’ works formed the basis for each year’s “allotment”, to use Schaad’s expression. Nevertheless, it appears that in the early years of Prokofiev’s relationship with the Aeolian Company, some effort was being made to record the entire Opus 12 and Opus 17, along with excerpts from The Love of Three Oranges, which it was expected would receive its premiere in Chicago in late 1919. Rolls that were never issued may very well have included other pieces from all these works, and indeed we know that the March from The Love of Three Oranges was not published until its rediscovery in the 1960s.
It is interesting to note that the two transcriptions for piano from *The Love of Three Oranges* find their place in Prokofiev’s general catalogue as Opus 33<sup>er</sup>, dated 1922. In fact the roll of the Intermezzo was issued in October 1921, so there is a similarity here with Stravinsky’s Piano Sonata, also recorded by the composer on Duo-Art before it was published in sheet music form.

**Editing The Recorded Rolls**

Like most Duo-Art recording artists, Prokofiev agreed in his contract to assist with the ‘correction’ of his performances. This process will be familiar to those who have a previous understanding of reproducing piano rolls and their recording methods, but those without such knowledge may find it helpful to have a short explanation.

In common with other reproducing piano systems, the Duo-Art had a special recording piano (actually at least three, two in New York and one in London), by means of which the note pitches and durations of a pianist’s performance could be accurately noted. The Duo-Art was one of the systems that was able to perforate a music roll in real time, at least as far as the note values were concerned, and as a rough rule of thumb, it had an accuracy in this respect of not less than one-fiftieth of a second. All major reproducing pianos of the time could only play back with a maximum of two distinct levels at any one time, one for treble and one for bass, and it was by careful editing of the coded dynamic perforations that an illusion was created of a very human performance.

The editing process needed in order to reproduce a pianist’s dynamic intentions risked being very subjective, therefore, and it was obviously in both the Aeolian Company’s and the pianists’ interests to co-operate in the matter. Thus, recording contracts called for pianists to return to the Company’s studios in order to supervise the correction and even creation of dynamic codings. This work appealed more to some pianists than to others, but Percy Grainger, Harold Bauer and Rudolph Ganz are all on record as having enjoyed the work. From his 1923 comment noted above, “I did that always with great interest”, Prokofiev clearly fell into the same category, a predilection that adds significantly to the authenticity of his rolls.

**Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade**

One important aspect of Prokofiev’s roll recordings is that he chose at least some music by other Russian composers, whereas on the gramophone he recorded only his own works. He was supportive of the music of his fellow-countrymen, and had suggested recording pieces by Miaskovsky as early as 1923. So when Hermann Schaad proposed an arrangement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade*, he was no less than eager to take up the challenge.

It was to form the basis of his 1923 allotment of rolls, and was smoothly (one might say ingratiatingly) suggested by Schaad in his letter of 8 January:
“In regard to the pieces we would wish you to record, I have been wondering whether you could make us an arrangement of the Rimsky-Korsakow Scheherazade, possibly making certain cuts that would [make] such recordings adaptable for Duo-Art reproduction. I do not know just how many it would require for properly presenting this work, but as this composition is very popular in this country, and as we have no good recording of it, I felt you were the most competent person, not only to do the playing, but also the arranging which requires a skilled and sympathetic treatment.”

Poor Prokofiev! Responding as requested, he suggested making three rolls, one each of the first three movements, only to receive the following in reply, perhaps after Hermann Schaad had taken up the matter with more money-conscious superiors:

“I appreciate your willingness to make a special arrangement of the Rimsky-Korsakoff and also to record it for the Duo-Art. Since writing you in this regard, I have been further thinking over this selection and, as usual, with my reflection another suggestion has presented itself, namely, as you know, there is a desire in this country to often consume the heart and leave the body intact, so I have been thinking whether it would be wise to distribute our energies in recording the Scheherazade over three rolls, or endeavor in one roll to give something in the nature of impressions from this composition which would contain the melodious phrases with which our public is so familiar, and not risk boring them with much of the orchestral development and thematic repetition which is admirable when played by an orchestra. I believe such a roll would be very popular and much more acceptable than having to take two or three rolls to accomplish the same purpose. Mr Kreisler has done this in a violin arrangement, a copy of which I am going to send you by same mail. You, of course, are quite familiar with the most charming episodes in this composition and could, I am sure, most successfully do what I suggest. It would be titled somewhat as follows, “Impressions from the Scheherazade by Rimsky-Korsakoff, Especially Arranged for the Duo-Art and Recorded by Serge Prokofieff”. Do you like my suggestion?”

In the same letter, Schaad notes that he has made arrangements for Prokofiev to be paid an advance of $500 by the Aeolian Company in London. Financial considerations no doubt weighed more heavily for a young composer than artistic endeavour, and, in a letter of 24 March, Prokofiev readily agreed to the single roll, to last no longer than seven, or at the outside, seven and a half minutes.

In the event, the arrangement was taken mainly from the existing solo piano score arranged by Paul Gilson, with a great deal left out, and about one measure of original music inserted in order to modulate from one key to another. A transcription of the music roll by the writer will be published shortly by the Prokofiev Archive at Goldsmiths’ College, University of London.
If Prokofiev’s additional suggestions, made in his March letter, were used as the basis of his roll allotment for 1923, then he also recorded the Andante from the Tchaikovsky Piano Sonata, presumably the Grand Sonata no 3 in G, the two Miaskovsky Grillen that appear on roll 7388, published in 1930, and two other unspecified pieces of his own or other composers’ music. If so, then the Tchaikovsky was never published.

Second Recording Contract

Prokofiev’s first contract ended with his recordings for 1923, and in early 1924 a second contract was prepared, on similar lines to the first, to cover another five-year period. However, on account of Prokofiev’s concerns that his reputation in America might suddenly flourish, it was restricted to a shorter period. The contract was finally dated April 17th, covering a three-year period, with three rolls to be made each year, for which Prokofiev was to receive $1251 annually, with any further rolls at a rate of $417 per roll. The remainder of the conditions were very similar to the 1919 contract, though it is noticeable that Aeolian on this occasion specifically stated that “said artist ... agrees not to play at any recital or concert, or exhibition or demonstration in connection with any other player piano or automatic piano, or where any such instrument is used ...” There had been trouble with Stravinsky, who had played at a demonstration concert for Pleyel, at which the Pleyela had also been used, which may well account for the greater rigour with which Aeolian drew up this particular clause.

The ‘American’ Overture, op. 42

It is difficult to see what rolls might have resulted from this second contract, as at least some of the Pictures from an Exhibition had already been issued by 1923, implying that the second roll, published in 1926, might also have been recorded at an earlier date. Scheherazade and the two short Miaskovsky pieces would seem to have been recorded in 1923, and there is nothing else that subsequently appeared in the Duo-Art catalogue. Unfortunately any correspondence concerning rolls that may actually have been recorded has not survived in the Prokofiev family archives, and the remaining correspondence with Aeolian in both New York and London deals only with the ‘American’ Overture and with AudioGraphic Duo-Art projects that in the end came to nothing.

So how can one account for this apparent contradiction? Luckily, Prokofiev himself provides at least part of the answer:

“In between periods of work on The Fiery Angel I wrote the Overture op. 42. The story of this overture is as follows: my contract with the American pianola company was still valid, but by now player pianos had gone out of style and the company had begun to diversify; among other things it was building a concert hall in New York. Instead of playing a new batch of pieces for recordings
(which could have been done in London) the company asked me to write an overture for the opening of the new hall. I eagerly seized on the idea, for I much preferred composing to making recordings.

"Since the hall was to be of medium size I chose an ensemble of seventeen musicians. I planned the music as follows: the main instruments would be two pianos, two harps and a celesta; the latter, used mainly in the lower registers, would serve as a sort of resonator for the pianos; there would be five woodwinds to carry the horizontal music; two trumpets and a trombone used with caution to add power and emphasise the rhythmic passages; and finally for the bass, three double-basses, now soft, now blatant (the highest was subsequently replaced by a cello). The seventeenth performer would play several percussion instruments (hence an overture for seventeen musicians and not seventeen instruments, as it has sometimes mistakenly been called). The music would be definitely tonal; all three themes without accidentals, the second in the Dorian mode, very little development and no coda. Later this form of ensemble turned out to be impractical (too small for a symphony concert, too large for a chamber concert), so I made a different version for full symphony orchestra."

One can see how the idea of an Overture commissioned by a company involved in making pianos might use keyboard instruments as its basis. Unfortunately, the Overture was not to be performed at its intended destination, and instead the premiere was given in 1927 in Moscow, as part of a concert tour that Prokofiev made to his homeland.

The Aeolian Company moved into its new premises at 689, Fifth Avenue, New York, in February 1927, having been forced out of Aeolian Hall on West 42nd Street. Prokofiev’s idea that the Company was building a new concert hall, although true to a degree, was in some ways the very opposite of the truth. Aeolian had lost a great deal of its capital in 1924, when losses incurred by the British Aeolian Company caused $1,000,000 to be wiped off the share capital of the parent company in the USA. Its most important shareholder was originally Frederick Bourne, President of Singer Sewing Machine, and Commodore of the New York Yacht Club. It was Bourne who arranged the capital for the purchase of the site on 42nd Street and the building of the most famous Aeolian Hall. However, the combination of the Aeolian Company’s losses and the death of Frederick Bourne caused his heirs to sell the 42nd Street site, and to evict Aeolian from its ideal headquarters.

