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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.

Plans have been made for a regular journal, public concerts, a lending library of rolls, a travelling exhibition, and in addition, a roll and information archive is to be established, 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:
John Brawn, Hugo Cole, Louis Cyr, Keith Daniels, Mike Davies, Denis Hall, Rex Lawson, Donna McDonald, Jeremy Siepmann. Company Secretary: Claire L’Enfant.

It is possible to support the work of the Institute by joining the Friends of the Pianola Institute. Membership enquiries should be sent to Mike Davies, 9 Jillian Close, Chestnut Avenue, Hampton, Middlesex, England.

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The fee includes a subscription to the journal and details of the activities of the Institute.
Editorial

Apart from Rex Lawson's second and final instalment on Stravinsky and the Pianola, which provides a connecting link with the first Journal issue, the emphasis in the issue at hand is shifting perceptibly away from individual works, composers and performers (Rachmaninoff, Elgar) 1) to software production (Wilson: new and recut player-piano rolls), 2) to recent repertoire inventory, whether of disc dubbings (Hall) or of exhaustive catalogue listings (Farmer), and 3) to the adroit marketing of the pianola in its heyday via its anticipated impact on general musical appreciation as well as on higher music education (Wood). The teasing revelation of a Ravel oddity ('Frontispice' – Lawson) and a review of the last 1988 London Proms concert involving the Grainger/Grieg concerto (Ould) round out a well balanced menu of both the old and the new, of the anthology and the individual.

Louis Cyr
Montreal
June 1989
LE PLEYELA
20, Avenue de l'Opéra
Paris

Les œuvres de
IGOR STRAWINSKY
Enregistrées par l'AUTEUR
Spécialement ADAPTÉES par lui pour le
PLEYELA
Sont éditées en rouleaux Pleyela perforation "Comète"
65-73-88 notes

Ont paru à ce jour :

PULCINELLA 8 rouleaux  le SACRE du PRINTEMPS 9 rouleaux
RAG-TIME. 1 rouleau  PIANO RAG MUSIC . . 1 rouleau

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Soc. An' Cap'100.000 Francs
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Métro : Pyramides

Tél. GUT. 39-08

This advertisement for the Stravinsky Pleyela rolls appeared in a special ballet edition of La Revue Musicale published in December 1921 in Paris.
Stravinsky and the Pianola: Part 2

Rex Lawson

The first part of this article was published in The Pianola Journal No. 1, 1987

In 1924 Stravinsky enlarged his player-piano activities to include the Duo-Art reproducing piano, signing a contract with the Aeolian Company which began in October of that year. His first recording session came in early 1925 in New York, when at least the first movement of the Concerto for Piano was automatically transcribed on to roll from his own playing.¹ But the total of these recorded Duo-Art rolls that have survived was small; only one movement of the Concerto and three rolls of the 1924 Piano Sonata,² although further movements of the Concerto were listed in various catalogues as being in preparation. There was also a roll of the Berceuse and Finale from The Firebird for the Aeolian Duo-Art pipe organ, a large and sophisticated breed of residence organ with automatic changes of registration and swell pedalling, much prized nowadays by those collectors who value rarity above all else. The repertoire of the organ was not very great, and its tone colours those of a home orchestra, so that a roll of The Firebird no doubt represents one of the pinnacles of its achievement. At any rate it would be most interesting to hear.

Besides these recorded rolls, a set of The Firebird was produced for the Duo-Art piano, in the AudioGraphic series masterminded by Percy Scholes, the British music critic.³ There are indications in this set, from the style of the dynamic coding, and from the fact that the tempo lever has to be reset during the course of certain rolls, that the Pleyela Firebird was used as a basis. One very obvious difference, however, can be seen in the fact that the Duo-Art Firebird begins with the Introduction, whereas the Pleyela version omits it, so that Stravinsky must clearly have been involved in at least a modicum of extra transcription. In any case, the Duo-Art coding must have demanded the composer’s own suggestions and approval.

There were actually two AudioGraphic series which ran roughly concurrently, one issued in London and the other in New York. The Aeolian Company in Britain was the originator of the scheme, owing not only to Percy Scholes, but also to the American, George Whitefield Fay Reed,⁴ the deputy managing director in London and less of an accountant than most of his colleagues, who was prepared to risk the enormous investment involved. As a result the British AudioGraphic series is the more important of the two, and it was for London that Stravinsky carried out the necessary work. For the non-Duo-Art owner, the chief attraction of
these rolls lies in the lengthy illustrated programme notes printed on paper left unperforated at the start of each. In addition, a running commentary is printed as the music unrolls, along with slur-like lines of several colours to emphasize visually the various themes. Since the programme notes are autobiographical in part, it would be useful to have them reprinted, an easy task in these days of cheap photo-lithography, but one which underlines the enormous expense undertaken by Aeolian in making printing plattens of extreme length.

Projects were also in hand to include Petrushka, The Rite of Spring and The Song of the Nightingale in this series, but in 1930 the American Aeolian Company, in a bid to survive, bought out its main rival, the American Piano Corporation, makers of the Ampico. To this end it needed cash, so it sent a hatchet man in the shape of Myers Wayman, its former Metropolitan Sales Manager for New York, to take charge of the British Aeolian Company and to sell off everything that he could. Thus the AudioGraphic project came to an untimely end through no great fault of its own. It certainly provided a unique and intimate way of linking printed commentaries to the actual music, and could easily have become a major force in musical education.

At this point Stravinsky’s direct involvement with the player-piano ceased, as far as I am aware. There had, incidentally, been two Ampico rolls of his works recorded during the 1920s, the fourth of the Opus 7 Piano Studies by Alexander Brailowsky, and the Russian Dance from Petrushka by Paul Doguereau, in the normal piano arrangement.

It was not until 1981 that the intermediate version of The Wedding, which includes a part for pianola, was given its first performance, so I have delayed mentioning it until the end of this talk, in order to leave you with the bells of Russia ringing in your ears. But before we walk down the aisle, I should like to enter one or two urgent pleas on behalf of the pianola. I am sure Stravinsky will forgive me; what I have to say is very much in his own interests.

Throughout the world and for many years the player piano has been the subject of prejudice and misunderstanding. In the case of the reproducing piano, it is extremely difficult to find instruments that have been restored with the necessary degree of thoroughness. In the case of foot-operated player pianos, the idea has been prevalent since the aggressive advertising of the 1920s that anyone can play, and that the roll does all the work. As we have seen, this is completely untrue, though one roll company even published a book entitled How to Play Like Your Player-Piano!

As a result of these misconceptions, much damage has already been done, and since at least fifty composers, including Igor Stravinsky, have written for the instrument, the damage is quite serious. I suggest that the
following steps would at least partly remedy the situation, and I shall be delighted to hear from any rich university in a mild climate with the necessary accommodation.

1. An archive building should be set up, with room to store tens of thousands of music rolls securely, and in the optimum temperature and humidity.

2. Rolls are not like books, to be restricted to a reference library. Copying machines and good, new push-up pianolas should therefore be made as a matter of urgency.

3. Class and individual tuition should be given in playing the pianola, linked preferably to one or more university music departments.

4. Research into the many composers who have written for the pianola and allied instruments should be undertaken quickly, since so many rolls are untraced, and so many others known only by single, privately-owned copies.

5. The pianola is far from being a solely historical instrument. Various contemporary composers have written for the foot-operated player piano, and of course Conlon Nancarrow has been writing for his specially modified Ampicos for many years. A pianola institute should act as a central stimulus for the composition of new music for the instrument, offering opportunities to composers which are not attainable by any other means.

If such a centre is not founded within the next few years, the pianola will remain the province of mechanical enthusiasts, and the world will stand to lose a unique part of its musical heritage.

Now, in the hope that we shall still get to the basilica on time, I return to *The Wedding* which, in 1919 in one of its trial instrumentations, was arranged by Stravinsky for pianola, harmonium, two cymbaloms and percussion. It was never performed at the time, according to the *Chroniques de ma Vie*, owing to the difficulty of synchronizing the electric instruments (plural) with the live performers. What Stravinsky means by ‘electric instruments’ is not clear; the harmonium cannot have been intended to be powered by electricity, since the manuscript specifies the use of the expression stop on occasions, a device designed to render the instrument’s dynamics controllable by the feet, so that accents and hairpins could be obtained. It is unlikely that he intended an electric player piano, since accents and fortepianos abound in the music, and these are not easy to achieve well with a non-reproducing, electric instrument. It seems to me that the part is meant for a foot-operated pianola, which Stravinsky would have heard in London, and that his later association with Pleyel, and the
electric Pleyela he had in his studio in Paris, became uppermost in his mind when he thought and wrote of player pianos thereafter.

Synchronization of a pianola with other instruments is quite demanding but not impossible, although the difficulty is all the greater when the tempo is strict. It is only too easy to shelter the odd late note under the wing of a slight rubato, but not in The Wedding! For the world premiere in Paris in June 1981, I was asked to prepare the music roll, which I did with the aid of many razor blades and a special ruler. There are some 14,000 individual holes, and the roll runs for something over ten minutes. The cutting process was begun at Macon municipal camping site in Burgundy, continued in a tent in Paris, by the banks of the Seine, and finished on returning from holiday, at my home in south London. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the music but it should be briefly noted that the pianola is called on to provide musical resources beyond the number, span and speed of the human fingers. Individual notes repeat at 640 per minute in many instances, and yet I found only one bar containing a musical impossibility in the shape of three pairs of notes repeated at 960 per minute, which is attainable by the pianola mechanism, but not alas by the piano keyboard. As luck would have it, the octave above is sounded with the first note of each pair, so the omission of the lower pitch is quite unnoticeable, especially at such a high speed.

Igor Stravinsky spent some fifteen years, about one-sixth of his life, in close and enduring contact with many types of player piano. I do not believe that this activity was some unfortunate form of aberration, but I do think the sad state into which the player piano has fallen over the years has coloured critical opinion of this part of Stravinsky’s opus, as well as gently diverting the composer’s own memories of the time. If this distortion is to be made good, then it must be realised that the player piano, like any other instrument, takes years of practice. It is to be hoped that this symposium will mark the beginning of a renewed interest, not only in Stravinsky’s own player piano activities, but also in the instrument and its repertoire as a whole.

