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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 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.

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Editorial

In this Journal, we have again aimed at a nice balance between the reproducing piano and the player-piano: between the contemporary and the historical.

To some of us, the Welte-Mignon catalogue has long been an intriguing mystery; to a very few who have been able from time to time to hear a really well adjusted Welte piano, the system has revealed staggering performances from what seems like another age. The whole story is now out – we have a magnificent history and full catalogue of what was once available on the first great reproducing system, and indeed it makes mouth-watering reading! As if to complement this notable addition to the player piano library, we have an article by Roy Howatt, a Debussy scholar and fine interpreter of Debussy’s music. He writes on the problems of editing his piano music, and the value of the series of piano rolls made for Welte in 1912 to clarify points of uncertainty in the published scores. Edwin Welte and his associates, more than the commercially-minded Americans of the next generation, seized the opportunity to record not only the great virtuosi of the day, but composers major and minor, leaving to us a legacy of tremendous worth of recordings from the early years of this century until the virtual demise of the whole player piano industry in the early ’thirties.

The professional pianola players who demonstrated the latest instruments in their heyday are the unsung heroes who, perhaps more than we can realise, have inspired countless music lovers to learn to play the foot-operated player pianos at home, providing themselves and their friends with hours and hours of pleasure. Rex Lawson writes about Easthope Martin, the first, whose reputation rests more on his compositions, although in his day he must have been an important disciple for the cause. His place, following his death in 1925, was taken by Reginald Reynolds, and we reprint an article written by him for the Player Piano Supplement of the ‘Gramophone’ on how Duo-Art rolls were made. This is a fascinating period piece, interesting as much for what it does not say as for what Reynolds chooses to tell us. Reynolds’ main interest was in the foot-operated player piano, but he was responsible for recording a large number of Duo-Art rolls in London during the ’twenties, some of extreme importance, and including, for example, the complete Chopin Preludes played by Busoni and the Schumann Fantasy, Op. 17, played by Katharine Goodson, who wrote to Reynolds of her pleasure at the success of the rolls.

At this time, the Institute is looking forward to the Centenary of the first
Pianola in America in 1897. It is hoped that the event will be celebrated widely and the opportunity taken to further our cause by sharing our interests with music lovers who even now are not aware of the great treasures stored in music rolls of all types only waiting to be enjoyed by anyone with the will to seek out an instrument to do them justice.
Debussy and Welte

Roy Howat

The *Pianola Journal* has sometimes made history by printing first musical editions of pieces composed and initially notated for the pianola. This article is about a counterpart to that, the first systematic use - as far as I know - of piano rolls to help establish an accurate edition of music already well known.

Debussy recorded fourteen piano pieces for Welte: ‘La soiré dans Grenade’ from the *Estampes* of 1903 (roll no. 2735), *D’un cahier d’esquisses* of early 1904 (roll 2734), the six pieces of his *Children’s corner* of 1908 (roll 2733), the humorous waltz *La plus que lente* of 1910 (roll 2736), and five Preludes from Book 1 of 1909-10 (three on roll 2738 and two on roll 2739). Already this raises a question of what, if anything, went under the serial numbers 2737 and 2740-1, for which no rolls were ever issued. Was there more Debussy? Unfortunately no answer is known, and the archives that might have told us seem to have long vanished.

Another question is recording date. It is often assumed Debussy recorded in 1913, the year some of these rolls were issued, and the date written on his eulogy to Edwin Welte (see facsimile opposite), but various factors suggest a little earlier. In particular, had Debussy recorded in 1913 he’d surely have included something from his second book of Preludes, completed early that year. Also, the techniques of preparing a roll (see Rex Lawson’s comments on this in The Pianola Journal no. 5, page 33) suggest that Debussy’s rehearing of a roll would more likely have been considerably after he recorded it. So we can probably conclude between 1910 and 1912 - probably nearer 1912, for it would seem unlikely for Welte to sit on such prime unpublished material for longer than necessary.

For many years, both as pianist and as a researcher of Debussy’s music, I’d been interested by the rolls, both for what they revealed (or at least implied) of Debussy’s performing habits, and for some musical differences from the printed editions. The most radical difference was a succession of tempo changes in the prelude ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’ not marked in the printed score or Debussy’s manuscript (of which more below); there were also many others, mostly added or omitted chords and notes and changed figurations and harmonies. I was already using some of them in my performances - at least as far as I could discern them from the Telefunken LP transfers, which were then my only source for what the rolls contained.¹
CLAUDE DEBUSSY

CLAUDE DEBUSSY, most strikingly original of modern French composers and leader of the impressionists in music, began as a pianist. He was prepared for the Paris Conservatory by Mme. de Sivry, a pupil of Chopin; was admitted at the early age of eleven, continued to study piano with Marmontel, and won many prizes. He was born near Paris in 1862, and died in that city on March 26, 1918. To hear his own playing of his piano pieces is a rare treat.

“It is impossible to attain a greater perfection of reproduction than that of the Welte-Mignon apparatus. I am happy to assure you in these lines of my astonishment and admiration at what I heard.”

Claude Debussy

80. Avenue du Bois de Boulogne

À monsieur,

Il est impossible d’atteindre à 
peu de perfection dans la reproduction 
que celle des appareils Welte.

Ce que j’ai entendu ne laissait 
comprendre et je suis heureux de 
voir l’affirmation dans ces quelques mots.

Pouvez-vous, monsieur, l’adresse 
de mon parfaite admiration?

Claude Debussy
The standard French editions of this music have long been a source of dissatisfaction among musicians - not only for the high price of their rapidly biodegradable paper, but also for their more enduring misprints and dubious readings. Several years of intermittent conversation on the topic with François Lesure (a leading Debussy scholar and the then Curator of Music at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), with Pierre Boulez on one or two occasions, and with several other people involved in the field, bore fruit in 1982 when the new Mitterand government, eager to show practical support for France’s artistic heritage, was persuaded by Messieurs Lesure and Boulez to sponsor a Complete New Debussy Edition, the \textit{Oeuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy}. The publisher Costallat, then part of the Gaumont/Erato film-record group (since dispersed but still wriggling) was persuaded, by a government tax-relief offer, to take on the task.\textsuperscript{2}

At a first editorial board meeting in July 1982, yours truly was assigned the first volume of solo piano music for preparation - the two books of Preludes - in co-operation with the French pianist Claude Helffer.\textsuperscript{3} The Preludes’ popularity made them a priority to launch the new edition, as did the fact that in them are concentrated a large proportion of the dubious readings from the old editions. As it happened, five Preludes from Book 1 are among the fourteen pieces Debussy recorded for Welte.

My search now was for a clearer source of the Welte rolls than the Telefunken LPs, a search complicated (so I feared) by my impending move to work in Sydney for two years. To my surprise, the Qantas 747 to Sydney turned out to be my magic stagecoach, for within weeks of arriving in Sydney I found myself at ‘Ampico Towers’, inspecting Denis Condon’s magnificent collection of reproducing rolls, all within walking distance of where I was living.

I’m being careful here with terminology, to distinguish between ‘player piano’ rolls, which have to be guided on replay by the pianola player in order to obtain any nuances, and ‘reproducing rolls’ of the Welte kind, which encode an entire performance and control everything once the machine is started. Welte rolls encode not only how long each individual note was held down but also details of pedalling; they also can reproduce quite fine degrees of dynamics, terracing them for crescendo, diminuendo, etc. Dynamics with Welte have two independent controls, one for each half of the keyboard, but the quickness of response between notes, and the fact that pianists in these days tended to spread chords or play left hand before right, can allow some extra degree of voicing even within quite complex textures. There are also several drawbacks and uncertain elements, which I’ll come to later.

Several pieces by Debussy also exist on Aeolian ‘Themodist’ player piano rolls, labelled ‘Interpretation by the Composer’, and headed by a facsimile of Debussy’s unmistakable writing: ‘La ligne de style marquée dans ce rouleau a
été dirigée par moi. / Claude Debussy / 16.VI.09.' As that implies, these are factory-punched player piano rolls which were replayed in Debussy's presence, while the great man himself (if we are to believe the blurb) guided the replay controls, tracing a 'ligne de style' on the roll to be followed in subsequent replayings. Since good pianola playing requires practice and expertise, we may wonder if Debussy's hand in turn was being helpfully guided by that of a technician; and of course his autograph declaration was probably not unguided by a dangling cheque. While these rolls are not without interest from the interpretive point of view, they are clearly not in the same league of direct information as the Welte rolls. Two of them, *La soirée dans Grenade* and *D'un cahier d'esquisse*, duplicate Debussy's Welte rolls, and it would be very interesting to hear how the two versions of each compare, something I haven't yet been able to do. (Anyone who has those two rolls in Themodist and would be willing to let me hear them, please tell Denis Hall.)

Debussy's signature at the beginning of an Aeolian "Autograph Metrostyle" roll.