The move to Fifth Avenue, although portrayed at the time as an expansion to higher quality premises, was not really very advantageous to the Company, and the concert hall in the new building was certainly smaller. Within a short time, the Elizabeth Arden cosmetics company had taken a large part of the building, and during the 1930s, Aeolian gradually diminished in importance as a former industrial giant.
The Aeolian building at 689 Fifth Avenue, New York
Third Recording Contract and AudioGraphic Plans

The second recording contract was due to expire in April 1927, and as far as one can tell, it was entirely replaced by the commissioning of the Overture, op. 42. Hermann Schaad wrote to Prokofiev in November 1927, regretting that no plans had been made, even for a private performance of Prokofiev’s new overture, and promising to try and find some other suitable organisation to take the work in hand. Yet in the same letter he brought to Prokofiev’s notice the new series of ‘AudioGraphic’ rolls that the Company was embarking upon, particularly in London. These rolls had copious illustrations and explanatory notes printed on their surface, and were intended to appeal to the educational market. The originators of the concept were Percy Scholes, the English musicologist, and George W. F. Reed, deputy chairman of the Aeolian Company in London.

Schaad made the suggestion that Prokofiev might help to create some autobiographical rolls, just as Stravinsky was doing with his ballet score, The Firebird. There is a clear implication of a third recording contract having been signed, and this is confirmed by Hermann Schaad in a letter dated 18 January 1928, in which he notes that the contract then in force was due to expire in April of that year. Thus, either a third contract was signed in 1927, to last for two years, or the second contract, signed in 1924, was extended by mutual consent, perhaps with one year’s worth of fees being paid for the new Overture, and with the remaining two years’ allotment of rolls being delayed. Whatever the case, it is clear that Prokofiev’s relationship with the Aeolian Company was intended to continue beyond 1927.

Some AudioGraphic rolls were produced of Prokofiev’s rolls, as the illustration opposite testifies. But by 1927 Aeolian had as many rolls as it needed, especially for a contracting market, and in a letter dated 12 December 1927, Prokofiev suggested that instead of making new rolls, or indeed writing programme notes for AudioGraphic productions, he might re-orchestrate his Overture for larger forces, making it more suitable for normal concert performance. This suggestion was readily accepted by the Company, and he delivered the new score to them in the summer of 1928.

Both in his January letter, and in a letter of 11 October 1928, thanking Prokofiev for the revised orchestral score, Schaad delicately brings the composer’s recording contracts to an end, pointing out the decline in sales, and the need for Prokofiev to perform regularly in the USA, if a demand for his music were to be maintained. But by the late 1920s, many artists’ contracts were coming to an end, and even being terminated early, as happened with Stravinsky in 1930.
This is an illustration of a music roll advertisement by the Aeolian Company, featuring an honors committee for the promotion of musical study by means of the 'Duo-Art' and 'Pianola.' The text highlights various notable figures in the field of music, including those from France, Spain, Belgium, and the United States. There is also a section titled 'The World's Music,' mentioning a new Aeolian library of illustrated and descriptive 'Duo-Art' and 'Pianola' rolls, edited by Percy A. Scholes. The roll is described as a correct reproduction of the performer's natural tone, and it is claimed to have been especially compiled for this series. The advertisement includes a picture of a man, possibly related to the music Brennan, and mentions a Prelude & Winged Poem by Scriabin, played on the Aeolian piano. The page also contains a testimonial from Edward S. Mitchell, accompanied by his photograph. The bottom of the page includes a note that Prokofiev's AudioGraphic roll of Scriabin's 'Prelude and Winged Poem,' D-7.
Recordings of Prokofiev’s Rolls

In recent years there have been several LPs and CDs made from the Duo-Art rolls that Prokofiev recorded. In listening to these, one should always exercise a great deal of caution. So many recordings have been made of reproducing pianos that were not in first-class condition, that the instrument as a whole has been brought into disrepute. In general terms, if a recording does not sound musical, then it is probably the present-day instrument that is at fault, and not the original roll. Duo-Art recordings, like those for the other reproducing piano systems, were made on medium-sized grand pianos, in medium-sized rooms. There may be an argument for using concert grands to reproduce rolls in live concerts, because there is always an element of theatre on such occasions, but for lasting recordings it is important to use pianos of approximately the right size. Otherwise, the dynamic range can become distorted, and in a large hall the resonances intended by the performer can be overdone.

Prokofiev’s legacy of recorded rolls is a small but important part of his life’s work, and it is to be hoped that a set of recordings can be produced, that matches up to the excellence of the original rolls.
Enrique Granados’ Recordings – Verification of the Granados Performance Tradition

Douglas Riva

The importance of any composer’s recordings is unquestionable. However, in the case of Spanish composer and pianist Enrique Granados (1867-1916), his piano roll and acoustic recordings of his performances of his own compositions have a particular and unusual significance. Undoubtedly Granados’ recordings preserve some of his artistry at the keyboard. However, in addition, Granados’ recordings document the very notes that he intended for his finished compositions—intentions which were not reflected in scores of Granados’ compositions as published during his lifetime.

Circa 1912, around the same time he recorded piano rolls for Welte-Mignon, Granados wrote: ‘My motto has always been to give up an easy success for one which is real and lasting.’ Today, Granados is universally recognised as one of Spain’s most important composers. His works are primarily Romantic with certain Nationalist characteristics. Attempts to classify Granados’ music quickly dissolve into superlatives. He has been variously described as ‘completely español’, ‘the Spanish Chopin’, and ‘the last Romantic’. Granados’ music is multi-faceted. No single characterisation adequately describes its complexity. He had a distinctive voice that is instantly recognisable and entirely his own.

One of Granados’ most remarkable gifts was his ability to improvise. In fact, improvisation may have been his most natural form of expression. Casals said of his friend that ‘music simply poured out of him’. The story is told that once Granados tried to describe a beautiful woman he had seen and as words failed him, he turned to the piano and improvised a poetic description of her. According to Natalia Granados, the composer’s youngest daughter, her father improvised constantly, creating new, more refined versions of his own compositions. It can be said that many of his ‘finished’ compositions have the freshness and formal structure typical of an improvisation.

Spanish pianist Alicia de Larrocha, whose mother and aunt were students of Granados, and who herself was a student of Granados’ disciple Frank Marshall, states that ‘we must not forget Granados’ custom of polishing and substantially modifying passages of his compositions after they had been published.’ Apparently Granados published his works before he had resolved all of the details to his satisfaction. Later he revised and corrected the published version in order to arrive at his final version. The significance of Granados’ habit of improvising at the piano is that subsequent to publication of some of his compositions, through continued improvisation along with constant artistic development and refinement of his ideas he arrived at a
definitive version, creating new and more refined versions of his works.

Granados did not publish these new versions. Consequently, pianists approaching the composer’s masterworks such as Goyescas and the Danzas españolas, as well as numerous other works by Granados are faced with the fact that the final intentions of the composer were not available in any published editions recently. Only with the publication in 2001 of the 18-volume first critical edition of the Complete Works for Piano by Enrique Granados, published by Editorial Boileau, Barcelona, directed by Alicia de Larrocha and prepared and documented by Douglas Riva, Assistant Director of the edition, were Granados’ definitive versions of his works available for study and performance.

Although Granados did not publish his definitive versions of his works he did preserve his intentions in two ways. First, he passed on his intentions as a performance tradition conveyed to his students. By explaining and illustrating at the keyboard his intentions during the course of lessons, Granados taught his pupils to play his ‘authentic’ versions, thus conveying his intentions. His principal disciple, Frank Marshall, was the inheritor of the Granados performance tradition. In turn, Marshall passed this tradition on to his students, notably to Alicia de Larrocha, the current Director of the Academia Marshall-Granados, founded by the composer.

And in addition, Granados fortunately preserved his intentions in his own compositions through recordings. Between 1912 and 1916 Granados recorded his own compositions for three distinct recording systems of his day. He made live unedited acoustic recordings for Odeón as well as piano roll recordings for the Welte-Mignon Reproducing Piano and piano roll recordings for the Duo-Art Reproducing Piano. These recordings provide objective evidence of the composer’s intentions in his own compositions and all of them include the previously mentioned changes which Granados made in his own music following publication. Consequently, Granados’ recordings corroborate and verify the validity of the performance tradition passed on by Granados to Marshall and by him to Alicia de Larrocha.

The present article is limited to a brief discussion of Granados’ recordings as a verification of his intentions in his own works. For an overview of Granados’ recordings readers of The Pianola Journal are referred to Lionel Salter’s article ‘Granados as a Pianist’, published in The Pianola Journal, No. 10, pp. 54-60, 1998, and to this author’s text included in the compact disc entitled ‘Enrique Granados—The Composer as Pianist—His Recordings for M. Welte & Soehne, Paris, 1913’, Pierian 0002, pp.1-14, 2002. In addition, Vol. 18 of the previously mentioned critical edition of the Complete Works for Piano of Enrique Granados contains several articles by Douglas Riva as well as a biographical sketch of the composer by musicologist Xosé Aviñoa. Readers interested in specific details of the scores of the original and definitive versions of Granados’ compositions as well as transcriptions of Granados’
recordings will find complete information included within the Critical Annotations of the Complete Works for Piano of Enrique Granados, Editorial Boileau, Barcelona, 2001.

An example of some of Granados’ most drastic post-publication changes in his works may be seen in the Danzas españolas, especially No. 7 known as Valenciana. The differences between the two versions of this piece, the original published version and the final version, include creating melodic patterns by sustaining certain notes, changing rhythmic patterns, articulations and substituting a completely new ending. Both the performance tradition for this work passed down by Granados to his students and his recordings of the work (a Duo-Art piano roll recording, 1916, a Welte-Mignon piano roll recording, circa 1912 and a sound recording for Odeón, Barcelona, circa 1912) verify Granados’ post-publication changes as passed down by the composer to his students.