I should like to thank Jann Pasler for inviting me here in the first place, Robert Craft for suggesting it, and Denis Hall, who is Chairman of the British Player Piano Group, for helping me to drag my 70 year old Pianola halfway round the globe. But in particular I need to express my indebtedness to Louis Cyr, who has gallantly made available to me all his research notes into Stravinsky and the player piano, collected over several years, and without which the revision of this talk would have been well nigh impossible.

During the course of this talk, the following rolls were played:

1. I. Stravinsky, Piano-Rag-Music, Pleyela 8438
4. I. Stravinsky, *Petrushka* (excerpt), Pleyela
5. I. Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring* (excerpt), Pleyela
6. I. Stravinsky, *The Song of the Nightingale* (excerpt), Pleyela

Notes
2 I cannot let this opportunity pass without recording an anecdote related to me a few days after the Symposium finished by Robert Armbruster, formerly in charge of light music for the Duo-Art, and now living in retirement in Los Angeles.
   'Stravinsky!' exclaimed Mr Armbruster, as our conversation weaved its way through the 1920s, 'He recorded for the Duo-Art, you know.'
   'Well, I know that,' came the reply of your excited interviewer, 'but what makes you remember his recordings after nearly sixty years?'
   'Well you see, when he came to Aeolian Hall in New York to record his Piano Sonata, he did it from the manuscript, so the classical department sent for me to turn the pages.'
   Awestruck silence.
   'In fact a rather amusing thing happened, so I remember the occasion quite clearly,' continued the page-turner. 'Stravinsky and I had just sat down at the piano, and he was about to start playing, when the studio door opened, and in walked Wanda Landowska, the harpsichord player. She and Stravinsky were great friends, you know, so they were all over each other in French for five minutes or so, embracing and chatting. Anyhow, they eventually calmed down, and Stravinsky came back to the piano, so I got ready to turn. In the meantime Landowska had found herself a high stool in the far corner of the studio, and just as Stravinsky was about to begin, she pulled one foot right up into her lap, in a sort of half-lotus position. After that I found it extremely difficult to concentrate on the music — she was wearing bright yellow bloomers with drawstrings!'
3 Scholes edited the *Oxford Companion to Music*, which up to its eighth edition prints an excellent illustrated article on 'The mechanical reproduction of music', including details of the AudioGraphic series.
4 I enter here a small plea in case anyone knows the origins of this gentleman, who was by all accounts a good amateur pianist. Was he related to Amy Fay, the pupil of Liszt, who wrote *Music Study in Germany*? The name is sufficiently unusual to suggest some connection, and clearly the family was strongly musical. Amy's sister, Rose, married Theodore Thomas, who founded the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with the aid of her brother, C. Norman Fay.
5 Information on many unissued AudioGraphic rolls is to be found in the Duo-Art Numerical Catalogue, compiled by Albert M. Petrak, and published privately by him in Cleveland, Ohio, 1963.
6 Information kindly provided by the late Bob Good, formerly roll librarian and pianola salesman at Aeolian Hall, London, and it should be said, a sadly missed friend.
7 Anxious as I am that no corner of Stravinskian research should remain unexplored, I
should report that the 1925 Ampico catalogue prints the following inspired programme note for the Study:

‘Delightfully picturesque in its suggestion, the mock anguish of hordes of little sprites smarting under the lash of a burly and loud-mouthed master, one who would govern by force and brawling rather than by kindness and friendly interest. The little fellows rush headlong, the noise of their pattering feet mingling with their cries and complaints. Now and again a gentler note is heard, and there is a suspicion of humour and burlesque underlying it all, which leads one to believe that things are not so bad as they seem.’


This was the QRS Company, which has survived to the present day, and now makes some 800,000 music rolls each year in Buffalo, New York.

In this connection I should be most grateful to know of the existence of composed rolls by Stravinsky and others, with a view to their re-issue during the next few years.


**Igor Stravinsky – Music on Piano Roll**

The list which follows contains all the rolls which the writer has so far been able to trace. Others may exist, but by now they must be in a very small minority. There are four columns, viz the title of the music, the roll number, the label under which the roll was published, and the original issue date. All the rolls referred to, with the exception of two, are intended for use on 88-note player pianos, or reproducing pianos. The two exceptions are the rolls mentioned in section E for the Duo-Art pipe organ. This instrument used large, complex rolls to reproduce two manuals and pedals, with automatic changes of registration and swell pedalling.

The titles in the list, following Eric Walter White, are all in English. Titles vary from time to time, particularly on Aeolian rolls, and there is not the space here to go into such detail. Standardization seemed the best compromise for the present.

Only those dates which appear without brackets are guaranteed. In such cases the writer has himself read a contemporary roll bulletin or press announcement, or has seen such a specific source quoted. Bracketed dates are probably as accurate as they claim to be. Sources for these include the factory date, codes on individual rolls, projection from annual roll catalogues, and deduction from composite roll advertisement, when new numbers appear between two particular months, without any specific issue announcement being made. Complete accuracy of these dates will take several more years of gradual research to achieve, and in the meantime it
Igor Stravinsky at the Duo-Art recording piano
seemed best to provide a set of reasonably accurate estimates. More specific notes appear under most sections of the list.

**Rollography**

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The Universal Music Company manufactured rolls not only for the Aeolian Company, its parent, but also for most of its competitors on a wholesale basis. Consequently, the majority of Aeolian Themodist rolls are
duplicated by the Universal Accentuated series, which was often overprinted with the names of smaller music roll dealers. The two series are identical, except for the red Metrostyle line, which appears only on Aeolian rolls.

It is probable that rolls 1-4 were originally commissioned by Claude Johnson, and released to the general public later, at the date indicated. Roll 10 was originally issued in the USA (see below), but had its AudioGraphic programme notes added in Britain. Rolls 11-16 were not directly recorded by Stravinsky, but over his signature on each he attests to the fact that they are his interpretations.

Rolls 1-9 have price code suffixes. These were introduced in about 1920, and at the same time the L prefix (signifying Aeolian rolls whose masters originated in London) was dropped. Both styles are given for rolls 1-4.

B Esther Willis, Brentford, Middlesex, England.

1  *Faun and Shepherdess*  
   Mechanically perforated  
   Unnumbered  Private (1915)

2  Two Melodies of Gorodetzky  
   Mechanically perforated  
   Unnumbered  Private (1915)

3  Scherzo Fantastique  
   Mechanically perforated  
   Unnumbered  Private (1915)

4  *Fireworks*  
   Mechanically perforated  
   Unnumbered  Private (1915)

5  *Zvezdoliki*  
   Mechanically perforated  
   Unnumbered  Private (1915)

6  *The Nightingale*,  
   (Chinese March)  
   Mechanically perforated  
   Unnumbered  Private (1915)

7  *The Nightingale*, (Excerpt)  
   Mechanically perforated  
   Unnumbered  Private (1915)

*These rolls were cut by hand by Miss Willis, for Philip Heseltine, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and possibly Edwin Evans. There is no suggestion that Stravinsky was involved.*

C Pleyel, Lyon & Cie, Paris, France.

1  *Pulcinella* (1)  
   Pleyela/Odéola  (1921)

2  *Pulcinella* (2)  
   Pleyela/Odéola  (1921)

3  *Pulcinella* (3)  
   Pleyela/Odéola  (1921)
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<td>Pleyela/Odéola</td>
<td>(1921)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td><em>The Rite of Spring</em> (3)</td>
<td>8431</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><em>The Rite of Spring</em> (4)</td>
<td>8432</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td><em>Piano-Rag-Music</em></td>
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<td>Pleyela/Odéola</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>8439</td>
<td>Pleyela/Odéola</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td><em>Five Easy Pieces</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
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<td>8441</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8446</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td><em>Petrushka</em> (7)</td>
<td>8447</td>
<td>Pleyela/Odéola</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td><em>The Five Fingers</em> (1)</td>
<td>8448</td>
<td>Pleyela/Odéola</td>
<td>(Nov. 1922)</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td><em>The Five Fingers</em> (2)</td>
<td>8449</td>
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<td>(Nov. 1922)</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td><em>Ragtime</em></td>
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<td>31</td>
<td><em>The Song of the Nightingale</em> (1)</td>
<td>8451</td>
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<td>(1922/3)</td>
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<td>8452</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td><em>The Song of the Nightingale</em> (3)</td>
<td>8453</td>
<td>Pleyela/Odéola</td>
<td>(1922/3)</td>
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34 Tales for Children 8454  Pleyela/Odéola (1922/3)
35 Four Russian Songs 8455  Pleyela/Odéola (1922/3)
36 Concertino 8456  Pleyela/Odéola (late 1923)
37 The Wedding (1) 8831  Pleyela/Odéola (late 1923)
38 The Wedding (2) 8832  Pleyela/Odéola (late 1923)
39 The Wedding (3) 8833  Pleyela/Odéola (late 1923)
40 The Wedding (4) 8834  Pleyela/Odéola (late 1923)
41 The Wedding (5) 8861  Pleyela/Odéola (1924/5)
42 The Firebird (1) 10039  Pleyela/Odéola Aug. 1926
43 The Firebird (2) 10040  Pleyela/Odéola Aug. 1926
44 The Firebird (3) 10041  Pleyela/Odéola Aug. 1926
45 The Firebird (4) 10042  Pleyela/Odéola Aug. 1926
46 The Firebird (5) 10043  Pleyela/Odéola Aug. 1926
47 The Firebird (6) 10044  Pleyela/Odéola Aug. 1926
48 The Firebird (7) 10045  Pleyela/Odéola Aug. 1926
49 Sonata for Piano (1) 8457  Pleyela/Odéola Apr. 1927
50 Sonata for Piano (2) 8458  Pleyela/Odéola Apr. 1927
51 Sonata for Piano (3) 8459  Pleyela/Odéola Apr. 1927

Many types of roll preparation were used for this series, and it is impossible at present to state which processes were used for each roll. Pulcinella, The Rite of Spring, Piano-Rag-Music, Petrushka, The Song of the Nightingale, Four Russian Songs, Concertino, The Wedding and The Firebird are all specially arranged for the player piano, and it is possible that some of the other rolls are also. Pleyel also manufactured rolls for its competitors, including Odéola, which used the same numbers.