From the Telefunken LPs of the Welte rolls I knew of some essential corrections and a few other variants which, however, were hard to hear in exact detail. I wasn't then sure how much they'd affect my editing work beyond a small handful of details. A few mornings at Ampico Towers answered the question dramatically: my score of the Preludes was soon covered with more unexpected annotations than expected ones, all made by checking the rolls in slow motion, perforation by perforation, on Denis Condon's Welte piano.

As a first example, from the Telefunken LP I had heard that some offbeat chords on the first page of the first prelude, 'Danseuses de Delphes', seemed to sound an octave lower than in the printed score (Example 1a, the first four high chords with the upwards stems). It was hard to know what to make of that, and the dim treble on the LP made more exact hearing difficult. My provisional verdict had been that I might footnote that bar in the new edition and mention the piano roll variant, especially as the old printed version was a bit odd, anyway. The Welte roll itself (2738) told a very different story. The right hand offbeat chords were exactly as printed in the old edition, and what I'd heard an octave lower were added left hand chords (Example 1b), making much better sense of the texture (presumably the finger cymbals of the
danseuses). By comparison with an analogous texture later in the piece (Example 1c), it became obvious that the added left hand chords correct an omission in Debussy’s manuscript and the first edition. It was highly satisfying to be able to start our first new volume, on its very first page, with such a prominent and essential correction from the Welte roll.

Example 1: ‘Danseuses de Delphes’


(b): Oeuvres Complètes, 1986, incorporating added chords from Debussy’s Welte roll.

(c): Bars 16-17 (from the Oeuvres Complètes, 1986)

Extracts from the Oeuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy are reproduced by kind permission of Editions Durand & Costallat.
One of the worst and most mystifying problems we had to face in the editing task was the virtually complete loss of Debussy’s own printed piano scores, from which he played at concerts and other occasions such as the Welte sessions. Some vanished even during his life, as presents or to pay debts, but the worst loss was after his death: over the years his widow Emma gave away or sold printed volumes and manuscripts piecemeal - the latter sometimes a page at a time - and went out with a bang in 1933 by dispersing most of what remained in a massive auction.

One of his only traced printed piano scores is of the second book of Preludes, which Debussy gave in May 1913 to the pianist Fernand Lamy. This was only a month after the book’s publication, but already it reveals a few dozen corrections inked in Debussy’s meticulous hand. From that, and from similarly annotated orchestral scores that survive, we can guess the probable density of corrections marked in other scores, now lost, which he had used for much longer.

From one point of view it’s fortunate that the surviving annotated volume is Book 2 of the Preludes. Taking it together with the Welte rolls for Book 1, at least we have one source of corrections for each Book, rather than duplicated corrections for just one. Nevertheless we would have loved some evidence of how closely his written corrections match the variants recorded on roll. So far it’s not to be!

Example 2: ‘Ce qu’a vu le Vent d’Ouest’. (Oeuvres Complètes, 1986)

Nonetheless, the rolls have helped by implication in pieces that Debussy didn’t record. For example, the correction in Example 1b put me on a general alert for textures, which was soon rewarded. In the seventh prelude, ‘Ce qu’a vu le Vent d’Ouest’, a succession of chords suddenly abandons the left hand after a bar in both Debussy’s manuscript (which we know was written out in haste) and the original edition. Example 2 shows the passage; in the second bar, in square brackets, are the suggested editorial left hand
completions, following the musical logic of Example 1. It’s a pity Debussy didn’t record this piece on roll - though given its extreme virtuosity, he probably carefully avoided it! A Welte roll might also have helped resolve a rhythmic problem also visible in Example 2; but that’s another story, footnoted in the *Oeuvres Complètes*.

The rolls of course help to confirm accidentals missing from the other sources, and to adjudicate when other sources are at odds. Some variants that occur uniquely on the rolls suggest deliberate post-publication revisions rather than simple corrections; they possibly follow changes Debussy had marked into his own copy, now lost. One of those, from the prelude ‘Le vent dans la plaine’ - Welte roll 2739 - is shown in Example 3, on an auxiliary staff (labelled ‘R’ for ‘Rouleau’ in the *Oeuvres Complètes*). Debussy’s Welte variant here is especially interesting for being confirmed in repetition, and its emphasis of D-natural strengthens the harmonic preparation for the cadence to E-flat minor which follows just after.

**Example 3: ‘Le vent dans la plaine’ (Oeuvres Complètes, 1986)**

![Variant from Welte roll 2739.](image)

Without Debussy’s personal scores to back them up, though, it’s often impossible to establish how definitively he meant such variants. As it is, we presently have to accept that in many cases there’s no definitive reading, but several possibilities to which we have to apply our musical sense. In many ways this is no bad thing, and perhaps takes us more accurately into the composer’s mind, where we really have to go if we’re going to play imaginatively rather than with dull obedience.

There’s also some less welcome information from the rolls, including obvious fluffs and semi-plausible variants, which may have been whims of the moment but stand up less well to cool retrospection. To avoid littering the new edition with debris, we needed some way of sorting, and decided on four categories. First, clear corrections like Example 1b are taken straight into the musical text, and of course listed at the end of the volume. Second, interesting and musically sensible variants are printed on auxiliary staves (as in Example 3), in places where the original printed reading is still plausible. Third, barely-plausible variants are listed at the end of the volume. Finally,
obvious fluffs are ignored, to avoid pages of useless clutter at the end of the volume.

All those categories had to be dealt with in tandem for the most complex and vital correction of all from Debussy’s Welte rolls, one that makes sense of an otherwise almost unplayable piece. In all previous editions, the prelude ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’ (Welte roll 2738) mixes the metres 6/4 and 3/2. Some sections are virtually all in crotchets and others virtually all in minims and semibreves, and this leaves a serious problem in performance of finding a tempo that doesn’t rush the crotchet passages on the one hand, yet doesn’t conversely make the minim passages remorselessly funereal. Example 4 shows the problem, which is focussed at the transitions of bars 7-8, 13-15 and 21-22.

Example 4: ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’ (Durand edition, 1910)
Left to itself, musical instinct suggests that the practical problem of speed could be solved by doing something outrageous by normal academic standards - doubling the speed when the music goes into minims. This would produce a constant triple pulse through the piece, regardless of the changes between crotchet and minim sections. Indeed the musical sense of this is so strong that several pianists have done it unwittingly, and been shocked and perplexed when it was pointed out to them! Whatever the case, this solution
is exactly what happens on Debussy’s piano roll. It is corroborated in recordings of the piece by pianists like Alfred Cortot and George Copeland who knew Debussy, by an orchestration of the piece made in later years by Debussy’s friend Henri Busser, and by the recollections of other musicians who heard Debussy perform the piece - as well as by proportional analysis of its form. Why Debussy left the score as he did is unclear, though there’s some evidence he may have been distracted by copying his final manuscript from an earlier draft possibly written in different metre.

Showing this solution in the *Oeuvres Complètes* was complex, because all the first three transitions between crotchet and minim notation are accompanied by other Welte roll variants of the sort that demanded auxiliary staves. Example 5 shows how this was tackled; to make the main point clear, the crotchet-minim equivalences from the auxiliary staves were carried up in brackets to the main system, and the end of the volume carries a commentary on the problem. Debussy’s Welte bass line at bar 21 is especially arresting, and the tying of the semibreve Es in bars 7-8 is also interesting, preventing them from gatecrashing the surrounding melody. In addition, numerous smaller variants of texture, plus some interesting pedalling, from the third and fourth pages of the piece are reproduced in a page of Appendix at the end of the *Oeuvres Complètes* volume. This was certainly an appropriate volume to launch the *Oeuvres Complètes!* Although several other recent editions of the Preludes claim in their prefaces to have consulted the piano rolls, not one so far has incorporated the tempo corrections, never mind any of the other variants.

**Example 5: ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’**

*(Oeuvres Complètes, 1986)*
One piece of corroborating evidence took memorable form. Between 1977 and 1982, my frequent trips to Paris always included a visit to Debussy’s stepdaughter Mme Gaston de Tinan, who in her youth (as Dolly Bardac) had been resident in the Debussy household at the time of the Preludes’ composition. She liked having Debussy played to her, and by doing this I’d already elicited several musical nuggets from her vivid childhood memories (she had an exact ear and, like her mother, had been a good singer). When one day I suggested ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’, her first reaction was, ‘Oh, I’m a bit tired of that piece, everybody plays it; well, play it if you like.’ Saying nothing of the tempo problem, I played it, following the tempo relationships from the Welte roll. By the final page Mme de Tinan was beaming and singing gently along. ‘You know,’ she said immediately at the end, ‘why do people nowadays play it at such a funereal pace? The way you played it was the tempo I remember Debussy playing.’ Not being a pianist, she was unaware of the problem in the notation.

Before concluding too much from the Welte roll, we have to remember that rolls, unlike analogue sound recordings, are basically digital and can be replayed faster or slower without changing the pitch. While this makes them much easier to transcribe, the drawback is that we can’t make exact claims
about original tempo - one of the few elements not digitally encoded on them. All we can say with ‘La Cathédrale engloutie’ is that the roll virtually assures us of Debussy’s tempo relationships: the mechanism’s inertia would have made it virtually impossible to doctor these, and anyway independent sources back them up.