The sources consulted for the original published version are:

2. Ms - an undated manuscript in the hand of a copyist with annotations written by Granados, Museu de la Música de Barcelona.

The sources consulted for the definitive version are:

1. Notation of the performance tradition passed down by Enrique Granados to his student Frank Marshall and, in turn, passed down by Marshall to Alicia de Larrocha.
2. DA—a transcription of Duo-Art No. 5760, realized by Denis Hall.

Remarkably all of these sources for the definitive version of the work are very similar to each other, varying only in questions of detail. It is of special interest that the variants found between the Duo-Art, Welte-Mignon and Odeón recordings are insignificant in that they are typical of the slight differences encountered when comparing any two or more performances of the same composition. As such the variants may be attributed to normal performance practices.
The selected examples on the following pages reveal some of the changes Granados made in *Danza española, No. 7, Valenciana* following publication of the original published version (shown first) to the final and definitive version (shown following the original version) as documented in the above mentioned sources:

*Danza española, No. 7, Valenciana, Original version, mm. 1—11*

*Danza española, No. 7, Valenciana, Definitive version, mm. 1—11*
Another of the Danzas españolas, No. 10, Melancólica (Melancholy) shows evidence of revisions from the original version. The specific variants found between the original version and the definitive version of the work are beyond the scope of this article. However, it is of interest to compare some of the variants found between the three recordings of this work as examples of previously sighted differences that are found in a comparison of Granados’ different recordings of the work.

The sources for Granados’ recordings of Danzas españolas, No. 10, Melancólica are:

1. DA - a transcription of Duo-Art No. 5759, realized by Denis Hall.
Danza española, No. 10, Melancólica, m. 58, WM and DA

The only variant found in m. 58, Danza española, No. 10, Melancólica in OD is the addition of an ornament of G2-A2 in the first beat, preceding the third sixteenth note.

Danza española, No. 10, Melancólica, m. 62, DA

Danza española, No. 10, Melancólica, m. 62, WM

Danza española, No. 10, Melancólica, mm. 102 - 106, WM, DA

Danza española, No. 10, Melancólica, OD is identical for these measures with the exception of m. 106 which is played as follows:
Granados autographing one of his music rolls

Bernard Holland’s probing comparison between reproducing piano recordings and early sound recordings (“Old Records in High Tech and Low”, *The New York Times*, Arts and Leisure Section, April 18, 1999) exposes clearly the conundrum of many listeners searching for an appropriate response to the ways in which these different recording systems have of “unfreezing a long-ago present.” Although both recordings are satisfying in different ways, what Mr Holland characterizes as the “eerie cleanliness” of Enrique Granados’ reproducing piano recordings as preserved by Mr Caswell and Mr Hall, in fact makes possible the notation of Granados’ intentions with an accuracy that is extremely difficult, at best, to achieve with sound recordings of the period, highlighting the tremendous musicological importance of reproducing piano recordings.

Many listeners, including this author, are drawn to Granados’ live performances as heard in the Odeón acoustic recordings, in spite of their crackling sound quality. However, the piano roll recordings bring us Granados’ grace and command as a pianist as well as the very notes the composer wanted future interpreters to play.

Albuquerque
New Mexico
December 2002
The Pianola Institute’s Duo-Art Push-Up

Denis Hall

One of the Institute’s main aims is to promote public concerts using player and reproducing pianos. Since its inception in 1985, it has had to depend on borrowing a push-up whenever it wanted to put on a concert using Duo-Art rolls. This situation was never ideal, and for some years, a group of members has been contemplating building a new Duo-Art player from scratch.

Over a period of a couple of years, we drew up several plans incorporating a number of novel and attractive features, such as trying to design the cabinet, so that the ‘fingers’ would be the highest part of the player, enabling the piano keys to be watched moving up and down while a roll was playing. In the end, though, with the limited resources available, this approach was abandoned as being too ambitious.

In 2000, a solution to our problem appeared in the form of a Hupfeld 73/88 note Phonola pedal-operated push-up which we were offered by Wolfgang Heisig in Germany, and which could be the basis of a conversion to play Duo-Art rolls. The player was complete, but not working. As a full rebuild was anticipated, this was not considered to be a disadvantage, and the Institute therefore went ahead with the purchase.

During the summer of 2001, the South Bank Concert Halls approached us with the offer of a Purcell Room concert during the Prokofiev Festival celebrations in March 2003. We accepted this, and thereby set ourselves a

Rex Lawson and Denis Hall with the Institute’s Duo-Art push-up in Rotterdam
deadline - to be able to have Serge Prokofiev play by means of his Duo-Art rolls. In 2001, the spring of 2003 seemed a long way off!

Inevitably, other things came along, and work on the push-up conversion was delayed. However, towards the end of 2002, Rex Lawson and I got down to serious work, with some assistance from other willing helpers. Examination of the push-up revealed that it lent itself to the conversion rather better than we had dared to hope. The striker pneumatics which operate the fingers were a suitable size, large, but no larger than some of the earlier Duo-Art original pianos, and - the rubber cloth was still in first class condition, so that recovering was not necessary. The double valve system was perfectly suited to our purposes, and again, the high quality leather work was still as good as new. So, after dismantling and cleaning, we had a serviceable stack.

The assembly beneath the stack, consisting of the foot pedals and accessories, we discovered, was all mounted on a large wooden board held in place by four wing nuts. Once that had been removed, we were left with a large space into which to build the Duo-Art expression system. Rex was able to provide all the necessary units from his remarkable stock of salvaged player parts. After rebuilding and servicing as necessary, a layout was devised for installing the Duo-Art mechanism. Since the Aeolian units do not have the same control linkages as the Hupfeld types, the control levers had to be adapted. I discovered that I had previously untapped skills in heating and bending steel rods and levers. Look out Uri Geller!

This left one of the major conversions to be addressed - fitting the Duo-Art tracker bar, automatic tracking, and the roll drive. Hupfeld’s spool box arrangement is a real work of art - a quite beautiful engineering sight, but a complete nightmare to alter! Our original thought was to retain the lead tubes from the tracker bar to the stack, but as soon as the original 73/88 note tracker bar was disturbed, it became quite obvious that the idea was impractical. We therefore dismantled everything on top of the stack and started again. We remounted the Duo-Art tracker bar in the Hupfeld spool box, and fitted the Aeolian-style automatic tracking. We had anticipated that this would be a constant source of trouble, but it has turned out to work perfectly. We modified the rather complicated roll drive gearing for 88-note operation only, and with some adjustments we have been able to use the forward and reroll gearing. This left tubing up the tracker bar to the note pneumatics and expression functions in the lower part of the cabinet.

About two days before the Prokofiev concert, we connected up a remote pump - and the push-up played! Between that magic moment and 7.30pm on 12th March, we went through about the fastest learning curve you can imagine. Our own Duo-art push-up played without a hitch. From the experience gained on that occasion, we have made a number of adjustments, and we now have a very satisfactory Duo-Art reproducing piano player.
Paderewski in Perspective

Denis Hall

Reproducing pianos are a wonderful invention, and a shining reflection on the brilliance of the developers and their application of the tried and tested materials and techniques available nearly a hundred years ago. Is it any wonder, then, that those of us who enthuse over these instruments should want others to appreciate and enjoy them too? The trouble at the beginning of the twenty-first century is that there are so few instruments in a fit state to demonstrate what must have seemed like magic at the time of their introduction. Just imagine in 1905 what impact a fine Welte-Mignon would have made on a public used only to the primitive gramophone. One way to reach a wider public is to make a digital hi-fi recording of a good piano, and publish it in the form of a CD.

For some time, several of my friends had been suggesting to me that one of my Duo-Art pianos was playing well enough to consider trying to make a recording with a view to its being commercially issued. I was reluctant to agree, at least until I felt that I could not make any further worthwhile improvement in its performance. Having reached that position during 2002, and knowing that just making the recording would not incur any expense (I already had the necessary recording gear), my objections one by one were finally dismissed, and so the moment of truth had arrived.

A further reason for making a recording of my piano was that I had written at considerable length in previous Pianola Journals about reproducing pianos in general, and what they ought to be able to do, and the Duo-Art system in particular; maybe the time had come to back up my writing with hard evidence. And so the Paderewski project was born.

Why choose Paderewski? There are a number of reasons, quite apart from the fact that he has been one of my favourite pianists since I first encountered his playing on 78 rpm discs more than 50 years ago.

1. He was Aeolian’s top Duo-Art recording artist, and one might therefore assume that his roll recordings would have been prepared with as much care and skill as was available to the company at the time of the recordings.

2. His rolls were recorded throughout the Duo-Art’s main recording period. Apart from two earlier titles (6097 - Etude Op 25/9/Chopin and 6100 - Minuet/Paderewski), they date from his return to the concert platform in 1922, when Duo-Art’s recording techniques had reached a very satisfactory standard of sophistication, right through to the end of classical Duo-Art recording around the end of the 1920s.
3. There are enough titles for one to be able to get a feel for his style and make some sort of judgement of the consistency and reliability of the recordings.

4. At the same time as the Duo-Art rolls were being produced, Paderewski was also making disc recordings for Victor, and in a number of cases, of the same titles. It would therefore be possible to make direct comparisons between the two media, and verify the roll recordings, and by definition the Duo-Art system - at least as far as this artist was concerned. Between 1922 and 1930, there were 20 titles recorded for both disc and roll.