The existence of roll 30 is in some doubt, as it disappears from advertised lists in 1924. Rolls 40 and 41 are each half of the final tableau of The Wedding. The Firebird series (rolls 42-48) omits the Introduction, and begins instead with the Firebird’s Dance. Whether there was any duplication of arrangements or recordings with Aeolian is a subject for further research.

D American Piano Company, New York, NY, USA.

1 Study for Piano Op. 7/4 64011 H Ampico Feb. 1925
2 Petrushka (Russian Dance) 66861 H Ampico Dec. 1926
**E** Aeolian, Weber Piano and Pianola Company, New York, NY, USA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roll</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Concerto for Piano</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>Duo-Art</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(First Movement)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Sonata for Piano (1)</td>
<td>6867</td>
<td>Duo-Art</td>
<td>Apr. 1925</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Duo-Art</td>
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<td>AudioGraphic</td>
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<td><em>The Firebird</em></td>
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<td>Duo-Art</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Berceuse and Finale)</td>
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<td>Pipe Organ</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td><em>Symphonies of Wind</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duo-Art</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Instruments – Chorale</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pipe Organ</td>
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</table>

It is possible that rolls 1-4 were also issued in Great Britain, with the same serial numbers. Roll 2 was issued there, in the AudioGraphic series, under a different number (see above). Rolls 5-10 are a re-issue of the AudioGraphic *Firebird* series prepared in London (see above).

The April 1925 Duo-Art Monthly, published in New York, announces the imminent issue of the two organ rolls without specifying numbers.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roll</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>
This roll was hand-cut from a photocopy of the manuscript, and first used for a performance of the work at Radio France in June 1981, conducted by Pierre Boulez.

**F** Victoria Music Rolls, Barcelona, Spain.

1. *Petrushka* (Tableau 1) 6551 Victoria
2. *Petrushka* (Tableau 2/3) 6552 Victoria
3. *The Song of the Nightingale*
   (Act 1) 6996 Victoria

**G** M. Welte & Söhne, Freiburg, Germany.

1. *Petrushka* (Russian Dance/ Chez Petrushka) 4074 Welte-Mignon
   Recorded by Carlo Zecchi
The Player Piano on Record

Denis Hall

It is ironic that the great majority of people today listen to the player piano by means of its erstwhile rival, the gramophone. In the early years of this century, when the player piano and reproducing piano were being developed, the quality of sound available from the gramophone was so poor that the music lover turned to the concept of the real piano playing in his own home. As we now know, this state of affairs was to last only until about 1930, by which time the sound quality of music recorded on disc had advanced to such a state of comparative perfection that almost overnight it ousted the expensive, luxury player piano. Nonetheless, during the 30 years’ hey-day of the player and reproducing pianos, a library of music rolls of all types of music was built up for the pianolist to interpret, as large as that of sheet music at that time, and in the field of the reproducing piano, more than 10,000 classical titles alone were recorded by every pianist of note active at the time, and probably as many again popular rolls.

A number of these reproducing piano recordings has been transferred to tape and disc. This article makes no claim to being a comprehensive survey of these recordings, but rather a pointer to some of the better ones. It provides some guidelines for assessing what one is listening to, and sorting out the good from the not-so-good. It will concentrate on reproducing pianos, purely because recordings of pianolist are so few in comparison.

In criticizing a recording of a ‘live’ pianist, one is conscious of whether or not one is listening to a good recording per se, and the ear quickly adjusts to the bad sound if the performance is worthwhile; the important point is that the interpretation will not be affected by a bad recording. In dealing with a recording of a reproducing piano, the sound coming off the disc (or tape) may be magnificent, but if the piano is not working properly, the interpretation will be distorted. How is the non-technical listener to know?

It may be helpful to be aware of some of the things which can be wrong. It may seem extraordinary that a record label would issue a disc of a piano which is not in pristine condition, but there are good (if inexcusable) reasons for this. The popularity of the reproducing piano plummeted in the early 1930s, by the end of the Second World War, it was all but forgotten. By the 1950s, when recordings of these pianos started to be made, the technicians and service engineers who had looked after the pianos for a previous generation had either retired or were dead. It therefore fell to amateurs without professional training to prepare the instruments for their visits to the recording studios, and the standards were certainly not uniformly high.
From the earliest days of the reproducing piano, the manufacturers were able to entice the greatest artists to make recordings and to allow them to be published. They elicited the most glowing testimonials, but the tone of many of these suggest that they were written by the manufacturers and signed by the artists in exchange for a good fat cheque! On the other hand, at that time, the reproducing piano would have been the first experience an artist would have had of hearing his own playing, and he may well have been quite overwhelmed at hearing himself. Once the immediate novelty had worn off, it would become quite obvious to him that it would not do his reputation any good to have recordings published which did not bear a good resemblance to what he could do on the concert platform. I therefore submit that right from the earliest days of the first Welte reproducing piano in 1905 to the most sophisticated Ampico B of 1930, the best of the music roll recordings played on a fine, properly adjusted reproducing piano gave a very plausible representation of the artist's performance. Any gramophone recording which sounds unconvincing will be the result of (a) a bad music roll recording or (b) a poorly regulated reproducing piano. It is important to be aware of ways in which the reproducing piano may be deficient.

There may be problems with the speed at which the performance is played back. The original recording will have been made on a paper roll designed to be reproduced at a constant speed which is marked at the beginning of the roll. If the piano is faulty, the whole performance may be too fast or too slow, and there is no tell-tale pitch deviation as with a disc or tape recording. The roll drive mechanism may be uneven, causing faulty rhythm, or the roll may run faster or slower from time to time, which can result in sudden unmusical hesitations or a general increase or decrease in overall speed. A perfectly operating piano will not display any of these faults.

The piano itself to which the reproducing action is fitted must be of good quality and be perfectly evenly voiced and regulated, and perfectly in tune. The player action (one pneumatomic motor for each note of the piano) must also be completely even, so that the quietest playing which can be achieved by hand can also be reproduced. There must be sufficient power to give a full dynamic range right up to a strong fortissimo. Within these two extremes, the dynamic control has to be correctly reproduced by the player action, and if this is not functioning correctly, there will be distortion in the form of notes and chords playing quietly instead of loudly, or the reverse. Notes may even be missed altogether. All this has to be achieved by an action made of wood, rubber-covered cloth, leather and felt, hardly materials a designer in the 1980s would choose for a precision mechanism! And yet, at best spectacular results were achieved which stand close
comparison with the untouched 78 rpm disc recordings made at much the same time (see Lionel Salter’s article on Rachmaninov’s Ampico rolls in *The Pianola Journal, 1*).

The first records of an automatic roll-operated instrument were not of a piano at all, but of a player organ, probably an Aeolian Orchestrelle, an elaborate reed-organ, operated by Easthope Martin, the light music and ballad composer whose claim to fame in this context was that he was the Aeolian Company’s pianola demonstrator up to the early 1920s (he died of tuberculosis in 1924). HMV made a series of seven double-sided records just before the First World War, and advertised them as being played on the ‘grand organ’. One side is of the Prelude to Act III of *Lohengrin* (Wagner), an extremely mechanical and unmusical interpretation which I am sure could not be played by hand in this way even if one wanted to produce such a performance.

No recordings seem then to have been made until Aeolian (which had a gramophone subsidiary (Vocalion) put out a demonstration disc in the mid 1920s. This contains a mediocre example of a pianola piano being demonstrated by a proud new owner, a Mr Clapham, and, much more interesting, the only surviving recording of a Duo-Art piano made when the instruments were being produced. As this is a recording by Aeolian, one can assume that what we hear is an instrument in first class order. The roll is Duo-Art 6206 – *To Spring* (Grieg) played by Percy Grainger. While the recorded sound is distant and the piano tone over-mellow by modern standards, the evenness of the playing and the natural balance between melody and accompaniment are evident. The dynamics are severely restricted by the old recording, but are nevertheless convincing and natural.

About the same time as the demonstration disc referred to above, Aeolian also issued a series of discs with pianola accompaniments played by Reginald Reynolds, Easthope Martin’s successor. These consist of ballads sung by the baritone Laurence Folker and the contralto, Elsie Francis-Fisher, and a rather distantly recorded pianola. These were to be used with music rolls and the pianola owner could play along with the gramophone record.

In 1934, Reginald Reynolds made a series of test solo pianola recordings for HMV. He returned to the studio in 1935 to record *Automne* by Chaminade and *La Belle au Bois Dormant* Valse by Tchaikovsky in the four-hand arrangement by Rachmaninov; these two titles were published on HMV C2746. These discs all demonstrate the control an expert pianolist has over the instrument, and how he can stamp his personality very clearly on his interpretation just as a traditional pianist can. The Tchaikovsky in particular is a *tour de force*.

The record industry does not think historically as a rule, and at the time
these 78 rpm discs would have been looked on as curios because the reproducing pianos and pianola pianos were still around in some quantities and functioning much as their manufacturers intended. By the advent of the long playing record, the reproducing piano was thing of the past as far as the general musical public was concerned, and quite unknown to anyone born after the late 1930s. Much interest was therefore generated by a series of recordings put out by Telefunken in the late 1950s of a Welte piano playing rolls of composers playing their own music. The discs included such tantalizing names as Debussy, Ravel, Mahler, Reger, Granados, and so on. Alas, the piano was not in good condition and the records were disappointing. There was however one record released a little later which had only a limited circulation and little or no publicity but which is well worth looking out for – Delta TQD3050 – *Great Pianists of the Past*, a selection of Welte rolls of great pianists recorded between 1905 and 1907 demonstrating quite clearly that Welte could capture the spirit of the playing if perhaps not all the subtlest details. Nonetheless the rolls on this issue can stand comparison with contemporary disc recordings of the same interpretations and be heard to be the same artist. The charm of Grieg’s *Papillon* is clearly in evidence and the overall delicacy and wayward hesitations sound completely musical and right. Paderewski in the Liszt Tenth Hungarian Rhapsody is full of grandeur in the opening section, but descends to a scramble in the fast closing section, just as he does in the 1922 Victor disc recording.