This question becomes crucial with roll 2738, containing the six pieces of the Children’s corner. Some recent editions of Children’s corner list the roll as one of their sources, although none of them quotes any of its variants except for the metronome speeds yielded by replaying the roll. Unfortunately this roll has an acute problem in that respect, yielding some improbably fast tempi entirely at odds with Debussy’s moderate tempo headings in the score - for example, \( \frac{\dot{i}}{\text{ca}} = 176-192 \) for ‘Modérément animé’ in ‘Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum’, and \( \frac{\dot{i}}{\text{ca}} = 208 \) for ‘Allegretto ma non troppo’ in the delicate ‘Serenade for the Doll’! Maurice Dumesnil, who worked with Debussy, fans the flames by quoting Debussy’s insistence that both ‘Doctor Gradus’ and ‘The snow is dancing’ not be played too quickly - in the latter case ‘not fast at all.’

An interesting answer comes from an early 1920s reissue of the roll in ‘licencee’ format. Divided into three rolls (2733, 2733a & 2733b), this yields playback tempi approximately 30% slower than the original ‘red roll’, including a final ‘Golliwogg’s cake walk’ based around \( \frac{\dot{i}}{\text{ca}} = 80 \) (instead of \( \frac{\dot{i}}{\text{i}} = 112 \) from the red roll), with much clearer snapped rhythms and off-beat dynamic explosions, corresponding to the dynamics marked in the score. Equally telling, the licencee roll’s tempo for ‘Golliwogg’ comes near the metronome speed indicated by Debussy for two other ragtime pieces, the middle movements of his Cello Sonata and Violin Sonata. (It also tallies with Scott Joplin’s constant exhortations during those same years that cakewalk and ragtime should never be played fast.)

To complicate matters in the other direction, the licensee roll’s tempi for the second and fifth pieces, ‘Jumbo’s lullaby’ and ‘The little shepherd’ (respectively \( \frac{\dot{i}}{\text{ca}} = 36-58 \) and \( \frac{\dot{i}}{\text{ca}} = 54-69 \)), seem improbably slow; and the percentage differences between the two issues from pieces to piece does show some variation, suggesting editorial tampering at some now untraceable stage. In sum, neither issue can be taken as completely reliable regarding speed.

Nonetheless two mechanical factors, in addition to the musical argument above, suggest that the licensee roll is truer, at least in the faster pieces. The first factor hinges on the essential fact - which I quote here from a letter kindly sent to me by Charles Davis Smith - that ‘the Welte-Mignon, especially in its expression, is based on timed pneumatics.’ That is, the perforations for nuance are placed just sufficiently in advance of the notes concerned to allow the pneumatics time to take appropriate effect. An inaccurate playback speed will distort the encoded nuances, either by delaying and reducing them (if too
fast) or by anticipating and exaggerating them (if too slow). In _Children’s corner_ the original red roll is susceptible to the former fault (not only in ‘Golliwogg’s cake walk’ as mentioned above, but also in other details, including the occasional failure of the pedal to catch a bass note). The licensee reissue by comparison shows no sign of nuance distortion in either direction. The second factor is the exceptionally large amount of music (six pieces) on the red roll: the implication follows that the perforations may have been compressed to fit on the roll, with the intention of compensating for this by reducing playback speed. The division of the licensee reissue into three rolls (with the perforations spaced more widely along the rolls) is implicit comment on this. So, perhaps, is the fact that the five Preludes Debussy recorded - pieces of comparable length to those of the _Children’s corner_ - were always spread over two rolls.

Such a procedure of compressing would be most unusual - indeed unheard of - as the Welte machine designed for the original issue is supposed to run to a strictly set speed. Probably for this reason, colleagues in the reproducing piano field have almost unanimously advised me that the original red roll should be more reliable than the licensee reissue. The fact remains, though, that the musical evidence, as well as mechanical evidence regarding nuances, points the other way. Charles Davis Smith also remarks that early Welte rolls have many implied hidden variables, information about which is now scarce or lost. An alternative hypothesis, which allows for the fixed replay speed of Welte machines, might be that the master roll was compressed at recording to allow Debussy to play the whole suite in one take, with the intention, later forgotten, of stretching it out again on publication. At this stage, with the masters untraced, we can only surmise.

We also have to bear in mind how many details of nuance may have been edited on to the roll after the original performance. Although it seems almost certain that the Welte-Mignon system could record dynamics in the form of key speeds (as well as note durations and pedalling) right from its inception in 1905, the data produced at the recording piano had to be interpreted by a musician/editor. This person may or may not have been present at the recording session, and converted the dynamic information into as form that the Welte reproducing piano could play back. This may explain one interesting-looking departure from the score in Debussy’s roll of _Children’s corner_; while a footnote by Debussy in the score instructs that the ‘Serenade for the doll’ must be played with soft pedal throughout, ‘even in the places marked $f$’, the roll itself releases the soft pedal for the few moments of $f$. Did Debussy disobey his own instruction? - perhaps to compensate for an unusually soft piano? Or did Welte’s editor, hearing $f$ in the original performance, decide to edit out this counterproductive-seeming soft pedal? Rex Lawson’s opinion (in conversation) veers towards the latter probability.
It becomes clear that we have to be very careful about what we conclude musically from the rolls. Debussy’s Welte rolls have been the object of several LP and CD issues over the years, and the results from one issue to another - using the same rolls played on supposedly identically set up machines - vary quite substantially. Even on the best sounding reissues there’s always some illogically ragged sounding rhythm and attack, even allowing for the performance practice of these days - especially from a composer who, despite his ‘impressionist’ reputation, actually hated having his music pulled around. This also has to be compared with the very firm rhythm (much less rubato than customary at that time, and hands mostly together) audible (just, above the frying eggs and bacon) on the 1904 audio recordings of Debussy accompanying Mary Garden in some of his songs and an extract from Pelléas et Mélisande. Stravinsky, who certainly had no time for sloppy rhythm, equally recalled Debussy in 1912 or 1913 playing him the extremely virtuoso ballet *Jeux* in reduction on the piano: ‘How well that man played!’ He also long remembered how well Debussy sight-read the *Rite of spring* in duet form with him, impromptu at a lunch party in June 1912.

From what I’ve been able to hear, those rhythmic problems on Debussy’s rolls seem worse than with rolls of other virtuoso pianists recorded by Welte around then. Naturally Debussy, not a frequent visitor to the concert platform, was probably more affected by studio nerves. But that scarcely accounts for problems like scrappy rhythm (of the sort he couldn’t stand from other pianists - a familiar story!) in non-virtuoso pieces like ‘Minstrels’, whose rhythmic clarity is of the essence. (That particular case suggests Debussy was perhaps doing something in half-touch to imitate the timbre of a banjo.) And even if time sometimes paints the memory pink, it is worth bearing in mind that Mme de Tinan always insisted (in conversation) that the Welte rolls were a poor representation of Debussy’s playing: in her view only *La soirée dans Grenade* (roll 2735) came anywhere near the subtlety she remembered from him live. Other musicians of high standard similarly remembered him as an exquisite pianist in terms of colour and sonority: for example, Marcel Ciampi once told me he’d never heard Schumann more beautifully played than by Debussy - a remarkable tribute from a very distinguished pianist who lived into his 90s.

To tackle this question is inevitably subjective, but the most exact thing we can do is to consider Debussy’s playing in the light of the technical definition of the reproducing system. As already mentioned, all reproducing pianos are based on binary systems, even if sophisticated enough to allow many dynamic gradations (Schnabel always retorted that he could get one more). Each note, for example, always has to be registered by the mechanism as either up or down, as does each pedal. So if a virtuoso pianist beds the keys firmly and works the pedals decisively (as they tend to do), a Welte or other mechanism
can record and then reproduce the resulting multiplicity of on-off decisions with relative ease, astonishing fidelity, tonal variety and rhythmic clarity. Many rolls recorded around the same time as Debussy’s reflect this.

However, what if a pianist’s touch concentrates - as Debussy’s apparently did - on subtle half-tints, half-pedallings, and all sorts of voicings within parts and chords, responding to the inner balance points of the action and sometimes playing the keys on half-release? Even this could be coped with by a very well-adjusted recording mechanism, if played back on the original piano with its pedal adjustment, key weight, regulation and voicing exactly as they were when the music was recorded on it. If Debussy was really as pleased with Welte’s machine as his written panegyric suggests - unguided by the dangling cheque! - it may be that Welte had achieved that miracle in the studio.