For some years, it has been my contention that the best results from reproducing piano rolls are obtained from the reproducing action being built into a piano, rather than using a push-up or vorsetzer on a separate instrument. It is perfectly feasible to use a push-up, and there are advantages, particularly in the choice of piano - a new instrument has obvious qualities which it is hard to find in an instrument 80 or 90 years old. It is also tempting to think that a 9’ concert grand is going to be superior to a 6’ model. However, in general, the wide dynamic range and aggressive tone of the modern Steinway have not proved sympathetic to the auditioning of reproducing piano rolls. This is not to say that it cannot be done; so far, I have yet to be convinced.

The piano used for my Paderewski recordings is a Hamburg Steinway model ‘O’ grand dating from 1926. It is fitted with a British-style Duo-Art action, although the history of this particular instrument is slightly unusual. Most Steinway Duo-Art pianos emanating from Hamburg are listed in Steinway’s records as having been sold to Aeolian at Hayes, Middlesex. This
piano is not listed, and a brass plate in its spool box reads 'Acolian, Berlin'. One may assume, then, that the British style of mechanism was installed in Germany. A model ‘O’ (5’10’’) Steinway conveniently fits in with my idea of the most suitable type of instrument on which to listen to Duo-Art rolls. It was the regular top of the range instrument, although a small number of larger instruments was produced. In America, the model ‘A’ was sometimes used, and in Britain about 20 model ‘B’ grands were produced towards the end of the nineteen-twenties. A handful of concert grands was also built, but these seem to have been intended in the main for concert hall demonstrations. Rolls played on medium-sized grands or large uprights somehow have a naturalness about them. The dynamics do not sound contrived or exaggerated as is sometimes the case on very large instruments, an important point for the recording.

Over a period of about eight years, I have been experimenting with recording my own pianos in my home. I use a pair of Coles 4038 ribbon microphones feeding into either a DAT recorder or a CD writer. Recording in domestic conditions is very much a matter of trial and error. The accepted professional microphone placings do not necessarily work. In time, I found a good position was about 4’ in front of the middle of the keyboard, and this gives a natural, well balanced sound. Of course one cannot get away from the fact that it is all too obvious that one is recording in a small room. However, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. The piano does not have to be moved and therefore disturbed, with the possibility of its being damaged. The biggest benefit, however, is that there are absolutely no time constraints such as there always are in a location which has to be hired and paid for by the hour. One is free to record and re-record until one is completely satisfied.

Once the preparations had been completed, the actual recording did not take very long. The piano was tuned, and some adjustments were made to the voicing of the hammers in the treble, and then over the course of the next couple of days, the rolls were played and recorded directly on to the CD writer. I had a well balanced result, but one which sounded very confined.

For some time prior to the final recording, I had been in touch with Richard Black, a recording producer and sound engineer, and, as it happens, one of the Friends of the Institute. He was enthusiastic about the project and was willing to apply his computer skills to producing a discrete artificial ambience to my recording. His patience with my inexperience and his knowledge of recording techniques have benefitted the final result more than I could ever have hoped for. The outcome was the sort of sound I thought I wanted, and Richard had already produced it prior to my last visit to his studio!

The booklet, so important if the CDs were to look professional, was the combined effort of a number of good friends, all noted in the booklet, who
generously gave their time and talent. The layout was carried out by Elpeeko Ltd in Lincoln, the printers who produce our Pianola Journal.

The manufacture of the CDs was arranged by Music Media Manufacturers in Dulwich, South East London. We have all been more than delighted with this arrangement, both in terms of quality and good value.

Reaction to the CDs has been extremely pleasing. The first was from Ronald Stevenson, who generously allowed us to quote from his essay on Paderewski, but who had no hand in the recordings. He wrote, "A generation ago, I was not an aficionado of piano rolls, but these are in a different class. The performances convey Paderewski’s style and musical speech; indeed his oratory". What more could one ask for?

Reviews in the record magazines have not so far been forthcoming. I suspect this is because we cannot afford to buy advertising space, and also because we do not have a distributor. I explored the relative advantages of using one, but with the small number of discs we have had produced, the finances just do not add up. However, the discs are available on our website, and from the Paderewski museums in Morges, Switzerland and Chicago in the United States have supplies to sell to their visitors.
Machines and Mechanisms in Music – a Conference at Michaelstein, Germany, May 2003

Rex Lawson

It’s not often that the Pianola finds itself the subject of musicological discussions. The Royal Musical Association invited G.C. Ashton Jonson to introduce it to an assembly of professors some ninety years ago in London, and in 1982 Stravinsky’s player-piano activities formed part of his Centennial Symposium at the University of California in San Diego. But by and large the echelons of higher education have eschewed music on roll. So it was with a sense of uncertainty that Wolfgang Heisig, Editha Konwitschny and Rex Lawson made the journey in May 2003 through the German Harz mountains to the Kloster Michaelstein, for the 31st Wissenschaftliche Arbeitstagung on the subject of Machines and Mechanisms in Music.

The Kloster Michaelstein, a monastery in medieval times, houses an artistic and scholarly archive and study centre, and is situated near to the border of the former East Germany. A group of some fifty speakers and students assembled for a wide range of talks, demonstrations and concerts, including the public opening of a reconstructed water-driven barrel organ, complete with dolphin-drawn chariot and mermaid-like Galatea! The conference extended over three days of a long weekend, from Friday to Sunday.

The player piano dimension was upheld by the opening concert, given by the three musicians mentioned above, and by papers from Professor Andreas Ballstaedt of Düsseldorf, Rex Lawson from the Pianola Institute, Dr Kathrin Eberl from Halle, and Dr Martin Elste from the Musical Instrument Museum in Berlin.

The concert, whose closing stages can be seen on the following page, included performances by Stravinsky and Ravel by means of the Institute’s new Duo-Art push-up player, part of the César Franck Violin Sonata, with Editha Konwitschny as soloist, and modern compositions by Conlon Nancarrow and Wolfgang Heisig. It ended with a precision performance of Nancarrow’s Study no 41b for two player-pianos, with Wolfgang Heisig’s Phonola and Rex Lawson’s Pianola in amicable if tense co-operation. As an aid to remaining in exact ensemble throughout such complex rhythmic patterns, Heisig had recorded the 260-odd seconds of the piece on to cassette by speaking them out loud, and he and Lawson followed this slightly nerve-wracking succession through matching sets of headphones.

Through the remainder of the Friday and Saturday, the papers presented covered a very wide range of musical subjects, from mechanical trumpets of the sixteenth century, through the history of metronomes, to the use of computers as an aid to contemporary composition. Andreas Ballstaedt
examined the player piano as a sociological phenomenon, Rex Lawson discussed the general lack of precision in our historical views of the player piano, with particular regard to the system of dynamic recording used by Welte in Germany, and Kathrin Eberl considered the ways in which mechanically produced music had influenced twentieth century composers.

A great surprise and pleasure, for this writer at least, was the evening concert given by Pierre Charial on his barrel organ. At least, one calls it a barrel organ, since this is the usual English description of such an instrument, but the reality is that the music is arranged and played from books, as with Dutch street organs. Charial punches nearly all his own music books, and he is clearly a virtuoso, both in playing and in making the musical arrangements. It is quite remarkable to listen to, say, Chick Corea being played on such an instrument, with minutely short perforations causing swathes of organ pipes merely to “chiff”, and thus in combination to produce sounds more familiarly heard from jazz percussion ensembles.

One of the highpoints of the conference was the official opening, on the Friday evening, of the fantastic music machine designed in the early seventeenth century by Salomon de Caus. A team of engineers and musicians had recreated the whole complex mechanical instrument from scratch, using only three hundred year old drawings and their own ingenuity, and an expectant audience crowded out one of the former monastic stable blocks in
order to gain a glimpse of the rushing water, the ornamental ship and passenger, and the pinned barrel, driven by a water wheel, which provided a respectable musical accompaniment to the whole man-made fairy tale.

After further talks on the Sunday, the proceedings were brought to a close by Dr Martin Elste, who provided a detailed tour throughout the whole history of mechanical music, with particular reference to the instruments housed in the Musical Instrument Museum in central Berlin.

Most of us confront on an almost daily basis the widespread misinformation of the player piano that is prevalent in the musical world. The Pianola Institute’s concerts are one of our attempts to set matters straight, and it is to be hoped that occasional attendances at musicological conferences will also help to build a better understanding of the instruments and music which we have in our care.
Some Studies in Practical Player-Interpretation

William Braid White

From *The Player-Pianist - A Guide to the Appreciation and Interpretation of Music through the Medium of the Player-Piano*, Edward Lyman Bill, New York, 1910

Editor’s Note

To a present-day audience, the language that William Braid White uses in the analysis of musical compositions may seem flowery and exaggerated. Yet we scorn such ingenuous and emotional responses to music at our peril. These days, piano playing has become a form of athletics; there are endless competitions in which young Tarzans of the keyboard flex their digital muscles. And yet far more often than not, these competing students, inexperienced in the emotions of life, informed by a specialised rather than a liberal education, fail to convey anything of subtlety about the human condition.

What is interesting about this article, which comes as an appendix to the work mentioned above, is that it betokens a musical attitude towards the player-piano in pre-First World War America. There are many who would tell us that the US experience of player-pianos was all ragtime and Rachmaninov, jazz or Duo-Art. But clearly there were careful pianolists as well, and through the braids of flowers and emotions one can glimpse a detailed and perceptive mind at work.