In the early 1960s, a fine Grotrian Steinweg model 185 (six foot) Ampico grand was recorded at the BBC studios in London for archive purposes. A programme, *The Great Piano Roll Mystery* was broadcast using a number of these recordings, and such was the interest that Argo issued three LPs based on the pick of the tapes, consisting of performances by Josef Lhevinne, Rachmaninov and Rosenthal, and an anthology of some other good roll recordings. The owner of the piano, John Farmer, supervised the restoration of the piano and the whole project of the recordings. The results were universally acclaimed and recognised by students of the history of piano playing who had almost without exception refused to give any credence to piano roll recordings up to that time. The discs remained in the catalogue until the early 1980s, and allowing for the mono recording and the fact that the piano was not a full concert size instrument, the records are a splendid achievement. Shortly after that, John Farmer was able to persuade EMI to issue an LP of popular and dance Ampico rolls (*Pianola Playtime*). This record was available for only about a year, but the reproduction of the rolls is excellent and is thoroughly enjoyable. It is the only good recording of popular rolls of which the writer is aware.

An excellent series of Welte recordings came from the USA in the 1960s.
The driving forces behind this series were Walter Heebner and Richard Simonton, who owned a Welte Vorsetzer, a cabinet player which was set up in front of a conventional piano, in this case a Steinway concert grand. There were two issues, each of 12 discs, and all may be strongly recommended to demonstrate just what can be achieved from Welte rolls, given ideal conditions. The special value of the early Welte recordings is that the first date from 1905, and they capture a generation of players who did not record for the gramophone including Leschetitzky, Carreno, Debussy, Ravel, Stavenhagen, Reisenaur, Scriabin, Mahler, Fauré and Glazunov, all of whom may be heard in this exciting series.

A long series of recordings of Duo-Art rolls has been made in Hollywood, California, on a Steinway Model B (seven foot) grand which belongs to Harold Powell of Klavier Records. The first records issued by Everest in USA and Decca in the UK are not good. There are notes not playing and the dynamic levels are distorted and ‘lumpy’, a sure sign of a badly functioning Duo-Art piano. Subsequently however the piano was rebuilt to a very high standard and the later Everest records, which carry the motto ‘Series II’ can be recommended. Three of these later discs were issued by Saga in the UK (Friedman, Hofmann, and Landowska). Further records have been issued (and are still coming out) using the same piano on Klavier’s own label and are mostly good, although there are a few exceptions, e.g., a recent issue of Busoni playing the complete Chopin Preludes. This particular set of rolls was produced in London in the early 1920s and will make musical sense only if played on a piano specifically adjusted for such rolls. The majority of Duo-Art rolls were made in America, and edited to play best on American made Duo-Art pianos. A much smaller, but important, series of rolls was recorded and edited in London. These as a rule will only play well on a British Duo-Art piano. The instrument used for this series performs splendidly on most of the rolls, although another disc which should be approached with caution is the Stravinsky Firebird, again a British set of rolls which it seems probable was not recorded by Stravinsky at all!

After their disappointing first series of recordings, Telefunken tried again in 1971 with a lavishly produced box of Welte recordings. These are again poor. Although the speeds seem correct and the piano tone is very acceptable, bearing in mind that it is a small (Model 0) Steinway grand, the performances lack excitement and realism due to the failure of the piano ever to play louder than mezzo-forte. These records have recently been reissued on CD but do not do justice to the Welte system.

In 1978 Decca undertook a major project to record all the known Ampico rolls of Rachmaninov, Lhevinne and Rosenthal. The piano used was a new Russian Estonia concert grand to which had been fitted by its owner,
Norman Evans, an original, but completely restored, Ampico A action. The result is a series of seven LPs which are the finest examples to date of a reproducing piano on disc. Ampico took particular care in editing their rolls, an important stage in the manufacturing process, and the full size piano and modern stereo recording show just how much detail is captured by the rolls. Due to the take-over of Decca by Polygram and resultant changes in their policy, the records were not issued until the end of 1985 and were deleted in the Spring of 1988. They should not be missed by anyone interested in the subject, and will surely convince the most sceptical of listeners. The most interesting of the series seem, to the writer, to be the first Rachmaninov, on which he plays his own compositions (including the complete Opus 3), and the Rosenthal (hear the breathtaking Carnival de Vienne!), although Lhevinne playing Schumann’s Papillons should not be missed.

A very important ongoing series of records was launched in the USA in 1977 and has this year (1989) reached its fifth volume. This is the Complete Studies for Player Piano by the American composer Conlon Nancarrow. Nancarrow composes for a specially prepared Ampico reproducing piano which is fitted with extremely hard hammers, giving a bright percussive sound, and his music uses only part of the normal reproducing expression action. It explores very advanced rhythmic, polyphonic and tempo change effects, far beyond the capabilities of human performance, creating a highly original and attractive music. Nancarrow is unique in that composing for the player piano forms the major part of his output, whereas, for every other composer for the medium to date, it has been an incidental passing interest.

In the early 1980s, two excellent examples of pianola playing by Rex Lawson were published. On an Erato disc devoted to the music of Stravinsky, he plays the Etude pour Pianola which was commissioned by the Aeolian Company in 1914, and on the Dutch Donemus label, is Boreal by the contemporary Dutch composer, Maarten Bon. This is a transcription for pianola by Lawson from the piano-duo version. A most important difference between the reproducing piano and the pianola is highlighted here in that new music is being written for the latter; the reproducing piano in the present context will not have its repertoire extended. Its techniques are of a previous generation and any serious new recordings for a reproducing piano today will be computer-based rather than depending on a paper music roll.

The most recent essays into recording reproducing instruments are a Welte series on the German Intercord label. The best are two organ discs made on an instrument housed at the Mechanical Music Museum at Linz. The Welte organ is very similar in specification to that in the Welte
Joseph Bonnet recording for the Welte-Philharmonie organ

recording studio on which the artists would have played. One disc is devoted to composers including Reger, Bonnet, Gigout and Dupre playing their own compositions, and the other to recordings of Bach; the most fascinating and moving of these are played by Karl Straube, a very important musician who seems not to have made disc recordings. These are quite excellent. Not so successful are three Welte piano roll records from the same source using a Vorsetzer. One of these is again composer performances, and the other two one disc each of Horowitz and Busoni. The recorded sound is excellent but the results achieved must be approached with caution. The Horowitz rolls date from the late 1920s and his general style can be compared with his first Victor discs made at the
same time. The Busoni rolls are obviously of tremendous historical interest, bearing in mind that he made only four double-sided discs for Columbia towards the end of his life, but these rolls have severe limitations if we are to judge from this issue. The touch throughout has a heavy deadness which is quite unlike the disc recordings. That his rolls need not sound like this can be demonstrated by listening to the Chopin Nocturne in F sharp as reproduced on Delta TQD3050. Compare this with the Columbia disc of 1924, and allowing for the differences between then and 1907 (the date of the Welte recording), you will hear something much more plausible.

The subject of piano roll recordings on disc or tape remains intriguing. There have been many comparative failures and rather less successes. It would be wrong to dismiss everything which does not come up to the highest standards, although the musician is sure to be disappointed. Nevertheless some facet of an artist's playing may be revealed even in the least successful. Historical evidence confirms that the reproducing piano could work very convincingly, and if a recording does not sound credible, even allowing for the great changes in the style of playing in the last 80 years or so, then the instrument is almost certainly not doing what the inventor intended, or what the performer approved.

A discography to accompany this article will be published in the *Pianola Journal* No. 3.
The Pianola
The Future Educational Force in Music
Sir Henry J. Wood

In all probability the year 1920 will, with the more universal adoption of the pianola, witness the victory of one of the strongest educational forces in music; and, since this artistic revolution cannot long be delayed, we musicians in Great Britain and the Colonies should be gratefully alive to the fact that the Aeolian Co. have formulated a system of musical instruction that will have a far-reaching effect upon the masses. It cannot be too widely known that the Company have been for some time past preparing and publishing a series of Popular Courses in Musical Appreciation and Libraries of Musical Classics, which include many of the great masterpieces: symphonies, overtures, concertos, sonatas, operas, and miscellaneous pieces, accompanied by annotated scores and music rolls, specially edited for educational purposes by expert musicians. These courses have long since been used in America, and their unqualified success has been proved by the fact that over one hundred and thirty of the principal colleges and schools on the other side of the Atlantic, including such world-famed institutions as Harvard, Columbia University and Vassar have adopted the pianola as an indispensable aid to the school curriculum.

They are prepared under the editorial supervision of Thomas Whitney Surette, Staff Lecturer for the American University Extension Society, and Carroll Brent Chilton, Lecturer for the Board of Education of the City of New York, and for the Extension Department of the University of the South.

This being the case in America, it is interesting to see where we stand in England as regards the employment of one of the most remarkable and helpful inventions of this ingenious age. I think it may be said that, while the pianola is making considerable way in this country as an interpretative means whereby the unskilled music lover may enjoy listening to every kind of music in his own home, it is still almost entirely ignored as an educational power. I myself have some occasion to realise the value and benefit of the pianola to the London musical public, for a good many of the individuals composing our audiences at Queen's Hall are acquiring by its means a closer acquaintance with the great orchestral masterpieces. By degrees the already considerable number of amateurs who have taken up the instrument will, as it were, leaven the whole body of concert-goers, so that we may reasonably hope for the time when the majority of our audiences will, thanks to the pianola, go to a concert prepared to listen to the programme in a spirit of intelligent appreciation, bred of a close intimacy
with works they are about to hear. This should soon be possible, since the library published by The Aeolian Company already numbers over 20,000 compositions.

It is, however, the educational uses of the pianola that I wish to emphasize in this paper. Here we have undoubtedly some prejudices to overcome. There is an idea – natural, perhaps, but erroneous – current among a certain proportion of professional musicians, executants and teachers, that the introduction of the pianola will be prejudicial to their interests. A small amount of reflection, however, should show us here, as in America, that this instrument is not in the least likely to supersede the concert or the music lesson. On the contrary, by stimulating musical taste, it is likely to help both branches of musical activity. It is difficult to see how it can meet with the disapproval of any but that small section of musicians who still desire to keep music an esoteric art, and believe, conscientiously enough, that only a long and painful initiation gives us the right to enter into this particular temple of art. But, in view of the rapidly increasing interest taken in music at the present day, this attitude is becoming untenable. What we must do with music nowadays is to separate the appreciative from the creative or executive faculties, just as we have long since agreed to do in the case of the other arts. Only in this way can the composer and the interpretative artist hope to flourish in the future; for at present the supply of professional musicians seems inclined to exceed the demand, and, unless we can greatly increase the number of their appreciators, the outlook for our rising artists is not a rosy one. It is a foolish and short-sighted policy to despise any means by which we may add to the sum total of musical appreciation in this country.