The problem comes when that original piano is no longer in the same adjustment, or no longer exists. Every pianist knows how the touch that coaxes a gentle piano from one instrument may let rip from another, and may not even speak on a third; how one keyboard may launch the hammers (the point of maximum resistance in the descending key) near the keybed, another nearer the top of the keys; how widely the balance between different ranges of the instrument varies from piano to piano, as does the voicing of individual notes through the range; or how touch and pedal effects that work marvellously on one piano can be utterly fruitless on another equally good piano. The range is almost infinite, and experienced pianists adjust to different pianos so quickly that it’s virtually a subconscious response. (Debussy’s momentary lifting of the soft pedal in ‘Serenade for the Doll’, if not a piece of later editing, was probably a response of this sort.) To try and reproduce on another instrument a mechanical recording touched in the fine way of Debussy’s half-tints could be regarded as akin to making a pianist play a concert of such music - with all its pianissimi and subtle inner voicing - on an unfamiliar piano, with earplugs in and fingers locally anaesthetized! This isn’t to blame Welte, whose system is an amazing piece of ingenuity that works very well for most pianists. And we can only be thankful to Welte for having the initiative to record Debussy - a challenge he probably relished, anyway. It may just be that Debussy’s piano touch was as far beyond the then norm of sophistication as his music was (a reasonable assumption, since Debussy’s way of playing and piano writing really were one), and we gladly accept the best any reproducing system can do with it, without assuming abilities beyond its mechanical limits.

The above can be amplified by Rex Lawson’s comments (The Pianola Journal, no. 5, page 33), in particular his quotation from Gordon Iles that ‘such rolls are akin not so much to a photograph, but to a portrait of a particular artist’s performance.’ It will be interesting to hear how much all
those factors affect the new compact-disc-based reproducing piano systems - for example, how a Yamaha player piano compact disc will sound on another piano many years later, after regulating and toning fashions have changed (they do).

My hope is that these lines may yet elicit ideas that help address the lurking problems in the Debussy Welte rolls. Whatever the case, Debussy’s session in Welte’s studio has helped, more than seventy years later, carry many corrections for his music into print. Denis Condon’s friendly help is recorded in three volumes, so far, of the *Oeuvres Complètes*, two in print and one *sous presse*. Those three volumes cover all Debussy’s traced Welte rolls except for *La plus que lente*, which will be one of the most interesting to deal with: the roll has so many variants from the printed score that it may be worth printing a whole alternative version of the piece based on the roll.

Notes:

1. For details and a general appraisal of the Telefunken and other transcriptions of these rolls on LP and CD, see Denis Hall, ‘The player piano on record - a discography’, *The Pianola Journal* no. 3 (1990).
2. The publication is a joint venture with Debussy’s original publishing firm Durand, who still hold some copyrights - notably on *Pelléas et Mélisande*, whose librettist Maeterlinck long outlived Debussy. Volumes of the *Oeuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy* can be obtained in the UK from United Music Publishers, in other countries direct from Durand S.A., Editions musicales, Paris.
3. The volume appeared in 1986, as Series 5 volume 1 of the *Oeuvres Complètes*. The project will probably eventually run to 34 volumes (unless we discover yet more works, as has already happened since 1982). Five volumes are in print as I type this in late 1993.
4. This manuscript is published in facsimile as *Claude Debussy, Preludes Book 1, the autograph score, with an Introduction by Roy Howat*; The Pierpont Morgan Library Music Manuscript Reprint Series; New York, Dover, 1987.
6. Charles Burkhart lists these pianists in his article ‘Debussy plays “La Cathédrale engloutie” and solves metrical mystery’, *The Piano Quarterly* no. 65 (Fall 1968), pp. 14-26. They also include George Copeland, who left some reproducing rolls as well as audio recordings of pieces by Debussy, but exclude Robert Schmitz (whose recording struggles through the piece the hard way, and who once criticized certain pianists - probably the enlightened ones - for not playing the piece the way Debussy wrote it!). Regarding proportional analysis see Roy Howat, *Debussy in proportion* (Cambridge, CUP, 1983), pp. 159-62: measuring the piece through the crotchet-minim equivalence, as on Debussy’s Welte roll, brings its form into golden section proportions, like many of his other works.
7. The dedicatee of Fauré’s *Dolly* suite, and half-sister of Debussy’s own daughter ‘Chouchou’, Dolly lived in the Debussy household from 1904 (aged 11) for nine or ten years before her marriage.
8. Digital techniques have now caught up again, allowing original audio recordings to be slowed down at pitch, as was done to produce Artis Wodehouse’s transcriptions of Gershwin playing on 78 rpm shellacs.
10. Reissued on EMI Références compact disc set CHS 7 61038 2.
On The Roll

Easthope Martin and other pianists

Rex Lawson

During its ninety-seven year history, the pianola has been championed by many individuals, most of whom remain little-known to the general musical world. From time to time I hope to detail what is known of the lives of these elusive musicians, whose contributions to the creation, recording and performance of player-piano rolls have affected us all in some way.

In Britain, the branded Pianola was sold by the Orchestrelle, later the Aeolian Company from its showrooms in Regent Street and at Aeolian Hall in New Bond Street in London, and through agencies in all major towns. As part of what we would now call “marketing”, the Company organised and sponsored public concerts and recitals of pianola music, for which it needed trained musicians as soloists and accompanists for singers and chamber music.

The first documented Pianolist in Britain, of whom I am aware, was a German, Dr Max Schulz, who played as soloist at the inaugural concert of the Aeolian Hall in London, and was reported in the Musical Times of 1904 as having also accompanied the singers Elizabeth Parkina and D.T. Ffrangcon-Davies, as well as the violinist Johannes Wolff. Pending further research, nothing more is known of Dr Schulz, except that his interpretations of Beethoven’s Op 28 Piano Sonata and Chopin’s Nocturne, Op 37, no 2 were “cleverly rendered through the medium of the ’Pianola’”.

Other player instruments, notably the Cecilian and the Triumph, had their own specialists, in the early years of the century Reginald Reynolds and Sydney Smith respectively. Reginald Reynolds is the best-known these days, since he joined the Aeolian Company in later years and became its chief Pianolist and Duo-Art recording producer. He will in any case feature in a further article in this series.

Sydney Smith can be seen in the two photographs (opposite) performing on both the Triumph and the violin. With no captions given in the London Magazine for November 1904, it is difficult to be certain of the other artists involved, but it is likely that the ladies were Elizabeth Parkina and Margaret Thomas, who sang with the Triumph at St James’ Hall on March 11th, 1904. Elizabeth Parkina, who sang at Covent Garden, evidently made a speciality of recitals with roll accompaniment. An interesting detail of the two photographs is that the one non-performer who appears in both pictures (on the left of the settee and in front of the mantelpiece) fits the description of Maximilian Kastner, who ran the Kastner Auto-Piano and Triumph business.
Sydney Smith and colleagues at the Ideal Triumph piano-player.
All these early performances were given on 65-note player instruments, so that large-scale piano works were not so easily rendered, although Sydney Smith and the Triumph did manage Mendelssohn’s Concerto in G minor with Ashton’s Concert Orchestra. However, the most spectacular early concert with Pianola came a few years later, in 1912, when Easthope Martin performed the Grieg Piano Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra under Nikisch, and for the remainder of this article I shall describe those details of Martin’s life that I have been able to trace.

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Typical advertising of the period—The Connoisseur for April 1912 carried this announcement about the Pianola push-up. The piano player was by this time well on the way out having been ousted by the player piano. Within a few short years, though, the end of the player era loomed in sight. On the next page we find the Aeolian Company leaving its fine Aeolian Hall in Bond Street. This half-page advertisement appeared in The Daily Express for 15 May 1930. The boom was over.

Easthope Martin at the Pianola with Nikisch and the London Symphony Orchestra — Queen’s Hall, London, 1912.
Easthope Martin’s image as soloist with the LSO is reproduced (above). The drawing was done by J. Harris, who was regularly commissioned by the Aeolian Company to produce advertising material, and Mr Martin’s small stature is somewhat emphasized by the commanding position of Artur Nikisch on the conductor’s podium!

Two contemporary observers who worked for the Aeolian Company, Bob Good and Alfred Riess, were both impressed by Easthope Martin’s impeccable appearance. Alfred Riess undertook similar Pianola demonstrations at the Aeolian Company’s subsidiary in Berlin, the Choralion Company, and he reminisced in the 1960s about the occasional trips that Martin made to Germany and elsewhere:

“I shall never forget young smart Easthope Martin of the Aeolian Co. London, who paid visits to Berlin now and then. He was a wonderful organist and mastered the Aeolian Pipe Organ by hand-playing and by means of the music roll to an amazing degree, showing all its beauties and his own musical skill, including some of his compositions.

“He was a master on the Pianola as well, and whenever he could spare the time, he also enjoyed listening to my Pianola-playing, and the pleasure of meeting each other was mutual, as it is a fact that musical people often are drawn to each other. From his many trips abroad, he often wrote to me and when I think of his short life and early death from T.B. years ago, I feel very sad. His pleasant cheerful personality, his wonderful organ and Pianola-playing I shall always remember.”

It will be noted that the Pianola in use with the LSO was a standard 65/88-note push-up, as seen nowadays in public concerts, that the piano was a Weber concert grand, the top range supplied by the Aeolian Company, and that the artist shows Easthope Martin using the Metrostyle pointer in what must have been the cadenza from the Grieg Concerto, judging from the interest and inactivity of the conductor and orchestral players.