Introductory Note

The general plan of this book and the conception which underlies it, have already been explained with some fullness. The reader will therefore be prepared for the studies in interpretation, which make up the subject-matter of this final chapter. It is no longer necessary to enter into any explanation of the why and wherefore of these studies. The reader who has followed the argument developed herein knows that the author has insisted from the first upon the necessity for the cultivation of the power of personal control over the player-piano. He has laboured, let us hope with success, to prove that the instrument must be considered solely as a technic-means and not at all as an automatic expression-means. If the thoughts which have been developed in the course of the book have any value, if the arguments herein made have any validity, the necessity for these studies need not be defended.

And there is yet another point of view. The present analyses may be considered not only in their purely technical sense; as studies, namely, in practical management of the playing mechanism, but also as aesthetic appreciations of the works themselves. Too little is known generally of the antecedents, history or tradition that surround most of the compositions which have left a deep impression on the world. There are times when a composer’s work rises to the greatest altitude of sublimity, nearly always as the
effect of some tremendous emotion, caused, perhaps, by the ‘slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’, or by the bitter pain of unrequited love. Is it not well that we should, if possible, know something of the circumstances which have surrounded the composition of such works as these, such pain-begotten children of a master’s genius?

In annotating the illustrations of various portions of the music rolls which represent the compositions here studied, certain conventional signs have been adopted and are here set down:-

1. All notes in black are to be emphasised.
2. ‘Pedal’ or ‘Pedal on’ means to throw on sustaining lever.
3. ‘Change Pedal’ means throw off sustaining lever and immediately throw it on again.
4. ‘Pedal off’ means throw off sustaining lever.
5. ‘Accent’ means throw accent lever or button quickly on and off.
6. All tempo signs refer to tempo indicator numerals.
7. Conventional expressive indications like ‘Adagio, Allegro’, etc., refer to ‘manner’ rather than to ‘speed’.

L. van Beethoven (1770-1827), Sonata Quasi Una Fantasia, op. 27, no.2. (Sonata in the form of a fantasy.)

Under the name of the Moonlight Sonata, this work is known throughout the world. It is not a strict sonata as that form has been described in this book, but rather a free fantasy which partakes at times of the sonata’s structure. There is a story connected with its composition which, in one form or another, has been told and told again. As nearly as one can discover from the various accounts which have survived, the composition was inspired by the love of Beethoven for the beautiful Giulietta Guicciardi, who indeed seems to have loved the great master, but whose parents were strongly averse to her marrying a man whom they considered socially below her. One version of the romantic tale is so apt, so appropriate and apparently so closely allied to the spirit of the composition, that we may well believe it to be the most accurate. It runs as follows:

Beethoven, who even at this early date (1801) was already threatened with that aural malady which finally destroyed his hearing, was fond of taking long solitary evening walks through the environs of Vienna. He was a lonely man, hardly as yet understood by his contemporaries and oppressed alike by public indifference and the poverty which was its result. During one of these lonely excursions he chanced to pass a handsome house in the suburbs, and as he walked past it, heard some one playing a composition of his on the piano. The master paused and listened. A gay party of young people was within the mansion, among them Giulietta Guicciardi. her sharp eyes saw the figure of Beethoven outlined in the street in light of a fitful moon-beam which at that
moment illumined the gloomy, overcast sky. Calling to her companions to follow her, she ran into the street, followed by the laughing crowd of youths and maidens, and merrily insisted that the master should accompany them within. He did so and when they asked him to play, nothing would please her but that the master should improvise and take for his theme the moonlight which had revealed him to them. The great composer acquiesced with good grace, and, seated at the piano, drew his fingers over the keys in the tragic strains of the opening adagio of what we now call the Moonlight Sonata. What he was thinking about we may partially guess from the music. Certainly the first chords give one no idea whatever of moonlight but rather of gloom and dark despair. Was the master contemplating his own hopeless love and comparing the figure of the beautiful girl who hovered around the piano to the tender beam of moonlight, which for a moment pierced the dark clouds of an angry sky? Did he liken that sky to his own oppressed heart and the pain of his deep but hopeless affection? One might well think so.

Certainly this first movement is a wail of despair, tempered at times by a gleam of light, but none the less dark and foreboding to the end. Simplicity itself in technical structure, its very baldness of outline renders imperative the utmost tenderness of treatment and the very opposite of rude strength. Tenderly, softly and sympathetically rendered, it has always a profound effect upon the emotions of those to whom music speaks in intelligible language.

In the second movement, a tender and graceful episode between those two tragic night pieces, the Adagio and Finale, Beethoven seems to simulate the half-tender, half-coy, spirit of the beautiful girl, who will not let her own true feelings have the empire over her false ideas of social position and her love of wealth and ease.

In the last movement Beethoven speaks as with the voice of God Himself. Tempestuous, torrential, cyclonic, this Finale literally carries one away with it in the impetuosity of its first rush, suddenly bursting from the tender strains of the middle movement. It is strikingly significant of a great spirit struggling against the cruel decrees of destiny, yet showing above grief and despair a strong faith in ultimate right, mercy and joy. In the attached drawing the opening bars on the first movement have been reproduced as they appear on a music roll. The first strains must be tender, slow and soft, with a slight accent on the bass tones (distinguished by dark lines). Observe also the slight slowing when the main theme is about to enter. This theme recurs and must be emphasised distinctly each time. At the close of the movement it is transferred to the bass and then dies slowly away.

Particular attention should be paid to the use of the sustaining pedal, which must be changed carefully at each change in harmony as the indications on the drawing clearly show. The little retardations and accelerations indicated
will be found to bring out the emotional content of the movement in a manner distinctly advantageous.

The greatest difficulty in handling this movement lies in the peculiar effect of the broken chords in the middle bass which run throughout the whole first division of the sonata and which must be very carefully subdued almost everywhere. If they are allowed to ring out they will spoil the whole effect.

The general idea in interpreting should be as of a quiet, meditative musing upon a hard and hopeless fate. The spirit is not childish or sentimental. It is full-blooded, manly, and faithful. It states its opinion of things quietly but none the less strongly. Dignity with calmness; this is the key-note of the movement.

The second movement demands an entirely different treatment. The first was masculine, the second is feminine. Here the opening strains must trip along gently and merrily. The tempo-lever should be rushed forward towards the end of the first bar, and immediately thrown back to the slow position so that the last two little groups of tones may be ‘jumped’ over the tracker-board, each group a little detached.
Sonata op27 no2

(Loonight)

Opening of 2nd Movement
Allegretto, D-flat Major

Pedal off
Change Pedal
Change Pedal
Pedal off
Change Pedal
Change Pedal
Pedal off

A little louder
Gradually
Crescendo
a little louder

Sonata op27 no2

(Loonight)

2nd Movement: Allegretto, D-flat.

Entrance of Syncopated Theme

Notes in black are to be emphasized

Notes indicated in black are to be emphasized
This will produce a pleasing ‘staccato’, which here will have a distinctly artistic and original effect, carrying out completely the dominating conception. When the alternating chords between bass and treble come in the second part of the movement, as if the right and left hand parts were gossiping together gently and quietly, one should put a little more emphasis on the treble part than on the bass. When the end arrives one must take a few last chords somewhat more slowly and broadly, and then dash at once into the Finale, without pause.

The tremendous episodes that now supervene must be treated with intelligence and skill. The beginning is a rush of arpeggios in the key of C-sharp minor, ending with two chords on the key-note. Let the first two of these be sharply accented, and the next one slightly held back and played as a mere echo of the first. The rush of upward ascending arpeggios is at once twice
repeated, and at the third time one should sharply accent the closing high chords, as these lead at once to a change in the melodic line. The theme which at once follows is well defined and noble. It seems to typify the strong cry of a sturdy spirit bidding defiance to ill fortune. Note that it comes first in the higher registers and then twice in the bass.

Note, too, the succeeding passionate repetitions of one chord, like the hammering of misfortune’s blows. These should be played neither too loudly, nor too quickly. Let there be a sharp accent on the bass note at the beginning of each phrase. When the principal theme returns for the last time it must be played gently and slowly until, without any warning, it is swallowed up in the tempestuous rush of arpeggios and the two crashing chords that close the work. The last whirl of arpeggios may be as rapid and stormy as one can make it, allowing an accent at the beginning of each arpeggio (every fourth note), and the two last chords should ring out like hammer strokes on a celestial anvil.

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849).

Of all composers for the piano, we may justly say of Chopin that it was he who first definitely settled the status of the instrument as something sui generis. Even the mighty Beethoven was so much occupied in the gigantic task of crystallising imperfect musical form that he had no inclination to create a new piano idiom. To Chopin belongs the credit of having definitely placed the piano and piano-playing in a place by themselves as a separate, essential and self-sufficient province of the kingdom of music. Every pianist plays Chopin’s works, although very few amateurs succeed in speaking his language with certainty or complete understanding. It is very fortunate that the player-piano provides at once an efficient and universally available key to the inner shrine of this most intimate, lovable and divinely beautiful music.

We have chosen here as studies in Chopinism two of his smaller works, the Waltz in A-minor, and the Nocturne in E-flat, which latter is perhaps the best known of all his compositions. It is hardly necessary to urge the music lover sedulously to study the complete list of Chopin’s works, nor to remind him that he will find embraced within their scope every shade of emotion, passion, tragedy and power. Such works as the B-flat minor Scherzo, the Etude, op. 10, No. 12; the sonata in B-flat minor, the F-minor Fantaisie, Fantaisie Impromptu, and the Ballade in A-flat, should be as familiar to him as the piano itself.

Waltz in A-Minor, op. 34, no.2.