A lover of painting who has never dreamed of setting brush to canvas can educate his appreciative powers to a high standard by frequenting the great picture galleries accessible to him, until the masterpieces of particular periods are indelibly fixed in his mind’s eye. If, however, the privilege of these galleries be denied him for a time, he can enjoy some reminders of them in the form of reproductions: a fine engraving or a good copy if he can afford such luxuries. If not, the humble and accessible photograph, or some of the countless art publications of the day, will keep his memory fresh. At any rate, he does not have to fall back upon his own unskilled attempts at reproduction like the less fortunate music lover. Here is one of the uses of the pianola. For the amateur musician may, through its means, enjoy the reproduction of a Beethoven Symphony or a Chopin Nocturne, just as the amateur of painting may delight in a fine reproduction of a Raphael, a Reynolds, or a Corot.

To those who live away from musical centres what a joy this may be! And, even supposing that our amateur is within reach of a town where he can
attend a local series of orchestral concerts, what happens? He hears, perhaps, a repertory of half a dozen symphonies and concertos in the course of the season, once and once only. Then he is no better off than would be the lover of pictures who walked once in five years through the Louvre or the Pitti, and had to live in the interval without any reminder of the masterpieces they contain. But he, more fortunate, may turn to his walls, his bookshelves, his photographic albums for reminiscences of beautiful things seen. The pianola, then, may supply the deficiency of the music lover by helping him at any moment to recall the memories of beautiful things heard.

It is foolish, therefore, to suppose that a wider introduction of the pianola would do away with the concert, the interpretative artist, or the teacher, any more than photography or colour reproduction has superseded the pictorial exhibition, the painter, and the school of art. Its mission is not to destroy musical life, but rather to form a vast and discriminating public, who will have learnt something of the delicate art of appreciation in the only possible way; by constant and familiar intercourse with the masterpieces which hitherto they could only hear at long intervals.

Everyone knows without my adding my personal testimony to the statement, the great importance of hearing the best works of the great masters from earliest childhood. Granting this, I have no hesitation in saying that had the pianola been invented fifty years ago we should be a more musical race than we are today.

All music teachers acknowledge the difficulties they have to contend with, thanks to our indiscriminate custom of setting nearly every child to learn the violin or piano, regardless of natural tendencies or physical disabilities. What do these children really learn about music? Many of them after four or five years of drudgery acquire a limited repertory of pieces, forgotten almost as soon as they are learnt, the execution of which can, one imagines, only give satisfaction to the most fond and unmusical parents. This is no reflection upon their teachers, whose conscientious efforts to make executants out of the most unpromising materials involve a labour even more severe than that which is imposed upn the children themselves. And yet many of these young people, whose musical instruction proves wholly sterile, will tell you that they are very fond of music when they can hear it. Would not fifteen to thirty minutes a day be well and refreshingly spent if the music pupils in a school could be assembled in the classroom to listen to a varied course of instruction (such as is provided by the Music Lovers' Library) in the classics of the pianoforte? Such a course could only be profitably conducted by an experienced teacher, who knew how to bring out all the best qualities of the pianola. Therefore his or her occupation would not be gone, but pleasurably increased. Here the esoterical mysteries
of musical analysis would be made plain even to babes, for the rolls are so annotated that first and second subjects, episodes, perforations, and all the rest of the analytical jargon can receive practical elucidation. Then what an object lesson to the more advanced students to let them hear the pianoforte works they will have to study, in the various interpretations of world-renowned executants! All this is now possible by means of the marked rolls, and that latest invention of The Aeolian Company, the Themodist.

Take by way of an individual example one of the most recent publications of the Music Lovers' Library – the Bach Chaconne for Violin transcribed for the piano by Busoni. What chance does the average amateur have in the course of a lifetime of becoming acquainted with this work, which lies beyond the grasp of all but the very first rank of violinists? And even among fairly proficient pianists few would be equal to playing Busoni's wonderful arrangement. But with the help of the pianola the Chaconne may become a part of everyone's musical life. Would not Bach, with his passionate striving to reach the souls of his fellow men, rejoice to know this?

And here an appropriate word may be said as to the objections of those purists who think that a work should never be heard except it be played upon the instruments for which it was originally written. Perhaps there is something to be said for this mental attitude in so far as it applies to the public performance of musical masterpieces, although if carried to a logical conclusion it would deprive us of the best music of Bach and other early classicists who wrote for instruments which are now obsolete. But when it comes to the study of music, with the object of attaining a familiar knowledge of its structure and emotional contents this objection seems to me to be answered by almost all the foregoing arguments in favour of the pianola. To say to the student, or the average music-lover: 'You must not study a Mozart symphony apart from its orchestral interpretation' seems as unreasonable as to forbid a man who has no opportunities for classical education to read a translation of Aeschylus, or to deny us the pleasure of a photograph of La Vierge aux Rochers because we cannot possess the original. Those who have heard the whole series of Beethoven's symphonies in innumerable interpretations by the best orchestras do not, perhaps, need to hear them on the pianola. But these are only a small minority of the mass of music lovers who may live and die without the chance of hearing them frequently. And when the opportunity does come, how far more enjoyment they will derive from the orchestration if the symphony, as a whole, has already become a familiar friend to them!

As a self-educator we can hardly exaggerate the value of the pianola. With a few hours' practice it brings within the reach of the unskilled amateur music which he could never hope to touch in any other way. At the same time, it is a mistake to imagine that this mechanical contrivance is
quite unresponsive to the influence of personality, or that there is nothing to be learnt regarding its manipulation. It is one of its own mysterious secrets how far more sympathetically it replies to a practised player, who is also an artist, than to the player who has no musical knowledge whatever. I am glad to say that I know several professional pianists who are using the instrument in the preparation and study of their concertos and for working up their recital programmes. They have assured me that it saves them time and unnecessary fatigue. They are able to repeat technical passages over and over again, at various speeds and all gradations of tone. It is also an excellent aid to memory, and in a few years, when the last vestiges of mistrust have passed away, we shall find professional students working in amity with this wonderful invention.

But, after all, it is in the impulse towards higher musical aspirations among the uneducated or half-educated masses that we may look for the pianola to exercise its most valuable and lasting influence. Among the bulk of the lower middle classes, in which the standard of musical taste is still regrettably low, it should do much to cultivate a love of better things. It may even succeed in ousting the most commonplace type of so-called ‘light’ music, and replacing it by worthier productions; for a great deal of this kind of trash is played because it is easy and within the manipulation of that large section of society who ‘play a little’.

Turning to the working classes, who are true music lovers with too few opportunities of bettering their knowledge of the art, I should like to see a pianola and a well-selected educational course of music rolls in every workman’s club in England. I commend this idea to the benevolently disposed in all districts, and especially in the country, where an annual village concert is often the only opportunity the agricultural population ever get of hearing any secular music whatever.

The profit and pleasure to be derived from the introduction of the pianola seem to me incalculable, and I trust that what I have written may serve to show that while the unskilled may by its help become intelligent and discriminating appreciators of music, professional musicians need not fear it as a rival, but will be wise to acknowledge it as a true educational force.

Let those who have hitherto regarded it as a possible offence to the sanctity of their art try to remember that it is actually a powerful disseminator of the gospel of music.
Sir Henry J. Wood endorses the PIANOLA

"I have heard your Pianola to-day for the first time, and I am intensely interested and astonished at its marvellous performances. It is musical and artistic, and when used in connection with the Metrostyle simply stands alone and cannot be classed with any other instrument played by auto-means.

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The name Pianola is not, as many think, a name for any and all piano-playing devices. It is a Registered Trade Mark, applicable only to the instruments made by the Orchestrelle Co.

This advertisement appeared in The Connoisseur, for March 1912.
New British Pianola Roll Releases

Dan Wilson

It is a pleasure as well as something of a surprise that activity in the British player piano scene has grown to the point of justifying a survey of new piano rolls, even if they are all what Americans might term ‘plain peddlers’ – rolls for foot-operated players (equals, in British parlance, pianolas) and not the fully automatic reproducing piano.

Pianola rolls have rarely been profitable to make. Before 1930 the Aeolian Company is said to have kept making them largely to prevent the market being occupied by other makes which might have erased the word ‘Aeolian’ from the pianola-buying public’s peanut-sized memory. A last brave attempt to maximize returns was made by Gordon Iles of the Artona Music Roll Company, who operated under a virtual UK monopoly between 1945 and 1970. I remember in 1950 seeing thin and uninviting rolls on sale in a Charing Cross Road music shop at £3 10s 0d each – £3.50 but in 1989 terms £70 or so, the best part of a school-leaver’s wage for a week. Towards the end Artona preyed mercilessly on famished collectors prepared to buy runs of the Tschaikovsky Second Piano Concerto at £30 a roll. If you took a commercial view it was probably the only way of operating.

Now piano-roll making has moved, like steam railway operation, into semi-amateur hands so that prices are, happily for the buyer, historically low. This does not prevent collectors aspiring ungratefully to the high standards of finish set between 1909 and 1930 by several European firms, notably Aeolian/Universal in Britain, Hupfeld in Germany, Pleyel and EMP in France and Victoria in Spain. Rolls should be soundly boxed, of strong stable paper, accurately made to the 1908 international standard 88 note dimensions with workmanlike ring tabs and provided with printed or stamped guidance lines or markings indicating (roughly) the markings on the original score. Classical music and the less percussive variety of popular music should be provided with the additional ‘Themodist’ or ‘accentuation’ perforations which assist the performer (on the appropriate kind of player) to bring out the melody and prominent notes in the accompaniment.