Easthope Martin is known generally as a popular ballad composer, and according to his obituary notice in Musical Times, November 1925, he was born in Stourport, Worcestershire in the early 1880s, while various other reference books give the year of his birth as 1882. In fact there were no children born in the Stourport area around that year with such a name, though a Wallace Charles Martin was born on 14th August 1882. However, at about twenty miles’ distance from Stourport is a small village of Easthope, and it is easy to imagine that a young, budding musician might wish to add memories of a country childhood to his nom-de-rouleau. Julius Harrison, another Worcestershire composer, dedicated a piano piece called “Redstone Rock” to Easthope Martin, as “a souvenir of our Worcestershire days”, and it is clear from the accompanying text that the two men knew the local countryside well.
As a young man, Martin studied at Trinity College of Music between 1902 and 1905, chiefly with Dr Gordon Saunders, and he began publishing songs in a small way in 1907, through the firm of Metzler and Co. As well as publishing sheet music, Metzlers manufactured and sold their own piano-players from 1904 onwards, and in 1906 they became the first British sole agency for the Welte-Mignon, so through contact with them, if for no other reason, Easthope Martin would have been well aware of the possibilities of roll-operated instruments.

Inevitably he must have earned his living by some means between 1905 and 1910, when he is first definitively mentioned as working for the Orchestrelle Company, and his training and experience were such that he was appointed organist of Aeolian Hall and chief Pianola demonstrator. Julius Harrison came up to London in 1908 and found work in mastering pianola rolls, so the two men’s early careers ran on similar lines. In late April 1910 Sir Edward Elgar visited Aeolian Hall and worked for three days on the Metrostyle lines for the Pianola rolls of his first Symphony. His wife went with him on at least one occasion, and he records in his diary that they were much moved by Easthope Martin’s tales of hardship.

Clearly Easthope Martin was the musician who pedalled the Pianola in order to mark up the Elgar Metrostyle lines, but quite what hardships he had suffered are not clear, though it may be that tuberculosis had already taken its toll. When Reginald Reynolds (who also contracted T.B. in early life) joined the Aeolian Company in 1918/19, one of his regular duties was to mark up Metrostyle lines on all new classical rolls, and this was evidently one of Easthope Martin’s responsibilities a few years previously.

The organ-playing duties were no doubt a mixture of private demonstrations and small public concerts, and they also extended to the arrangement of rolls for the Aeolian Pipe Organ. The bulk of this work was restricted to American musicians, since the 116-note perforating machines only existed at the Aeolian factory in Meriden, Connecticut. However, an attractive arrangement of Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes” march assured Easthope Martin’s place in the 116-note catalogue.

In about 1913, the Gramophone Company published seven double-sided records of Easthope Martin playing on the “Grand Organ”, as detailed in part 4 of Denis Hall’s discography in Pianola Journal no 6. From listening to several of these, it is clear that the playing is being carried out by means of rolls, and not directly by hand. It is difficult to be certain about the style of instrument used, though the impression given is that of an Orchestrelle-type reed organ, rather than a large pipe organ, such as that resident in the Aeolian concert hall. Interestingly enough, the control of tempi and such musical devices as trills leave one in no doubt that the instrument is mechanically operated; perhaps a reflection of the fact that the tempo
drawstop on an Orchestrelle is somewhat cruder than the lever on a Pianola.

In 1912 and 1913, Easthope Martin took part in two well-publicised demonstration concerts for the Pianola. The LSO concert mentioned above occurred on 14th June, 1912, and as well as the Grieg Piano Concerto, included Liszt’s Hungarian Fantasia, and songs by Hugo Wolf and Richard Strauss, sung by Elena Gerhardt to roll accompaniment. The concert was reviewed in the Piano-Player Review of September 1912, by a reasonably impartial critic, as can be seen from the following excerpt:

“It is too seldom that we get a programme so well balanced as that of the 14th, and one sat down with satisfaction to the programme, as one does to an epicure meal, except perhaps that the thought of the rather startling dish to come (the Pianola) caused some occasional uneasy tremors.

“An expectant silence, half curious, half fearful, was over the audience when the attendant approached the fearsome new thing for the purpose of making sure that all was in order, and with a laughing aside to a member of the band, a matter perhaps indicating rather than hiding nerves, Mr. Easthope Martin sat down at the Pianola, twizzled on the music-roll and the first notes were heard.

“One expected accidents, half-bar differences, lost rhythm, and providence only knew the rest. Perhaps it was Mr. Martin, perhaps that peculiar kind of nervousness that ever precedes something new in life had got hold of us, but one felt that the conductor, the orchestra, the Pianola-player, were all suffering from this apprehensiveness as to possible disasters. But a change soon came. The perfect technique of the Pianola, the gradual building up of the crescendos, and the terrific tonal climaxes drove out all but the enjoyment of it. Mr. Martin became the pianist - the fearsome thing didn’t exist - and a great noise of applause crowned (and, of course, spoiled) the end of the first movement. The tempo of the second movement was slower than one usually hears it, and missed just that sense of an intense crescendo that one looks for. The rest of the Concerto was untrammelled by hitch or twitch, and brought more noises from the audience than ever. Incidentally it must be awkward to re-roll a perforated music-roll and bow to the audience at the same time, but custom will settle this point of etiquette.

“After the Symphony the Pianola interested us again as accompanist to Miss Elena Gerhardt; more than that, it astonished us, not only because it did not lump along, but because it did what we all thought it could never do. It was a medium only - and Easthope Martin played for Gerhardt, and played as a perfect accompanist, and the lovely tones of Gerhardt’s voice were free. How many singers ever feel free, perfectly, while singing songs like Strauss’s “Standchen,” with their difficult accompaniments? No trace - not the movement of a muscle, the glimpse of an eyelid - of restraint or irritation passed over the singularly clear countenance of the singer; and comparing the
Strauss accompaniment with many that is heard, Gerhardt must have revelled in this freedom. Certainly she sang exquisitely. The singer was recalled again and again - till an encore was obtained.

“The Liszt just gave room for the peculiar piano-player effects that the hand cannot do; and perhaps too much advantage of this was taken by Mr. Martin - the whole work having just a taint of “playing to the gallery.”

“Were the shakes done in the best manner possible, or in certain circumstances is the sledge-hammer shake unavoidable through the pneumatic medium?

“Whatever else goes to make beautiful piano playing possible by means of the piano-player, it is certain that temperament tells - and one is inclined to think that the measure of success in performing by this means, is the measure of the temperament brought to bear. The future must bring a chastened mood, serious examination and consideration of the once fearsome thing, on the part of musicians and music lovers. There will doubtless be other concerts of this kind.”

Exactly one year later, on 16th June, 1913, Easthope Martin was once again called upon to demonstrate his skills in a very public way, when Cecile Chaminade, the French composer, paid a visit to Aeolian Hall for a concert of her own music. On this occasion the Pianola was used for solo works, the accompaniment of Miss Mary Leighton in various songs, and as a duo partner to Mlle Chaminade herself in one or two pieces for two pianos.

In the review of this latter concert in the Piano, Organ and Music Trades Journal, Chaminade and the Pianola are both highly praised, though the discreet Mr Martin is not mentioned. However, this lack of attention may not entirely have displeased Easthope Martin, who derived much greater fulfilment from playing the piano by hand. In a letter sent to the editor of the Piano-Player Review in November 1913, he links this sentiment to a disapproval of some public pianola concerts as follows:

“The question whether admission should be charged at concerts where the piano-player plays an important part in the programme is one upon which I hold very strong views, so much so that if there is a person who can lay claim to being the finest “Player-operator in the world,” I would not pay a red cent to hear him. In my opinion, the piano-player was never intended to use up the privileges of the concert platform except for the purpose of free demonstration. The mechanical assistance which the manipulator enjoys is of such proportion that the term “Artist” can never apply to him, although his interpretations may be brimming over with artistry. To my thinking, a work of art, whether it be from the interpretative musician, or the painter, stands as such because it is solely and absolutely a human product, entirely due to human effort.

“No, Sir; beyond free demonstration recitals (of which I whole-heartedly
approve) the sphere of the player is not on the concert platform, but in the home. And here let me say that I would much rather listen to a good performance on a piano-player, than indifferent hand-playing such as one hears in the home circle. At the same time, however, I get much more pleasure from my own indifferent playing by hand than by my own performances on my Piano-player.”

It is impossible at this distance in time to know the background to this deeply-felt view, though presumably there had been paying recitals that had taken place and aroused Easthope Martin’s ire. From the evidence of the insistently regular trills on his gramophone records, taken with the criticism of the 1912 LSO concert in similar vein, it is possible that Easthope Martin’s performances on the Pianola were to some degree outclassed by Reginald Reynolds, who also gave well-publicised public concerts. However, without digital stereo recordings of both men such comparisons will remain locked in a past era.