This beautiful and tender little composition is an excellent specimen of the ‘Valse au Chopin’. This does not mean a dancing measure, but rather the musical expression of emotions and feelings engendered by the ballroom. Indeed, while the waltz rhythm is discernible in all of these pieces, they are little poems about the dance rather than actual dances.
The present composition is said to have been Chopin’s favourite, and well it might have been. It demands a tender, delicate treatment, never loud, never rude, but light, graceful and fairy-like throughout. The first theme begins in the bass. Special attention must be given to the management of the accent lever here, so that the melody may be gently emphasised, while the waltz-like accompaniment is subdued throughout. Note after the first trill that the leap of the melody up to the higher treble should be signalised by a slight holding back on the first high note. When the repetition of the melody comes (immediately following), it is well to take it a little more slowly for the first three bass tones. This melody is then succeeded by a graceful episode in the treble with considerable ornamentation, which should be treated with the same lightness, never allowing tones to be thumped out, but attempting to follow the vein of melody as it courses in and out of the accompanying chords and grace notes. After several bars of this dainty interlude the second theme enters. It is tinged with a gentle melancholy and seems to voice the disappointment of one who searches the ballroom with his eyes from some secluded corner, seeking the face of his beloved amidst the light and gayety. Note here the phrasing indicated by the illustration.
After the second theme has been developed we have a return of the original material, which is now treated in a slightly different manner. Interlude and first theme reappear, and later the second theme comes in again. Lastly the gentle strains of the opening measures sound sweetly in our ears as the composition closes with a melancholy sigh.

The player-pianist, in attempting to interpret this waltz, must understand first something of its spirit as we have here tried to describe it and must practice the production of tones in a singing manner but without rudeness or force. Roughness and violence will kill the whole effect. The management of the foot-pedals, of the accent lever and of the sustaining pedal-lever are here of prime importance.

**Nocturne in E-Flat, op. 9, no. 2.**

Here we have Chopin, simple, youthful and ingenuous. Not very much can or need be said about the work. The melody which moves through its whole length is of singular beauty and lucidity without a trace of obscurity or perverseness. The accompaniment is a delight, so warm in its harmonic colouring, so perfectly fitted to the content of the piece and yet so simple. In
interpreting it the player-pianist need only keep in mind some such program as this: A moonlight night, a fair lady’s window and under it a troubadour gently thrumming his lute and breathing a song of love, grace and beauty to the embodiment of all the graces who sleeps behind the casement overhead. Let the melody be rendered slowly, lightly and sweetly, holding the tones well with the sustaining lever and changing it frequently, so that the ever-shifting harmonic colour may not be blurred and rendered dull. A perfect suggestion of the lute or harp can easily be brought about by such a treatment of the accompaniment, while the melody can be allowed to sing on gently, and mingle its sweetness with the rich chordal effects.

The usual expression marks of the music roll will probably be found to be of slight assistance here, and the player-pianist must try to interpret exactly as his own feelings prompt. Tempo-lever management is here important, as well as the use of the sustaining-pedal lever.

One passage at the close of this work demands special care. This is the graceful, rippling cadenza from which the closing modulation proceeds. Take this very gently, lightly and slowly at first and then gradually swell it and increase its speed, finally letting it die away as if it were surrendering itself utterly to the sweetness of the closing chords.

This nocturne will be found in every way an excellent test of the player pianist’s powers, while at the same time mastery of it is very easily acquired.

Cecile Chaminade, Scarf Dance, op. 32.

Cecile Chaminade is perhaps the best known and most popular of living woman composers. Her work is distinguished by a peculiarly fascinating charm, all its own, and defying analysis. She is essentially the modern Frenchwoman and her music partakes as intensely of her personality as Chopin’s of his. No comparison of course is offered or intended. The little work here analysed is one of a suite of dance movements and is entitled ‘Scarf Dance’. Like all of her music it is above all ‘chic’, just as a modern Frenchwoman herself is likely to be. A trifle of perversity, no little mischief and perfect self-command are to be noticed in all Chaminade’s music, and the ‘Scarf Dance’ is no exception to the rule. Sudden, fantastic changes of tempo, light and graceful skips of melody, and always something unusual in treatment; these are things we are sure to find. The opening theme of the ‘Scarf Dance’ should be phrased as indicated in the illustration. The first chord must be sharp and well emphasised.

Then let the next three move lightly and trippingly, more rapidly and slightly detached one from the other, until the sharp, thrice repeated chord that follows them brings them up with a jerk, as it were. This thrice repeated chord must be played more slowly and with considerable emphasis. After they have sounded their challenge, the music flows on as before until two sharp
tones in the bass sound out announcing a change in the melodic line, which gradually leads into a graceful repetition of the whole material.

The second theme, which follows after the repetition, must be taken well “staccato,” that is, with complete detachment between each pair of chords. These must be played lightly but with accent where indicated, and at the

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*Scarf Dance*  
*From Ballet Suite*  
*A Flat Major*  

**Notes in black are to be emphasized.**
beginning of the little run which ends them the tempo must be sharply accelerated, dropping back again immediately afterwards. Particular attention must be paid to the sustaining pedal-lever and the player-pianist should remember that this device must never be used when staccato chords are being played, as these are to be detached and not made to sing together.

The composition consists of these two themes with some graceful elaboration, and is, all told, a very beautiful little piece, thoroughly characteristic of its charming and brilliant creator.

**Franz Liszt, Hungarian Rhapsody, no. 2, C-Sharp Minor**

We have been told that this famous work is actually the most popular composition ever arranged on music rolls. And one may well believe it. Whatever carping critics may have said, the fact remains that Liszt succeeded, in the series of piano pieces to which he gave the generic name ‘Hungarian Rhapsody’, in reproducing most wonderfully the spirit and style of the primitive gypsy music. And there is something so fascinating about these wild melodies that the least musical ear seems at once to be attracted to them, while familiarity and understanding only bring even greater appreciation. Liszt’s formal music may have lacked inspiration sometimes. It may even have been tainted with charlatanry and insincerity. All the charges that have been made against his artistic faith may be true. And still these marvellous creations, these gypsy epics, will remain securely entrenched in the love and appreciation of all to whom music speaks with a familiar voice. The form in which Liszt cast these wild creations is as remarkable as the music itself. He did not directly invent the melodies which comprise their material, but selected them from the immense mass of such themes which he had collected during many years of study and observation among these strange people. Gypsies are found wandering all over the world, but their influence and numbers have become more apparent in Hungary than elsewhere. Strictly speaking, indeed, the Rhapsodies should be qualified by the name ‘Tsigané’, or ‘Gypsy’, rather than ‘Hungarian’. But Hungary has sheltered these strange peoples from the time of their first appearance in Europe and they have become the national musicians of the Magyars. Hungary has fostered them, and their music has developed in the sympathetic environment thus furnished.

All of these Rhapsodies, then, are cast in forms derived directly from original Gypsy melodies. Three separate types of melody may be discerned. First comes the ‘Laszán’. This is a slow, weird, mournful rhythm, breathing sorrow, disillusionment and despair. Then we have the ‘Frischka’, a playful, merry, dance movement, the very opposite in spirit to the gloomy ‘Laszán’. Lastly comes the ‘Czardas’, a wild, frenzied, satanic dance, breathless in its rapidity and demonic in its emotional effect. From these three remarkable forms all the Rhapsodies are fundamentally constructed.
The present example, no.2, in C-sharp minor, begins with a slow, abrupt introduction. Each group of sharply accented tones into which it naturally divides itself must be taken with definite detachment, as if the piano were uttering a series of short staccato commands, with an appreciable pause between each. Observe how carefully one must manage the sustaining pedal lever. Here we must only have sharp, short speech. Then a clear modulation leads us into the main theme of the ‘Laszán’. This is gentle and melancholy and must on no account be hurried. It goes its way quietly but powerfully, until brought to a sudden close by the repetition of the opening theme.

A slight pause and the ‘Frischka’ begins. It should be begun quietly, accenting the high note repeated at intervals in the treble, and gradually increasing the speed little by little. Faster and merrier, wilder and more reckless, the music rushes on, till suddenly the ‘Czardas’ bursts out with crashes of rude chords and wild runs up and down the whole keyboard. Faster and faster, wilder and wilder, until there comes a gentle lull in the storm and the speed begins to
slacken. Then gracefully there emerges, soft and sweet, the beautiful theme heard at the beginning. This is played gently and calmly, ending on a high tone, well sustained. Another pause. Then very slowly, very softly begins a run of octave passages. It grows louder, more rapid; and louder, faster, faster, louder, sweeps on to a tremendous climax, signalised by four great closing chords, crashing out like the trump of doom.

In the illustration the most difficult part of the interpretation has been analysed. This is the opening theme, and its difficulty comes from the fact that the music roll cannot give all the requisite directions, nor can it indicate by its perforating method anything of the abrupt decision needed in the speech of these opening chords. If once this essential point be mastered the description given above will furnish all further needed information for the rendition of this magnificent work.

The player-pianist is earnestly advised to study the 6th, 9th, 12th and 14th of these Rhapsodies, all of which are masterpieces of emotional music.
Book Review:

Claire L’Enfant

*Agapē Agape* is the final work of William Gaddis, the American novelist best known for his novel, *The Recognitions* (recently reissued by Atlantic Books). He was born in 1922, appropriately, the year in which those two masterpieces of modernist fiction, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* were first published.