The modern rolls mostly fall short of these desiderata, but in minor degree and with one outstanding exception. This is a series of rolls replicating as exactly as possible a special edition of pieces composed or rearranged for the pianola by several contemporary composers in 1927 and issued by the Aeolian Company. The modern copies are being made by Malcolm Robinson of Southport on a computer-controlled perforator which just cuts one sheet at a time. The markings are then added by hand.
The rolls I have examined are to all intents and purposes exact copies done to each single perforation and even replicate the red ‘Metrostyle’ line which, on pianolas equipped with the matching pointer and lever, theoretically enabled the unschooled performer to execute an artistic rendering. Pedants have pointed out unkindly that the paper of the modern roll is marginally thicker and really requires the Metrostyle line to shift progressively leftwards, compared to the original, as the take-up spool fills, to slow it and achieve the same original tempo. Given the appalling inaccuracies in replication of the Metrostyle line on 1920s rolls compared to when they were originated before the Great War, I am inclined to be lenient about this. I have only ever met one Metrostyle roll where following the line intently made any sense. One just admires the dedication in replicating it so faithfully. fifty years after the last Metrostyle pianola was made. The music is also rare and unusual and includes Stravinsky’s Étude pour Pianola and Bax’s shortened four-hand arrangement of his orchestral Scherzo. This is a labour of love which can scarcely be repeated.

Just as interesting in a quite different way is another Southport venture, a couple of ‘lounge piano’ medleys freshly played by Charles Mitchell on a recording piano – the first fruits of a longer term project to make Duo-Art reproducing rolls. On a good piano, after a bit of familiarization, these can be made to sound very fine, but they crucially lack Themodist perforations and dynamic markings and so give no help to the beginner. I regard this genre of music (also called ‘hotel piano’) as sadly underrated: given theme perforations and suitable instructions on the roll after the style of Aeolian’s AudioGraphic tutorial rolls of the late 1920s, it could form an introduction to piano music for the exact public for which the pianola is suited – and merges seamlessly into the softly-played club jazz of James P. Johnson in his later years, Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson, almost none of which is represented on piano rolls and would be wildly popular if it were.

Currently there is no semi-commercial label whose rolls are actually made in Britain: the others use American perforators and paper stock. Dormant and currently up for sale as I write this is Ambassador, formerly centred on Artona’s old perforator which, prior to the tragic death of its principal Paul Young, was installed in the Slough shop of the Autoplayer pianola repair firm, together with a Steinway B Duo-Art grand equipped as a recording piano. Celebrity jazz recitals were held on this during the late 1970s, the resulting performances being issued as ‘themed’ 88 note rolls of great gaiety but zero quality control. Searching there for copies without wavy edges and blatant ciphers one weary Saturday, I estimated that 75% of production was faulty – not counting the large stacks of bargain rolls stamped IMPERFECT. One wishes Ambassador a luckier afterlife.

Another dormant all-British label, awaiting the completion of a new
computer-controlled perforator, is Play-Time, the honorific of Steve Cox at Pagham on the South Coast, from whom I have learnt much of the sombre economics of roll-making. The dies for making your own thermoplastic spool ends – that is, supposing you have patterns to start with – cost, for example, £2000 for each end of the roll.

So we come to Perforetur, the imprimatur of pneumopope Rex Lawson, cofounder of the Institute. Rex operates what one might regard as a remote terminal of the roll-making computer of the QRS Music Roll Co, producing floppy discs which, inserted into the Buffalo system, cause it to emit rolls which are very foreign to QRS’s normal production: classical music with ‘theme’ perforations (now used in the USA only on Duo-Art reproducing rolls).

What I like about Perforetur rolls is that they are produced by someone who is not just an enthusiast but musically and technically the equal of the roll editors of the player piano’s heyday. Perforetur starts where Aeolian and Hupfeld left off. A careful study was made of the different modes of applying the Themodist note-accentuation system which by virtue of marketing power sixty years ago is the UK’s *de facto* standard. The great drawback of the system is that to achieve mechanical simplicity, accentuated notes have to be distanced very slightly in attack time from the accompanying ones (in the same half of the keyboard) by delaying or advancing them slightly. The roll editor must choose which and this commits the player to one particular way of striking that chord. Perforetur has standardized on rigid score-cut arrangements (i.e. with no rubato cut into the paper) but strives for the most naturalistic effect in chord attack, sometimes advancing and sometimes delaying the accentuated notes. In some situations the upper note of an accentuated octave is played ahead of the accompanying element of the chord and the lower after, to produce a more incisive effect – a thing never tried in the old days. This works surprisingly well. A slight degree of accentuation in chords, independent of the ‘theming’ system, occurs if the heavier notes are played fractionally earlier: this alleviates to a marked degree the pianola’s normally *pesante* colouring and I daresay will be exploited further as experience is gathered.

Despite QRS’s rather utility-looking jumbo-roll brown paper, you get full measure: there are no cuts and an additional luxury only provided before on AudioGraphic rolls is provision of minute perforations towards the right-hand edge in place of bar lines.

On repertoire Rex has had to balance his own predilection for musical curiosities with titles that will sell, so in a strict sense all his initial titles are piano roll rarities but all fairly well-known pieces. Mozart’s pioneering *Fantasie for Mechanical Organ* K608 has appeared in a Victorian arrangement on 58 and 65 note rolls before, but returns here as an 88 note première of the earliest-known score. It is nine minutes long and was
written for a spiral barrel organ of which an example (with a barrel of it) exists in Leipzig. Contrariwise a special 65 note roll arrangement of Mendelssohn’s Scherzo from A Midsummer Night’s Dream is re-issued here which uses the multiple-hand capability of the player to skilful effect. Widor’s organ Toccata is interesting to have but sounds a bit strange on piano: a large church has to be simulated with the sustaining pedal before getting much sense from it. (One pianolist I know will not order this set of rolls because this one reminds him of his wedding.) There is a typical bit of Percy Grainger quasi-folksongery of c.1912 rearranged in the 1940s for four hands, Handel in the Strand, and then for those who like such things (and I do), the first two of the four movements of Rachmaninov’s second two-piano Suite. If his Second Piano Concerto Op. 18 was ‘another lugubrious helping of strawberry jam’ (G Bernard Shaw, 1901) then this Op. 17 is ‘chocolate cake to make the eyes smart’ (D Wilson, 1989). However did the original roll companies overlook it?

Perforetur has somewhat upset the general enthusiast public by insisting (so far) on complete sets being purchased by subscription. This is to reduce commercial risk. An outfit which exists on risk is Jazzmaster, which since the middle 1970s has been getting copies made in the USA (earlier by Play-Rite, now following a piracy dispute, by QRS) of master rolls handmade by the jazz pianist John Farrell, not on a piano but a hand perforator, ‘imagining’ (with exquisite success for the most part) the syncopation straight onto the paper.

A fairly lengthy essay could be written (and was for the 1985 Pianola Marathon, by me) on the tension between repetition and limited ambit of jazz piano rolls and the free-ranging improvisation and expansiveness of live piano jazz: all a roll can do is suggest one particular rendering on one occasion, providing a hamburger reminiscent of the original steak. So Jazzmaster (where appropriate, Ragmaster, in different coloured blue boxes, a nice touch) has generally operated a steely commercial policy of restricting rolls to around three minutes, if necessary editing well-known pieces to fit.

However, in the latest set of six titles, a move has been made on two of them, Bee’s Knees and Lulu’s Back In Town, to allow the arranger a little rope. Basically ‘stride piano’ standards, these explore the possibilities of the basic theme with a little more freedom than usual. Played with a lissom, throwaway touch, they begin to approach genuine carefree session music. Full marks!

The ragtime pieces in the set touch on a different problem: do you cut rolls to produce the delicate and lilting effect (‘Spanish tinge’, Jelly Roll Morton called it) of the very early performers revived by Joshua Rifkin in the 1970s, or the more commonplace, four-square and faster ‘barrelhouse’
style, geared for noisy conditions, of all early piano rolls and pianists after 1910? Ragmaster goes for the latter. History can wait.

If there is any criticism to be made of these rolls it is that no guidance is given about playing style, with the result that most pianists go for the easiest possible option: heavy four-square playing which at least has the sanction of historical accuracy and is why the pianola is thought to suit jazz well. But quite a lot of subtlety and additional meaning can be injected into jazz rolls and suitable marking (or even historical notes on contemporary theories about interpretation) would greatly expand the worth (and I daresay saleability) of these rolls.

Farrell produces rolls like rabbits produce more rabbits and I was dismayed to learn on a recent visit to the Jazzmaster impresario John Sirett (a geniel double-bass player well known in the traditional jazz world) that a whole tranche of them escaped some time ago to appear exclusively on the Hot Piano Classics label of Fred Schirmer in Illinois. Why does not Jazzmaster syndicate HPC in Britain? Sirett just looked apologetic and shrugged. Piano rolls are not profitable!

We owe a great debt of thanks to all the roll-makers. The pianola world would be a dead place without you.
Maurice Ravel: *Frontispice* for Pianola

**Rex Lawson**

Having been told at university that 'there is no room for speculation in musical criticism', I might well have brought wrath to the eyes of my then professor, Denis Arnold, by writing such article as this. In fact, he is much more likely to have succumbed to one of his tremendous peals of laughter (he was a wonderful teacher, and he has been sorely missed since his death a couple of years ago). Twenty years on from graduation, however, a little easing of the academic straitjacket has led to my discovery that deux and deus can sometimes add up to cinq, in this case cinq mains in a composition that purports to be essentially for two pianists.

In October 1921 in London, the première was given of a number of works specially composed for the pianola by Stravinsky, Malipiero, Casella, Eugene Goossens and Herbert Howells. The five pieces formed part of a series of music rolls that also included special arrangements by Arnold Bax, J. B. McEwen, Granville Bantock, Sir Frederick Cowen, York Bowen, Joseph Holbrooke, Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Sir Hubert Parry. The performances of the five compositions, plus excerpts from *The Rite of Spring*, took their place as part of a lecture on the subject of 'Pianola Music' by the critic, Edwin Evans, that is transcribed in the November 1921 issue of the *Musical Times*.

From late 1917 onwards, Evans contacted various composers with the intention of persuading them to write music directly for piano roll, and in the process he irritated Stravinsky, who was concerned that his uniquely conceived *Eude pour Pianola* of 1917 should become a mere component of a much greater design. Stravinsky was convinced that Evans had stolen the idea from him, although the very first pianola compositions, unbeknown to Stravinsky, date from 1902 or 1903. It is one of the aspects of pianola composition during this century that isolated groups of composers have each thought of themselves as the originators of such an idea.