In the same way, the circumstances surrounding Easthope Martin’s premature death are very difficult to ascertain. It is known that he married, and that his wife Kate later re-married, to a US Navy lieutenant, emigrating to the USA after the Second World War. On the other hand, it is also clear that he boarded as an invalid for a while with a Mrs Knightley, trained nurse and mother of William Knightley, one of the Aeolian Company’s senior managers, whom Reginald Reynolds mentions in connection with tweaking or “Knightleyising” Duo-Art grand pianos for public concerts. Whatever the case, Easthope Martin died of tuberculosis at the early age of 43, on 25th October, 1925.

Unlike many other pianists, Martin has left a considerable legacy to the musical world in the shape of his vocal and instrumental compositions. There can be few musicians who have not encountered his “Songs of the Fair” or “Evensong”. The British Library lists some seventeen song cycles for various combinations of voices, in addition to numerous individual songs and both piano and organ pieces. The style is gently straightforward, with an attractive and at times almost naive use of harmony. Musical Times, in its obituary, is grudgingly forced to admit that Easthope Martin’s music exhibits “a quality of refinement and technique not always to be found in songs that appeal widely to the public.” The Pianola Journal is not so reticent; we like his music, and hope that more of it may one day find its way on to roll, as a memento of a fine pianola player.

There can be no doubt that Easthope Martin played an important part in drawing forth respect for the Pianola from a none-too-sympathetic musical establishment, a task that the Pianola Institute also finds itself having to perform. We can only regret the shortness of his life, and be grateful that a small number of recordings of his organ playing have survived.
The Reproducing Piano
Part 3.*

John Farmer

It seems extraordinary that in spite of the high standard of reproduction attained by the standard Ampico, the head of the firm, Charles Stoddart, should in the twenties have become dissatisfied, and that as a result, in the latter part of 1928 an entirely new type of reproducing piano action was perfected and marketed. This new Ampico was called the ‘Model B’. The rolls manufactured for this later version were similar to those for the original Ampico which then became known as the ‘Model A’. To a limited extent the rolls for the two systems were interchangeable; it was a necessary feature in the design of the new Ampico that this should be so since owners of the model A were expected to buy model B rolls, which from that time onwards were the only type manufactured.

These are several reasons why the American Piano Company went to the trouble and the great expense of designing an entirely new reproducing piano despite the great success enjoyed by their existing model. Firstly Ampico, unlike its German rival Welte and the American Aeolian Corporation, manufactured reproducing piano and rolls exclusively and had no other interests to absorb their energies. Second, Charles Stoddart and his friend and colleague Dr Ralph Hickman were perfectionists who were dissatisfied with many of the components of the Ampico which were standard player piano hardware parts. They felt that by starting from scratch they could design a reproducing action which would not have to rely on externally designed components and which being 100 per cent Ampico would have nothing in common with its competitors. But the most important stimulus which led to the development of the Model B was the superiority of the Ampico recording system, the capabilities of which had begun to outstrip those of the playback system of the Model A Ampico reproducing system.

It is difficult to make accurate analogies between different art forms. Nevertheless a comparison between the playing of the Model A Ampico and its successor the Model B (given that each is playing the rolls designed for it) is akin to a comparison between two paintings of the same subject - one in water colour and the other in oils. Both may be accurate representations in their respective mediums of the subject, and it some cases water colour may be the more appropriate medium; but inevitably the oil paintings will provide greater contrasts and stronger effects.

* This article is reprinted from Recorded Sound, 28 October 1967, by permission of the British National Sound Archive and the author. The first two parts were reprinted in the Pianola Journal No. 6 1993.
There was another factor which led the firm to decide to develop the Model B. By the end of the twenties a new generation of pianists was emerging; the older generation had been products of an age in which the new music for the piano was essentially that of the Chopin or Liszt school, requiring its performers to give priority to the production of a beautiful tone and a style of performance which was always elegant. The new music of the twentieth century often required percussive and even at times brutal effects. This kind of playing was anathema to artists such as Rosenthal, Pachmann, Paderewski, Sauer, Josephy and their contemporaries. On the other hand theirs was a style of playing admirably suited to the Ampico Model A. While it is a valid criticism of the Model A that it often depicts the playing of lesser artists as being more even and controlled than was the case, these qualities - of evenness and control - were inseparable from the art of a Rosenthal or a Lhévinne. Thus the greater and the more technically equipped the pianist the more faithful to the original performance was the playing of the Ampico. The best practical example of the qualities of the Model A can be obtained by comparing Ampico rolls of Lhévinne and Rachmaninov. In both cases the distinctive styles of the two quite different Russian pianists are captured with mirror-like precision. Nevertheless the Ampico organisation were to be fully justified in incurring the very high development costs which preceded the production of the Model B; justified artistically, that is to say, since world-wide economic conditions prevented the company from selling more than 900 of these instruments. Furthermore for reasons of economy many of the Model B actions were fitted to very small grand pianos and to pianos of inferior make.

There are four major improvements in the performance of the Model B Ampico when contrasted with its predecessor. Firstly the range of volume is considerably increased, to a point where it is possible to state that no pianist playing the keyboard of the reproducing piano by hand could possibly produce a greater level of tone in the fortissimo passages than that achieved by the Model B action. The level of the pianissimo playing is as low as that achieved by the Model A action which itself is comparable in delicacy to that of a live pianist. Second, the ability of the action to change the force which it applies to successive notes in any part of the keyboard has been greatly improved, with special reference to rapid passages. Thus theme and accompaniment notes in the same part of the keyboard can be struck with widely differing force in rapid succession, or so closely together that to the ear they sound like parts of a chord to which different emphasis has been given. This is not to say that the Model A cannot do the same thing. The third important improvement concerns the method of drawing the music roll across the tracker bar which scans the note and expression perforations. In all other types of reproducing piano a small air motor - driven by vacuum power tapped from the main source of vacuum for the player action - propels the
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Advertisement for the Ampico ‘B’ – 1929.
music sheet. These air motors are cleverly constructed to run at a constant speed, with pneumatic devices which counteract fluctuations in the level of vacuum due to sudden demands upon the supply from other parts of the action in fortissimo passages. However, in practice it is impossible to avoid slight variations in speed which have the undesirable effect of imposing rubatos and accelerandos, albeit tiny ones, on the tempos of the artist. This problem is entirely circumvented in the Model B by eliminating the air motor and replacing it with a variable speed electric motor which can be set to run at whatever speed is indicated on the music roll. This motor is strong enough to be unaffected by the variable drag on the paper crossing the tracker bar as the vacuum level and the consequent suction effect rises and falls with the changes in the level of playing.

The fourth and last improvement in the design of the new Ampico is closely related to the increased range of tone volume available from the action. If readers will refer to the earlier article in this series where the operation of the Model A Ampico action is described (Recorded Sound 26 April 1967) it will be noted that seven ascending steps of volume are used to traverse the range between pianissimo and fortissimo. These steps are supplemented by a crescendo device which can superimpose a gradual increase in tone volume. By co-ordinating these two systems the Model A action spans a considerable range of dynamics more smoothly than the use of only seven steps would lead one to expect.

However, while the Model B also uses seven steps, these are effectively multiplied by three and by arranging for the pump to deliver three levels of vacuum. Thus normally the pump delivers approximately 20 inches of vacuum to the system and the steps can be used to raise the playing level from around 5 inches to 20 inches and back again as required. If the mood of the music changes so that a higher level of sound is required, a signal is sent to raise the pump pressure to the first stage of amplification. This has the effect of raising the maximum available vacuum to about 29 inches although the starting point for the range remains quite close to piano at around 61/2 inches of vacuum. The final stage of amplification makes available a maximum level of 40, commencing at about 10 inches. In the accompanying graph (figure 3) of these three scales of amplification it may be observed that the curve for the second amplification is similar to that for the Model A except that the starting point for the Model A is about 5 inches and the top point about 35 inches. It is thus obvious that the Model B has wider powers of expression in both the lower and upper ranges of its playing because it has three stages of amplification whereas the Model A has only one.

The way in which the steps of intensity are achieved against these different levels of amplification is so ingenious that readers may like to refer to the explanation of the expression regulator given in the 1929 Service manual for
the Ampico reproducing piano which is printed at the end of this article. From this it will be seen that both friction and inertia have been virtually eliminated from the system, this accounting for the speed with which dynamic changes can be accomplished. Pump pressures are changed whenever a new stage of amplification is required by restricting the amount of air spilling into the pump.

Tragically enough the recording of new rolls apart from popular music ceased a year after the introduction of the Model B. Nevertheless some magnificent recordings were made in the twelve months preceding the shutting down of the recording studios, and these continued to be on sale to the public until about 1940. The list of Model B rolls cut by great artists during that short period gives some idea of what might have been done over the next five or ten years but for cruel economic forces over which the Ampico company had no control.

Nowadays new developments in the field of electronic recording techniques occur constantly; yet when it comes to recording the piano and reproducing the sound of the playing of an artist on this instrument, the hardest of all to record, it must be admitted that the final version has yet to be equalled, let alone surpassed.

Excerpts from the 1929 *Service manual for the Ampico reproducing piano*.