While working at the *New Yorker* magazine as a fact checker, he first became interested in the player piano, which was the subject of an article he was assigned to work on. This was the start of an interest – obsession even, which would remain with him over the next 50 years of his writing life. Gaddis was not, however, interested in the player piano as a musical instrument, but as the manifestation of what he considered to be a disturbing trend in modern life: the growing use of mechanical reproduction in the arts, the resulting loss of autonomy and respect for individual artists, and a growing market for instant gratification entertainment. He began to research the history of the Player Piano, with the aim of writing something of his own on the topic. An article published in Atlantic Monthly in 1950, ‘Stop Player. Joke no.4’ is a light-hearted and anecdotal overview of the player piano’s history, and marked the first appearance of the research on the topic which he would return to many times over the next half century.

He set the project aside while he worked on his first novel, *The Recognitions*, which was published in 1950. This hugely ambitious novel, nearly 1000 pages long, is now recognised as a masterpiece of twentieth century American fiction, but when it first appeared, it met mainly uncomprehending reviews. His interest in the history of the player piano surfaces briefly in *The Recognitions*, and after the book was published, he returned to his research on the subject, as he was to do at many different points in his life. He planned to write a detailed and comprehensive history of the instrument and its influence on contemporary life, but the project was never fulfilled. It seems this was in part due to his growing realization that the player piano was just one small part of the history of mechanisation and automation. He became overwhelmed by the sheer volume of material he accumulated on the subject, and the difficulty of marshalling it into an effective narrative. But it was also the case that Gaddis used much of the material directly or indirectly in his novels, and by 1989, had decided that the history, for which he had by then accumulated material over a period of nearly 50 years, was ‘over-researched’ and would never be published. So it was perhaps surprising that for his last work, he decided to return to the project. He spent two years working on the history, but then decided to re-cast it as a work of fiction. *Agapē Agape* was

The novel is a stream of consciousness narrative by a sick, possibly dying man. Confined to his bed by ill-health, he frantically tries to sort and make sense of his chaotic papers and affairs, while raging at his physical deterioration and incapacity. The reader is immersed in the mind of a writer and thinker desperately trying to set down his thoughts about the nature of art in the modern world in a coherent way, before illness and muddled thinking overwhelm him. It hardly matters whether Gaddis and the narrator are one and the same: they share a preoccupation with the influence of mechanisation on art and artists, and a conviction that the player piano represents all that is worst in the modern desire for gratification without thought or effort. The book is a series of sustained reflections on art and the creative impulse, and the narrator’s bitter disappointment and disgust at the commodification of art - whether it be painting, music or writing - brought about by mass reproduction: ‘Authenticity is wiped out when the uniqueness of every reality is overcome by the acceptance of its reproduction, so art is designed for its reproducibility. Give them the choice…and the mass will always choose the fake’. The Pianola represents for him the desire for ‘mindless’ entertainment at the expense of art: ‘Waiting to be entertained, because that’s where it started and that’s where it ends up, avoiding pain and seeking pleasure play the piano with your feet, play cards, play pool, play pushpin….don’t have to read music know a clef from a G string just keep pumping’. For a man to whom music is at the centre of the universe, ‘Music, that’s where it all starts and ends’ this careless, mindless approach to music making is almost intolerable. But at the same time, the narrator makes a sharp distinction between the Pianola and the reproducing piano, and has nothing but respect - reverence even - for the Welte-Mignon:

‘…the Welte-Mignon that didn’t just record the notes but more perforations that actually reproduced all the shadings and subtleties of the artist, the unique performances of their own work by Debussy and Grieg, Rachmaninoff George Gershwin and the greatest pianists, Paderewski and God knows who, don’t you see? These Welte, Duo-Art Pianolas, Ampico all over the place what they’d done was to make the transient permanent, given the fleeting nature of music of great performances of great music a permanence that’s the heart of authenticity….when Welte’s reproducing apparatus put Debussy into the piano you wouldn’t need Debussy. You wouldn’t need Grieg you wouldn’t need Gershwin or Paderewski or any of them because you’d have authenticity and the whole concept of authenticity preserved, the music itself and the fleeting performances brought together forever, given permanence that’s the heart of authenticity’.

Throughout the book, he sets mass culture – the desire for entertainment and instant gratification without thought or effort - against the values of true
art, which he tries with ever-increasing desperation to pinpoint and describe to his own satisfaction. The book is structured as a series of digressions and reflections that circle endlessly around the same themes: we are in the narrator’s head, following an argument, experiencing his panic as he loses his train of thought, conscious suddenly of his physical ills, of the mound of paper shifting precipitously about on his bed. His struggle to make sense of the ideas which have preoccupied his thinking life, the sudden flights of brilliance and insight, the lapse back into uncertainty and the insecurity of his physical life make the book both moving and exhilarating. We urge him on as he takes a run at a line of thought, share his irritation when it peters into a dead end, and rejoice when his passion and intellect finally come together in the insights he has been searching for: ‘...the rage is there at the heart of it, the sheer energy, the sheer tension the tinge of madness where the work gets done, the only reality, the only refuge from the vast hallucination that’s everything out there....’

The book is an extraordinary work of fiction by any standards: it is particularly fascinating to anyone with a serious interest in player and reproducing pianos for the way in which it puts them at the heart of debates about modern culture. Gaddis was clearly extremely well-informed about many aspects of these instruments, particularly the technical, so it is a great pity that he entirely failed to understand the potential of the Pianola as a musical instrument of considerable subtlety. Of course he was right that it is quite possible to ‘just keep pumping’ but anyone who knows what the instrument is capable of will feel that his arguments, scintillating as they are, are undermined by the real potential of the instrument he so maligned.
Concert Review:
Prokofiev and Stravinsky at the Purcell Room, 12 March 2003

Benjamin Wolf

“It was worth coming just to see that guy’s beard.” This comment, overheard as I left the Purcell Room, seemed somewhat unfair. While I cannot deny that Rex Lawson’s beard is impressive – reminiscent of Albus Dumbledore, perhaps, or Gandalf in his more imposing moments – there were far better reasons for attending this concert than mere beard-watching. For this concert was a rarity: an evening which was musically satisfying, entertaining and educational. Lawson proved to be an admirable and eloquent guide to the vagaries of the pianola, a skilled comic poet, a sensitive accompanist and a thoughtful musician – let us not conclude, as my fellow concert-goer did, that the beard is the man.

The Purcell Room ‘pianola evening’ formed part of the Philharmonia Orchestra’s Prokofiev and Shostakovich festival, a series of concerts focussing on the relationship between these two composers and the Stalinist regime under which they wrote so much of their music. While there was, thankfully, little of Stalin in the repertoire being performed here, there was an understandable slant towards the Russian, beginning with repertoire recorded by Prokofiev for the Duo-Art reproducing piano.

This is, of course, hardly the place to criticise Prokofiev’s playing, particularly when the final performance was evidently aided by subsequent editing of the piano rolls. Suffice to say that there was something both fascinating and haunting about hearing notes played by a dead composer (and a great dead composer at that). The notes were deliciously played, including Prokofiev’s arrangement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Sheherazade - the composer here ‘accompanying’ Editha Konwitschny’s elegant rendition of the famous violin solo – and a performance of Rachmaninov’s Prelude in G Minor. Here, Lawson’s gentlemanly introductions to the mechanism and history of the reproducing piano were supplemented by a poem he had composed while transporting pianolas up and down English motorways. Reminiscent of Hilaire Belloc, it summarised what many may have felt about Rachmaninov’s music:

“Rachmaninov, a serious child, by nature hardly ever smiled.
He couldn’t bear to play with toys,
Like other little girls and boys,
But, wracked by deep consuming gloom,
He sat alone, predicting doom.
In later life, this dismal manner
Pervaded all his works for pianist;
Said he, “I think there’s nothing finer
Than making music in the minor…”
The second half of the concert was devoted to the potential of the pianola – the foot-operated player-piano. I suppose I should confess that I have long been sceptical of the pianola. To a life-long pianist, who has on occasion spent many hours trying to persuade unwilling fingers to hit the right notes, there has always seemed to be something unfair about an instrument that plays the notes all on its own. No doubt this is a stigma that pianists the world over must confront, and I am pleased to say that I have now been both corrected and converted. For, while the reproducing piano in the first half did function on its own (with some help from the mains switch), the performances in the second half were very much dependent on the musical abilities of the two pianolists – Rex Lawson and Denis Hall. Although I cannot pretend to understand the mechanisms involved, I do at least now appreciate the importance of Lawson and Hall’s dancing feet (and hands) in controlling tempo, accents and phrasing.

The climax of the evening was a performance of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, first transferred onto pianola rolls in 1921. Before this, Lawson demonstrated his skill as an accompanist in a performance of Prokofiev’s Five Melodies for Violin and Piano. Once again the violin part was played by Editha Konwitschny, a German violinist and recent graduate of the Royal Academy. It surely cannot be easy for a pianola and pianist to take on the role usually assigned to piano and pianist, but Lawson and Konwitschny produced a lifting and effective performance (though with the occasional hint that the violinist was adapting herself more than she might have liked to the music dictated by the piano roll).

And so to Stravinsky – a composer who more or less managed to avoid the evils of Stalinism, but who shared a number of musical interests with Prokofiev. He was, in Lawson’s words, “fascinated by the pianola,” and recomposed many of his greatest works for the instrument, including *Petrushka*, the *Firebird*, *Les Noces*, *Pulcinella* and the *Song of the Nightingale*. In part, this seems to have been a result of this increasingly ‘modernist’ composer’s wish to banish interpreters to the dark corners of history – to objectify his music and free it from the irritating interventions of conductors and orchestras (though he did himself try on a number of occasions to record a ‘definitive’ version of the *Rite*).