A few years ago I was lucky enough to be able to study and transcribe a series of letter sent to Edwin Evans by Alfredo Casella, dating from October 1917 to October 1918 – the very time when these compositions were being planned. Insofar as they cover the field of the pianola, the letters deal mainly with Casella's projected *Preludio, Fuga, Tarantella, Valse* and *Ragtime*, of which only the first-named and the last two were eventually written. But in just one or two places there are intriguing references to other composers.

In a letter dated 10 October 1917, Casella writes as follows (the
translation from French is my own):

I spoke to Ravel about it, and I asked him to speak to Delage. Just this morning Ravel wrote to me to ask if your address was still the same, because he means to send you a reply. In principle the idea appeals to him.

Then a further letter of 24th February 1918 provides this second reference:

I am about to get down to writing the five pieces for you that I have in mind for the pianola. You will probably have them in five or six weeks time. I saw Ravel in Paris – of course he hasn’t done anything yet, and he seemed to me a bit … cool, since he doesn’t think they are offering him enough money (I’m only repeating what he said to me). Write to him and see if you can’t get him to make his mind up. Malipiero would love to write three pieces, but he’d like to be sure that they will be paid for. Can you throw any light on this?

We know from a letter sent to Stravinsky in September 1917 by Edwin Evans, and quoted in volume two of Stravinsky’s correspondence, that Casella was in London in that month, and that Evans had obtained from the Aeolian Company the authority to ask him for a pianola composition. Taking all this into account, it is fairly clear that the invitation to compose was to be extended to Ravel by Casella on his way home from London to Italy, though so far no evidence has come before me that Maurice Delage was involved.

Thus the pair of quotations above form the first ‘two’ of my unscholarly calculation, and for a few years I simply left it at that. The implication was that Ravel had been unsuccessfully asked for a pianola composition, and that his involvement with player pianos had been restricted to making records for the Welte-Mignon and the Duo-Art. Then in 1987, during a trip to Paris, I visited Ravel’s house at Montfort-l’Amaury and was able to purchase the first two issues of the Cahiers Maurice Ravel, published by the ‘Fondation’ of the same name.

An article by Jean Roy in the first issue (1985), deals with a very short and unusual work composed by Ravel in 1918 for two pianos, entitled Frontispice. Originally published in Feuillet d’Art (2, 1919), the work forms a preface to a poem of Ricciuto Canudo, Sonate pour un jet d’eau. Travelling back to Paris, I was able to read with mounting enthusiasm of the music’s surprisingly polytonal nature, the incisive accents of the top musical line, the suppression of bar lines, and most tellingly, the need for a fifth hand to join in from time to time. To a pianist, such details are immediate pointers to a composition for the player piano, and so on my return to London, I acquired a copy of the sheet music and studied it in detail.

Although Frontispice is now described as being intended for two pianos, the musical staves are allocated in such a way that the first piano handles all the treble and the second piano all the bass. The separation of the music for human pianists is dictated not so much by the same notes being played on
both pianos (very few such clashes occur), but rather by the complex way in which the middle two parts interweave. Duet partners would soon come to blows over this complexity, whereas to a pianist it would present no problems. Multiple staves in descending order of pitch is the standard way of writing music for the pianola.

Equally the lack of bar lines, though difficult for live musicians, is irrelevant once the notes have been correctly transcribed on to roll. Ravel, being such an accomplished orchestrator, was an extremely practical composer, and it seems hardly likely that he would have set out to create unnecessary difficulties for the performers. And what of the fifth hand? What composer in his right mind would demand one half of a third pianist for a few bars in the middle of a composition? Clearly the work was written with the pianola in mind, and to me this is confirmed by its musical style. A simple start in one part leads to greatly increasing complexity in five parts, and at the end a series of five chords is repeated with ever greater octave doublings. Such features are often to be found in pianola compositions; in Hindemith’s Toccata for Welte-Mignon and Arnold Bax’s Scherzo for Pianola, amongst others.

Given all these coincidences, and the fact that the work was written in 1918, the very year when Ravel was considering a composition for player piano, I am content to add Casella’s two letters to Ravel’s two pianos and come up with an 88 note music roll. In view of Frontispice’s extreme brevity (it lasts only lm 30), it may well be that it was intended as a ‘Frontispice’ to a longer composition, but perhaps I should refrain from too much speculation.

As a postscript, I am able to add that Ravel’s Frontispice received its world première in piano roll form during a concert at the Purcell Room in London, on 19 April 1987, played by Denis Hall. I should be delighted to hear from anyone who can shed more light on this unusual composition.

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Reviews

Grainger plays the Grieg Concerto

Last night of the Promenade concerts, London, Royal Albert Hall,
17 September 1988

Barry Peter Ould

The Grieg concerto with Percy Grainger on piano roll featured in the first half of last year’s final Henry Wood Promenade concert together with a helping of Grainger’s more popular pieces, pieces that he had called his ‘fripperies’. It is a pity that the BBC didn’t see fit to replace these versions with the later large orchestrations that Grainger made for Leopold Stokowski and his orchestra for RCA (coincidentally these recordings were coupled with the first recording of the Grieg concerto using the Grainger piano roll when it appeared on LP about 10 years ago RCA (UK) VRL1 0168), a pity because only earlier this year did we receive the actual première of these versions in their definitive form given by Oliver Knussen conducting the BBC Philharmonic in Manchester. Three of them were performed at a Promenade concert in Grainger’s centenary year, 1982, but that was before a number of discoveries were made as to the extent of cutting Stokowski had done to the scores for the 1950 recording sessions.

But this takes us away from the performance of the Grieg concerto as heard and in this case seen as well (the concert was one of the few televised). After a slight ‘hiccup’ (the piano roll and orchestra were not together on the first beat) and multitudinous laughter from the well-packed Albert Hall, the orchestra and the ‘ghost’ of Grainger weaved their way through to a rapturous ovation (we also had applause after the first movement) for one of the most unusual Prom concerts we had ever witnessed. For those lucky enough to be present it must have been quite something to see the keys of the piano being depressed by the Vorsetzer and to imagine the man who had made this remarkable rendition of such a favourite with Promenaders. Those of us watching from the less cramped areas of the arena i.e. at home on television, had a visual experience to add to the thrill of hearing this exhilarating performance. From time to time pictures of Grainger and Grieg were faded in and out on the TV screen, culminating in a life-size photograph of Grainger sitting at the keyboard superimposed on the live keyboard. A TV camera was trained on the music roll playing on the Duo-Art Vorsetzer, partly to assist Andrew Davies, the conductor, to keep in step with his soloist, but also, thanks to the splendid BBC presentation, to let those at home have a close-up of the roll from time to time. This enabled people to see exactly how the perforations look, and how they correspond
with the notes being played, a unique opportunity for the uninitiated. To add to the fun a life-size cut-out picture of Grainger, complete with carnation in buttonhole, was brought out to take his bow alongside the conductor.

The piano roll used in the concert was an interesting one. As originally cut, the roll contained not only the solo part but the orchestral piano part as well. Grainger studied this work with its composer in Norway, and edited a version for publication (G. Schirmer Classics) which contained editorial ossias by both Edvard Grieg and Percy Grainger and the roll which was subsequently cut was based on this edition. Many years later, when a live performance with piano roll became possible, work had to be done in editing out the orchestral piano part. My friends in the Pianola Institute know far more about the technicalities of this procedure than I. I am only glad that such a procedure took place, otherwise we would not be hearing this work as it was authorized by Grieg himself, and originally played by Grainger in 1922 when he was at the peak of his powers. Grainger also recorded the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto for Duo-Art but in that case rolls were made of the solo part only, with the express intention of using them for concert performance with orchestra. This too was issued on LP by RCA (Australia) VRL1 0342 about the same time as the recording of the Grieg mentioned above.

Within the last five or six years Grainger’s legacy to the music world has been coming ‘more to the fore’ (an expression he used himself) with many recordings being made and interest increasing in his not so well known compositions. Although there are large areas of his output still waiting to be heard, gradually he is gaining a respected position on the musical platform, and is now championed by many performing musicians. He never experienced this state of affairs during his lifetime, but spent his career slogging his way from performance to performance, concert to concert, getting his music played so that his publishers would keep his music in print. Grainger’s music can fit in practically anywhere, and in the last weeks we have heard performances of his Random Round, a pre-Cagian aleatoric work for chamber group of any instrumentation, and his arrangement for two pianos of Henry Balfour Gardiner’s English Dance given as part of a splendidly presented recital by Donna Amato and Alison Brewster. Grainger’s interests are wider than any other musician/composer I know, and this might well be the reason why he has never reached the position secured by his contemporaries. However, the tide is turning and with the first CD of some of his orchestral music in preparation, together with a recording of his complete piano solo output as well as his two piano compositions, Grainger is at last gaining some form of recognition which is to be welcomed.
History relates that Sir Henry Wood had always wanted Grainger to play the Grieg under his baton – it never occurred, but 81 years after Grainger gave his first account of this work under Sir Charles V. Stanford (it was to have been Grieg), Grainger (‘in absentia’) was given the platform to play the concerto under the gaze of a bust of Sir Henry, a performance that would have surely pleased him.

**Note on the instrument used for the performance**
The forces used to assist Grainger play the Grieg concerto at the Royal Albert Hall were the same as those at the Institute’s inaugural concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in December 1985, viz., the Duo-Art pianola ‘push-up’ player owned and prepared by Peter Davis with rolls edited by Denis Hall, and operated on this occasion by Rex Lawson who sat in the orchestra and cued the entries.

The instrument is based on an Aeolian Company foot-operated pianola and uses the original valve chest, pneumatic motors and ‘fingers’ to play the piano keys, but it has installed an original Duo-Art expression mechanism of the type fitted to British designed Duo-Art pianos manufactured in the 1920s, on which the Duo-Art rolls were to be played. The combination of this instrument and a modern Steinway concert grand brings the realization of the roll recordings to a similar standard as delighted Duo-Art concert audiences in the heyday of the reproducing piano.

In the light of a comment by Dan Wilson in his review of the 1985 concert, it is right to note that since that time, the player has been fitted with a modern electronically controlled electric motor to drive the music roll. At the Prom concert, then, we were assured that Grainger’s performance was reproduced at the correct speed.

Denis Hall
This modern catalogue appeared in 1977 after years of research by its author Mrs Obenchain, and a well orchestrated team of her husband, friends and fellow enthusiasts.