**The Expression Regulator:** The operation of the regulator is best understood by referring to Fig 1. A perforated partition or grid B forms a seat for the rubber cloth pouch A which controls the flow of air from the windchest F to the chamber G, and thence to the pump. The chamber C under the pouch is connected to pump suction through the adjustable opening E and to atmosphere through the variable opening D. If E were open and D tightly closed, pump suction through E would pull the pouch completely away from the grid and full pump suction would be admitted to the windchest F. If these adjustments were reversed with E tightly closed and D open, pump suction in chamber G would cause the pouch A to seal the holes in the grid and no suction would be developed in the windchest F.

Opening D is actually made up of four openings of different sizes, 0, 2, 4, and 6, Fig. 2, which may be opened or closed, either singly or in combination, from the note sheet. Three of these openings are arranged longitudinally along the bottom of chamber C and one connects into the side of this chamber.

For the purpose of making this figure perfectly clear, all parts are shown in transverse section, except the openings and valves which are diagrammatic and are shown in longitudinal section. The three openings and pouch valves are actually built into the bottom board of the regulator and not isolated as
Expression Regulator – Fig. 1.

shown. Disregarding the parts of the apparatus at H and I of the 1st Intensity adjuster, atmosphere enters tube P around the tapered pin K, flows through J and then through 2, 4, and 6, any or all, into chamber C.

With 2, 4, and 6 open and 0 closed, the suction maintained in chamber C produces the First Intensity. The closing of 2, 4, and 6 singly, or in combination, produces different degrees of suction in it. These different degrees of suction in the chamber C cause the regulator pouch A to open different amounts and produce the same suctions in the windchest F. This gives the different steps in the intensity scale.

With 2, 4, and 6 and 0 open, the suction maintained in chamber C produces an intensity which is lower than the No. 1 intensity. This is called the 'sub' intensity and is used to obtain extreme pianissimo effects. The pouches controlling 2, 4, and 6, as well as the opening 0, are operated by valves in the expression valve block. These are described on page 12. All of these openings - 0, 2, 4, and 6 are of fixed size, each having its proper and constant effect
Expression Regulator and Atmosphere Constrictions – Fig. 2.

upon the intensity scale. They are manufactured very accurately of a material which insures against any variation, and must never be altered. Two regulators as described above are used - one for the bass, and one for the treble. The entire regulation is accomplished by the balance of pressures established on both sides of the regulator pouch by means of the relationship between the respective fixed orifices. There are no heavy or cumbersome mechanical parts to be moved during the process of regulation when action suction must be accurately maintained, or instantly changed. All of this is accomplished by the slight movement of a thin rubber cloth pouch, the weight of which is only a few thousandths of the weight of the moving parts of the best regulating system heretofore employed. It is due to its lightness and simplicity that the accuracy and effectiveness of regulation in the New Ampico is infinitely
Intensity Scales – Fig. 3.

greater than has been achieved by any regulating system previously used.

**Intensity Scales:** Fig. 3 shows the relation of the three intensity scales ‘Normal’, ‘1st Amplification’ and ‘2nd Amplification’. The lines represent the approximate pressures of the various valve settings when the Normal No. 1 intensity is 5.6 in. and the Normal pump pressure is 20 in. The Normal No. 1 intensity may be set slightly higher or lower than 5.6 in. according to the heaviness of the particular piano action used of climatic conditions. Each of
the eight valve settings give three gauge pressures, i.e., the normal pressure; a higher pressure when the 1st Amplification is set; and a still higher pressure when the 2nd Amplification is set. Thus by the use of expression valves alone 24 different gauge pressures may be obtained. In addition to these 24 fixed pressures, the crescendo mechanism makes it possible to obtain any intermediate pressure desired.

The Ampico normal scale is not an arbitrary succession of steps, but is based on the different degrees of loudness that are perceptible to the ear. These different perceptible degrees of loudness are called ‘Audibility Steps’. Extensive research and numerous tests have shown that a scale based on audible steps is the correct one for reproducing the artist’s playing.

The factory setting of the pump pressure is marked on the pump spill box. The only way to alter the pump setting is to obtain a new spring from the factory, but this should be rarely necessary.

In reading gauge pressure on the New Ampico, always connect at the tappet under the centre of the piano.
A Note on the Technique of Recording*

R. Reynolds A.G.S.M.

Very many pianists perform at the Æolian Hall, in London, leaving no trace of those delightful sounds with which they have charmed their audience during a brief recital; yet fortunately other and greater pianists have found their way to the top storey of the Æolian building, and there discovered a means of perpetuating their interpretations for all time.

In a secluded room stands a Weber grand piano, in tone and in outward appearance not different from the usual model, nor does the touch betray the magic power beneath the keys. Upon closer inspection the secret is partially revealed by the electric cable which can be seen coming from beneath the instrument; and if it were possible to trace this back into the piano, there would be found 160 wires, half of them leading to specially devised contacts under the keys, the remainder running to positions near the point where the hammers strike the strings, while the cable itself passes through the wall of the room, coming out into a sound-proof chamber, in which is installed the amazing mechanism that constitutes the Duo-Art recording apparatus. Here the other ends of the wires are attached to electro-magnets, which operate the punches in the powerful perforating machine, each punch corresponding with each key of the piano. The pianist plays – the punches perforate – the record is produced!

This method of recording ensures absolute accuracy of reproduction, the length of the perforations being determined by the period for which the key is held down. Thus staccato notes produce little round holes about 1-32 of an inch in diameter, a tribute to the agility of the fingers and also to the rapidity of the recording punches which are working at 4,000 pulsations per minute. The rhythm is determined by the spacing of the perforations in the music roll as it passes through the recording machine at a uniform speed (usually 8 feet in one minute), and this spacing is in exact accordance with the interval between the notes played by the pianist, so that when the music roll is placed upon a Duo-Art piano, and caused to play at the same speed, there must result an exact reproduction of all the most subtle nuances of rhythm.

Similarly the touch of the pianist is recorded and reproduced; still by means of perforations in the music roll, in conjunction with the most ingenious mechanism, both in the recording machine and in the Duo-Art piano. By the use of only 8 “dynamic controls” no less than 32 variations of touch can be produced, extending over the whole range of finger power, from the lightest

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pianissimo to the strongest accent, and in combination with the well-known “Themodist” device (“Pianola” patent) the melody is differentiated from the accompaniment, each having its own free modulation of tonal effect.

Such fidelity of reproduction will not only perpetuate the artist’s performance, but will also show any errors of technique, and will record the stray wrong notes from which no pianist can entirely escape when playing passages requiring great force and extreme rapidity. One of the finest artists in playing a single composition recorded no less than 360 false notes!

Fortunately there is a means by which the “Duo-Art” music roll can be edited under the supervision of the pianist, and every blemish easily and effectively removed, while omitted notes can be cut into their proper places; nor do the possibilities of editing end at note corrections; the touch itself and even the rhythm can be improved upon if the artist so desires. These alterations are made by means of paper patches over the perforations to be eliminated, or by neatly cutting such notes and “dynamic control” perforations as may be required. The original record (signed by the artist) is then duplicated upon a “stencil,” from which all future copies are produced.

It is obvious that when this revision of the record is carefully carried out under the direction of the pianist there will result a most finely finished interpretation. This is why Percy Grainger was moved to confess that his records represent him not merely as he did play, but – as he “would like to play”! While Paderewski paid the greatest tribute to the artistic effect when,

Reginald Reynolds recording Katherine Goodson for the Duo-Art.
referring to the “Duo-Art” record of his well-known Minuet, he said that listening to this gave him the same feeling in his heart as when he played it himself.

Almost all the great pianists have recorded for the “Duo-Art” either in London or New York, and many interesting personalities have revealed themselves to the person in charge of the recording department. Pachmann’s quaint self-appreciation was delightfully illustrated when he prefaced his recording by saying: “I have heard Rubinstein play this piece, and Liszt also; they both played it beautifully – very beautifully, but – I shall play it much more beautifully!” Busoni stated that he used to be extremely particular about the accuracy of his technique, but now he did not care how many wrong notes he played, providing he obtained an artistic effect. This sounded a little alarming to the “Duo-Art” editor, who foresaw shoals of false notes which would have to be eliminated, because, although not very noticeable at a concert performance in a large hall, they would be rather too obvious in a drawing-room where the “Duo-Art” is usually heard. However, the Busoni records were quite as free from blemish as those of the other great pianists.

Lamond has taken much care with the editing of his records, and during his several visits has shown the versatility and wide vista of his thoughts by discussing many subjects, even extending to the immensity of astronomical investigation. Harold Bauer and Hofmann are both enthusiastic recorders for the “Duo-Art”; while the latter declares that he is greatly indebted to his own records which have revealed certain points in his playing he had not previously realised; and, by taking advantage of the knowledge thus gained, he has attained even greater artistic success in his public performances.