The *Rite of Spring* - a work which uses an impressively-sized orchestra in its usual form—takes up nine rolls in total, and in order to play it this evening’s two performers had to use two pianolas and two concert grand pianos, used alternately. The result was a remarkable performance, bringing to the fore the *Rite*’s most percussive qualities. Lawson and Hall showed a fine knowledge of the score, and its constantly varying tempi and dynamic indications. This reviewer is only sorry that Hall proved so reluctant to acknowledge the final applause which he undoubtedly deserved.

With missionaries such as these, the pianola may yet reclaim its rightful position in the musical legacy of the twentieth century. Certainly, this was a stimulating evening’s entertainment – a fine mix of musicality and erudition, an all-time great as a warm-up act, and, yes, possibly the perfect beard.
CD Review: Paderewski in Recital, Aeolia 2002

Malcolm Binns

We know from letters written to the Aeolian Company in 1900 that Paderewski was already much interested in the Pianola. He wrote from his private rail car 'Riva', en route to San Francisco on 24th March, 'Everyone who wishes to hear absolutely faultless, free of any kind of nervousness, piano playing should buy your Pianola. It is perfection!' Later that year he asked for an instrument to be shipped to his home in Morges. So when he came to record for the Duo-Art reproducing piano, he must have been happy to do so, and also he would not have felt inhibited by the four minute sides of the gramophone record. It does seem a little odd that he did not take the opportunity to record some of the larger works in his repertoire.

A recent RCA CD of gramophone recordings was badly received in some quarters. His technique was said to be poor and that he was a charismatic figure who charmed his audience with his presence (and that famous red hair!) rather than his performance. As someone who was brought up with the 78 rpm disc recording and didn’t see the film *Moonlight Sonata* (in which Paderewski stars) for many years, I feel these comments unjustified. The adjectives noble and grand have many times (rightly in my opinion) been used to describe Paderewski’s playing, and in a strange way, his technical (or other mechanical) limitations highlight these aspects of his playing. Yet on occasions he could deliver a stunning virtuoso performance, as in his disc of Liszt’s *La Leggerezza*.

Paderewski’s contemporaries amongst the front rank of pianists were on the whole appreciative of his playing. Alfred Cortot, in his forward to Henryk Opienski’s biography of Paderewski, describe the Paris debut as a ‘révélation décisive. C’était un poète inspiré qui prenait possession du clavier.’ Josef Hofman, interviewed in 1898, said ‘I could not criticise Paderewski - he is an artist.’
Amusingly, Elly Ney, on a tour of the States, found herself billed as the 'female Paderewski.' She went to hear him, liked the Schumann Sonata Op 11, but as for the Chopin, 'He should be called the female Paderewski!'

I have compared the many works recorded here with performances of the same works on disc and found a great similarity in interpretation. I was worried by a passage in the Ballade No 3 op 47 of Chopin (not done on disc), but was reassured when I heard a radio performance with exactly the same outcome.

It is good to have these recordings in what is a very difficult medium to reproduce so successfully done and transferred to CD.
Trevor Watkins - An Appreciation

Rex Lawson

When the Pianola Institute was founded, which will soon be twenty years ago, it was mainly in an attempt to draw together the world of music and of music rolls. This may seem almost a tautology, or at least an unnecessary process, but it is a fact that player pianos are still not widely understood in the general musical world.

However, since the world of music was largely unaware of the pianola, it was on the whole not from amongst worldly musicians that the Institute’s supporters were initially drawn. The Friends of the Pianola Institute took us on trust, and in many cases were personal friends or even family, who appreciated the need for the emphasis on music above mechanism, and who were prepared to dip their hands into their pockets once a year, and in some cases to turn out on occasional evenings or weekends to provide practical help.

Trevor Watkins was my uncle, my mother’s cousin, and so this appreciation of him is inevitably a very personal one. His upright Aeolian Pianola Piano was one of the first I ever encountered at close quarters, and his dedication to the truth has been one of the foundations of my life. Trevor, or indeed ‘Uncle Trevor’, as almost everyone knew him, was a bastion of the Friends of the Pianola Institute. Joining right at the start in 1984, he served for many years as its Secretary, and was very frequently to be seen at Institute events, handing out brochures, selling ‘T’-shirts, perhaps even making tea. Mind you, his own appetite for tea was amply catered for by the vacuum flasks that he managed to take everywhere. Driving up from London to Wales on one occasion, he poured himself a cup of the brown liquid (“Still hot, you know!”) as we passed Shrewsbury. And he had already come up from Lancing to London on the train, before we even set out on the road.

Uncle Trevor was the son of a Unitarian minister. Losing his father at a very early age, he and his mother came down to London to lodge with my own mother’s family, and when as a teenager he lost his mother as well, my parents kept an eye on the young student as he proceeded through the Second World War and, later, his BSc at London University. When I lost my own parents in the 1970s, he and his wife, Joyce, looked after me in my turn.

Trevor’s gifts as a Physics Lecturer at the Borough Polytechnic were manifold. He had a gentle way with the students that encouraged them far more readily than his more didactic colleagues, and his ingenuity in mechanical matters must have helped generations of students, and at least one nephew, to restore sundry domestic and industrial mechanisms to working order.

It is difficult to remember which individual events connected with the
Pianola Institute Trevor and Joyce attended, mainly because they attended nearly all of them. Trevor braved the winds of Wales when the FPI played on the Ffestiniog Railway, travelled to Holland for pianola concerts in the Hague and Oirschot, stayed awake for a commendable proportion of our 1985 Pianola Marathon at the Festival Hall, and whooped it up with us in Paris in 1988, on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the *Rite of Spring*.

![Trevor Watkins (front left) and Friends of the Institute at Blaenau Ffestiniog](image)

The little group seen below at Blenau Ffestiniog station entertained the passengers as they waited for the down train to Portmadoc around May Bank Holiday. Denis Hall arriving on the second day, enquired of Trevor where Rex might be, receiving the pointed answer, “Oh, he’s in there - I think he’s having a motion.” Such memories bring a real smile to the face, and perhaps a slight tear to the eye, but in their way they represent an innocence and a feeling for truth that is an example to all of us.

As Secretary of the FPI until 1994, Trevor worked quietly away, providing an often unseen service to the Friends’ Committee, and ensuring the smooth running of very many events and activities. He had his own style - the minutes of meetings were usually handwritten - but his analytical brain ensured an accurate representation of even the most diffuse meetings.

Trevor’s daughter, Cathy, and her partner, Nic, have inherited the family Pianola, and we are very glad that they will continue the family association with the Friends of the Pianola Institute.
Contributors

Malcolm Binns, the distinguished English pianist, gave his first London recital in 1957, and made his Proms debut in 1960. He subsequently played in 13 Proms seasons. He has played with many of the world’s leading orchestras and given recitals in both this country and abroad. His repertoire includes the concerti of Mozart, Beethoven, Grieg, Schumann, Chopin, and Rachmaninov, as well as those of Liapunov, Medtner, Paderewski, Reger and Menotti. His solo repertoire also embraces the music of Balakirev, Scriabin and Janáček. He has a particular interest in the interpretations of historic pianists, and possesses a rare knowledge of their playing on both disc and reproducing piano.

Denis Hall has for many years been an enthusiast of historic performance recordings on both piano roll and disc, and of making them accessible to present-day music lovers. He has involved himself in the restoration and preparation of reproducing pianos for concerts and recordings, and in the transfer of 78 rpm recordings to master tape for LP and CD reissue.

Rex Lawson is a concert pianist who has been involved in research and music-making with these instruments since 1971. He has travelled with his pianola to the USA, Canada and many European countries, transporting it by plane, ship, car and even, in 1986, by gondola in Venice. He has made a special study of music written for the pianola, by the hundred or so composers who have been interested in its possibilities during the course of the twentieth century. In 2004 he is to give the world premiere of Conlon Nancarrow’s Concerto for Pianola.

Claire L’Enfant is a publisher by profession, and lives in London. She has been Company Secretary of the Pianola Institute since its foundation in 1984. This is her first venture into print under her own name.

Douglas Riva, the American pianist, has gained international recognition for his “profound knowledge of Spanish music” (La Vanguardia, Barcelona). Mr Riva’s interpretations of the works of Enrique Granados (1867-1916) in particular, have earned him a place as one of this composer’s leading exponents worldwide. In the words of El País (Madrid), Mr Riva is “one of the principal apostles of Granados’ music”. And according to Natalia Granados, the composer’s daughter, “Mr Riva knows everything relating to my father to perfection.” In recognition of Mr Riva’s credentials as a Granados exponent, in 1999 Naxos initiated a series of his recordings of the complete piano works of Granados. Spanish critics writing in Scherzo praised Mr Riva’s

William Braid White was a noted American authority on the technical aspects of the piano, and of the player and reproducing pianos. During the period from the first decade of the twentieth century, until the end of the Second World War, he produced a number of books based on his experiences, both theoretical and practical, on the design of pianos, and the servicing and repair of both pianos and player and reproducing actions. These volumes have stood the test of time and are still looked on as standard works in their field. He was a Fellow of the Acoustical Society of America, a Fellow of the Institute of Musical Instrument Technology, and was Principal of the School of Pianoforte Technology, Chicago.

Benjamin Wolf was educated at Dulwich College and University College, Oxford, where he obtained first-class honours in Classics. After a number of years as a professional concert agent, he is currently studying for his doctorate in music at King’s College, London. An experienced conductor, he has performed widely throughout Britain and abroad, even venturing as far afield as Vilnius, where he directed the National Symphony Orchestra of Lithuania.