With the benefit of the author’s and her helpers’ access to the original factory roll listings and inventories as well as to the annotated collections of private owners round the world, this catalogue can justify its title as being the most complete listing of Ampico piano rolls to have appeared. It is also a notable contribution to our knowledge of the American musical scene during the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Ampico Company produced an illustrated hardcover catalogue in 1925 which listed classical and semi-classical rolls produced up to the date of printing. This covered approximately the first 1200 issued rolls.

A later paperback handy reference catalogue, which listed rolls released up to 1928, and added a further 700 rolls to the main classical series, was the last publication of its kind before the amalgamation of the Aeolian, Ampico and various piano manufacturers in the 1930s. Thereafter about another 150 originally recorded rolls were released and older rolls continued to be reissued from the master stencils, most of which have mercifully survived to this day.

Ampico’s production was fairly evenly divided between serious music and popular music. Being regarded as ephemeral, the latter was not included in the company catalogues that were publicly available and was numbered under a different series from the classical or serious music. However, some music of a purely pianistic nature and without printed words for singing, was included in the classical series, even though of a ragtime or popular origin.

Some condensed catalogues containing the last rolls in the classical series, continued to appear up to 1941. After 1929, no new recordings were made. Mrs Obenchain’s catalogue has the distinction of being the first publicly available listing of popular rolls in the 20,000 series. Some of these rolls are musical works of art in their own right, being the products of such masters of American light music and the art of rolls editing as Edgar Fairchild and Adam Carroll. When the writer interviewed Adam Carroll in 1968, he described Rachmaninov’s regular visits to the popular recording
area in the company’s studios on Fifth Avenue. After one of his own recording sessions, the maestro would ask to hear the current popular rolls in course of production and comment on the harmony and counterpoint written into the more ingenious arrangements. As a result, the popular music department would sometimes introduce quotations from classical works into their accounts of the latest foxtrot hit to amuse the great man. His little known interest in this part of the company’s output must have been a valuable artistic stimulus to those involved in playing and arranging the week’s new releases from Tin Pan Alley.

The rolls are presented in the various numerical systems under which they were issued, with a commentary on the missing numbers in the sequences and with explanations of the deductive and research processes used to unravel the sometime obscure logic behind the roll number and letter codes used by the manufacturers.

The achievements of Mrs Obenchain are impressive when one realises that she has been able to annotate virtually all the rolls issued under the various titles of Stoddard-Ampico, Ampico Artgraphic, and Ampico commencing in 1911 and finally petering out around 1941.

The most interesting section of the catalogue and the one with the greatest general interest to music historians, is an alternative listing of Ampico rolls by performer with brief biographical notes on each artist. The artists range from household names such as Rachmaninov, Rosenthal, Moisewitch, Lhevinne, Dohnanyi, Levitski, Godowsky slowly descending by degrees, to the obscurity of such unknowns as Ferdinand Himmelreich or Werner Jansen who might seem to us today the dimmest lights of the observable pianistic universe, but who, on closer study, turn out to have made interesting contributions to the musical profession. Somehow curriculum vitaeae have been assembled for everyone listed, making this catalogue a unique source of information for those inclined towards biography of musical figures in the darker corners of the profession’s history.

Mrs Obenchain is no less thorough on the popular music side where the performers are less numerous but which nevertheless includes composers such as Vincent Youmans, Ferdie Grofe and Richard Rogers, and at a lower echelon, that doyen of the cocktail hour pianists, Lee Simms, author of numerous piano tutors on the art of learning to harmonize melodies and play by ear. Ampico employed two light pianists and arrangers with an undeniable touch of genius: M. Edgar Fairchild and Adam Carroll. Their ‘creative’ work survives only through their inventive arrangements on rolls. The complete catalogue is the only reference book to supply details of the careers and musical achievements of such remarkable but forgotten artists from the world of light music.
Ampico issued their rolls in chronological numbered sequences. The complete catalogue lists the rolls in four ways, numerically, alphabetically, by artist and by composer.

By examining a combination of the listing by number and the listing by artists, the evolution of the science of roll-making by the Ampico Company can be discerned.

To those of us whose interest in the reproducing piano dates from the 1960s, the whole subject was at first a mystery. The recollections of a few survivors of the original reproducing piano roll companies such as were extant then, seemed confused and contradictory. We all had to place reliance on the original companies’ advertising and promotional material which was written to sell their product to the accompaniment of glowing tributes from the musical giants of the day. Having heard much of ‘artistic integrity’, we tended to take such tributes at face value. Certainly we believed that the object of the reproducing piano roll companies was to make the most faithful recordings possible, as attested by countless endorsements from composers and artists of impeccable credentials.

Gradually, our knowledge of the subject improved, thanks to the tireless researches of Mr Larry Givens, who totally lifted the veil on the Ampico Company by his recorded encounters with Dr Clarence Hickman and the recollections of Mr Adam Carroll. Nelson Barden, the Boston organ builder wrote perceptively on Ampico production and editing techniques after his recorded interviews with editors Angelico Valerio and Emse Dawson, pianist and arranger Adam Carroll and designer and engineer Dr Hickman. My own discussions with the greatest of all Ampico roll editors, Edgar Fairchild (né Milton Suskind) revealed the company’s early dependence on rolls transcribed from other systems but unlike the Hupfeld transfers, with no attribution. Undoubtedly within the music roll industry, hand played recordings were traded between companies. The rolls would then be coded in the appropriate language for the reproducing system involved.

Today, a clearer picture has emerged of the nature of the Ampico Company output. Nobody has doubted the mechanical efficiency of the Ampico reproducing system. Given correct coding and accurate perforation on the music roll, an Ampico of the early or late systems can play the action of a grand piano with a degree of power, speed, control and precision very closely approaching that of the finest piano. Therefore, quality of playing, or lack of it, lies in the rolls and the system used to record the pianist’s playing. Beyond this the pianist’s own performance is the last and only variable component in any critical analysis.

It is apparent that before the First World War, many companies possessed the means to record the playing of pianists by registering the
movement of the keys and pedals on moving paper by electrical tracing. Apart from the manufacturers of the German Welte-Mignon system, there was vagueness or silence on how the dynamic force of each key pressed was measured. We now know that this distinguishing and prized quality of the reproducing piano is not difficult to introduce retroactively into a recording of the key movements. It is the exact positioning of the note and pedalling perforation on a music sheet which distinguishes one performance from another. The dynamics of a performance suggest themselves from the phrasing, which is the rhythmic component of the performance. By the time Ampico was using the Spark Chronograph recording technique (1927), there was no observable difference between the best manually introduced dynamics on the earlier rolls and the later automatic process. An analogy might be the colouring of black and white photographs by a first class artist.

The picture which emerges from a study of the Obenchain catalogue is of a company which started with an entirely superior player system, designed by professional engineers, but which lacked any self-generated recording programme. Therefore the company began by manufacturing the player mechanism and relying on transcription, into the Ampico system, of rolls recorded by other companies. In those days the dynamics of the performance were entirely an addition of the Ampico Company editors. Later the company recorded its own hand played rolls and acquired the services of trained musicians who were attracted by the excellence of the Ampico system. Mrs Obenchain supplies invaluable information about Howard Brockway, who was the first qualified musician engaged by the company. He was followed by a succession of professionals who coded and edited the rolls recorded by Ampico, as well as encoding into Ampico dynamic language additional material purchased from the Welte-Mignon company. This included many Josef Lhevinne rolls, before these became one hundred per cent Ampico production. Finally, the company achieved a comprehensive recording system by adding the Spark Chronograph dynamic measurement to its own superior note and pedal movement recording system, which eliminated the requirement for musically qualified editors. The result for the company must have been a saving in staff salaries, as the specialized editing task was reduced to a checking and translation process requiring unskilled staff. All this came about by 1928. By the end of 1929, all recording had ceased and with it any further evolution of the reproducing piano. Perhaps this was as well, because the unique partnership between musician and engineer which had distinguished the Ampico in the 1920s, would have given way to a wholly automatic recording process. This would have eventually eliminated all the musically qualified members of the permanent staff and, with it, the interaction between the artist, the staff musician and the inventive designers and engineers who, for a few brief years, made this company a unique phenomenon.
Contributors

LOUIS CYR is a Jesuit priest, a freelance musicologist and a composer of liturgical music. He was Professor of Musicology at the University of Quebec at Montreal and for several years chaired its Music Department. He is a leading authority on the music of Igor Stravinsky, and edited the manuscript full score of *The Firebird* for its recent facsimile publication in Geneva. His enthusiasm for the pianola originated in the acquisition in 1975 of over half (28) of the Pleyela rolls produced in the 1920s of many of Stravinsky's works.

JOHN FARMER enjoys the distinction of having persuaded a sceptical musical public of the artistic worth of the reproducing piano at a time when it was at its lowest ebb. Through his supervision of a superb series of piano roll recordings for the BBC in the early 'sixties, the Ampico overnight became respectable again. He is a leading authority on the system in his knowledge of its catalogue and its musical and technical capabilities, and has written important critical articles in a number of specialist journals, notably for the British Institute of Recorded Sound (National Sound Archive).

DENIS HALL has for many years been an enthusiast of historic performance recordings both on piano roll and disc and in 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 reissue. In recent years he has turned his attention increasingly to the pianola.

REX LAWSON is a concert pianolist 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 eighty or so composers who have been interested in its possibilities during the course of this century.

BARRY PETER OULD was a close friend of Percy Grainger's widow, Ella, until her death in 1979. He founded the Percy Grainger Society of Great Britain and is currently editor of its journal. In recent years he has launched a new publishing house, Bardic Edition, which is in the process of issuing a number of unpublished Grainger works.
DAN WILSON is a keen and experienced pianist, and a longstanding member of the Player-Piano Group. He has been instrumental in the development of the art of pianola playing to its present day standard, not least by the enthusiasm he has shown for converting new musicians to the cause of the instrument.

SIR HENRY WOOD was born in London in 1869 and died there in 1944. For nearly half a century he directed the Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts and was the best-known and most-loved British conductor of his generation. In 1911 he was knighted for his services to music.

His article was published by the Aeolian Company as a pamphlet in 1920, but from its descriptions of music rolls was clearly written at least ten years earlier.