This is perhaps the highest compliment payable to the “Duo-Art,” that it not only serves as a most valuable educational medium, already in use at the Royal College of Music, the Royal Academy of Music, the Guildhall School of Music, and many other similar establishments throughout England and America, but it has also proved to be of real value to the recording artists by enabling them to hear themselves as others hear them.

[The lecture given by the author at the Royal Institution on February 19th, was in the nature of a demonstration of the following article; and included charts showing the comparative rhythms and touch-values in two records of the first four bars of the Raindrop Prelude (Chopin), as played by Busoni and Pachmann. Miss Lilian Southgate played a duet for two pianos with a Duo-Art Cortot roll; and M. Jean Pouguet played a violin sonata (César Franck) with another Duo-Art roll.]
Book Review


Denis Hall

We are fortunate to be living at a time when, after more than 50 years’ neglect, within the space of a very short time, we have comprehensive scholarly catalogues available for the major reproducing pianos. The latest of these, and the most ambitious, deals with the Welte-Mignon, the earliest and, musically, the largest and historically most important system (Hupfeld’s DEA and Tri-Phonola are still a closed book, although it seems unlikely that they can vie with Welte in terms of overall importance of their catalogues).

Edwin Welte and Karl Bockisch together worked on the development of the first fully automatic ‘reproducing’ piano during the early years of this century, and were in a position to launch their invention in Germany in 1905. The total Welte-Mignon system incorporated a means of recording sufficient information from the playing of a pianist to enable a perforated music roll to be produced which could play that performance back on a piano fitted with a suitable player mechanism, a staggering achievement bearing in mind that nothing like this had ever been tackled before. Welte and Bockisch were young men who would have had little influence in the social world of that day. Their invention was, however, promoted strongly by Hugo Popper, the influential owner of a large distributor and manufacturer of mechanical musical instruments in Leipzig. Through Popper’s influence, Welte and Bockisch were able to make recording of the world’s greatest pianists and composers right from the earliest days of the Welte-Mignon. In fact, the period of greatest activity was the first 16 months from early 1905, when a staggering 1277 rolls were issued, and included performances by such legendary artists as Carreno, Schnabel, Dohnanyi, Paderewski and Busoni. Welte had a good nine years’ start over its two main rivals, the Ampico and the Duo-Art. By 1914, Welte had a factory in the U.S.A. to manufacture both rolls and pianos, and so was in a good position to compete with the two main American developments. It continued to hold its market share and produced new rolls, both classical and popular until 1932, when the whole player piano market virtually came to an end.

Davis Smith’s book is a tremendous achievement, and we are all greatly in his and Richard Howe’s debt for having undertaken what must have seemed a daunting project, and for having so successfully brought it to a triumphant
conclusion. The book consists of two main parts – the catalogue, and a substantial history of the Welte-Mignon.

The first section of the catalogue is a numerical listing. Welte issued in the region of 8,000 rolls. These appeared in three formats: the original red-coloured type which are 12¾" wide, and which were the ones issued in 1905 when the Welte-Mignon was introduced. Secondly, a standard width (11¼") green-coloured roll: both these were issued in Germany. The third type is known as the Welte Licensee, and is a standard width roll which was issued in America almost to the exclusion of the other types, although the red rolls were available to a limited extent. Fortunately, with one small exception, only one series of catalogue numbers was used, so that a roll issued in red, green or licensee formats will bear the same number. Welte did not issue catalogues in the early days, of if they did, none has survived, and so it has been an enormous task to track down titles, particularly those which only remained for a short time in the catalogue almost ninety years ago. Davis Smith has succeeded to a remarkable degree, in that there are few blanks in the numerical listing, and some of these may never have been recorded, having been reserved in a batch of numbers for an artist who did not play as many selections as had been planned. One intriguing omission is in the series of rolls made by Debussy in 1912. In the block of numbers 2733 to 2739, roll number 2737 is missing. It is conceivable that it may be lost, but equally likely that it was never made. The numerical listing section details where the rolls were likely to have been recorded, and also shows separately the German and American issues.

The second section of the catalogue, which is, to the writer, the most fascinating, is a listing by artists, together with biographical details mostly taken from contemporary catalogues and other literature published by Welte-Mignon. One can browse for hours at the mouth-watering performances once readily available on the Welte-Mignon. This system was particularly strong in its classical catalogue, and hosts a generation of pianists of the gramophone era, from Carl Reinecke, born in 1824, three years before Beethoven died, and who studied with Mendelssohn and Schumann, to Horowitz, who made his first recordings for Welte in 1926. The women pianists Teresa Carreno and Fanny Bloomfield-Zeisler did not make gramophone records, and even if they had, they certainly would not in the early years of the century have left us their interpretations of such major works as the Schumann Fantasy and the Beethoven Waldstein Sonata (Carreno), or a selection of Chopin Nocturnes and Scherzi and the complete Beethoven Opus 111 sonata (Bloomfield-Zeisler). Liszt pupils, Reisenauer, Lamond, Friedheim, d’Albert; Leschetizky himself and his pupils Paderewski, Hambourg, Gabrilowitsch; and composers Mahler, Reger, Fauré, Ravel, Debussy, Falla, Humperdinck, Leoncavallo, Dohnanyi, Medtner, Milhaud.
One wonders what induced Welte to record so much what must have been uncommercial material, but can only be unbelievably grateful that he did. While most of this treasure trove is accessible to literally only a handful of people in the world, at least much of it still exists, and one hopes that it can be properly recorded on to CD and issued in that format so that music lovers and students of piano playing can once again hear the gems enshrined in these magnificent roll-recordings of so long ago. Where known, recording/publishing dates are given in this listing and the numerical one above.

The third section consists of a composer listing again with biographical notes. Surprises galore are there too. Who would have suspected Pachmann to be recording Bach’s Italian Concerto in America in 1926? No less than 25 of the Beethoven sonatas were issued; the four Ballades, four Scherzi, two piano sonatas and most of the Etudes and Preludes of Chopin; and the Sonata Op. 2 no. 2 by Horngold played by Rudolph Ganz in 1910! From the ‘twenties’ popular field, there seem to be quite as many titles as for the other reproducing piano systems, even including a number of rolls cut by Gershwin prior to his involvement with Duo-Art, and likely to be more authentic recordings of his playing than some later dubious “assisted” issues.

The fourth section lists the rolls by titles which can give an easy reference particularly to popular rolls.

The other main part of the book bears the title “Historical Overview of Companies and Individuals”. It quite specifically does not claim to be a technical treatise, although in passing gives the most credible explanation of the system for recording dynamics which the writer has yet seen. To the European reader, it is this historical overview which by its sin of omission gives cause to the most disappointment. The Welte-Mignon was a German invention and the pianos and rolls, although not at all common, which are encountered most on this side of the Atlantic are the red type, and occasionally the green. The German organisation was operational from 1905 until the early ’30s, and from its headquarters in Freiberg manufactured pianos and undertook recording there and also to the writer’s knowledge in London, Paris and St. Petersburg if not elsewhere. In spite of this, only 33 pages are devoted to the European organisation as against 107 to that in America. Davis Smith does concede that “the point of view herein is towards the United States. This is not a distortion. A great amount of activity relative to the Welte-Mignon action occurred in the States”. The financial and legal machinations which went on make fascinating reading, and one wonders how the Welte-Mignon ever produced any rolls or recordings in America! None the less, there must be some wonderful tales to tell of activities in Europe which are not touched on. Having made this criticism, what we have is a quite marvellously detailed account of the running of the various Welte companies, their rivalry, sell-outs and take-overs. All through the ’twenties in America,
The superiority of any reproducing piano is assured if it contains the Welte-Mignon Licensee reproducing action.

The Master's Fingers on Your Piano

Money can buy no gift that will so fully bless both giver and receiver as a reproducing piano equipped with the personally human mechanism—Welte-Mignon Licensee Reproducing Action. Welte-Mignon Licensee actually puts the master's fingers on your piano—Paderewski, De Pachmann and Gieseking, the new star in the pianoforte heavens.

Your Christmas selection of a reproducing piano may be made from one hundred and fifteen of America's finest pianos, all containing Welte-Mignon Licensee. You will find Welte-Mignon Licensee-dealers everywhere.

The Auto Pneumatic Action Co.
W. C. Heaton, President
633 West 51st Street New York

Advertisement for the Welte-Mignon Licensee.
there were more than one company making pianos and rolls for the licensee system; the wonder is that all these instruments and rolls were compatible, resulting in a much larger catalogue than would have been available to any one of them on its own. Not only were the financiers it almost seems doing their best to ruin the Welte-Mignon piano, the lawyers too played their part, pursuing other reproducing piano manufacturers for infringing the original Welte patents. In fact, they eventually won a case against the great Aeolian Company, forcing it to pay a royalty on every Duo-Art piano they made. The story is complex and repays close study by the interested reader, as well as providing an invaluable reference book. One cannot imagine a more detailed history of the American side of the Welte-Mignon.

This book, which contains 975 pages, is a magnificent achievement and will serve as the definitive Welte-Mignon reference work for many years, taking its place alongside the similar works on the Ampico by Elaine Obenchain and the Duo-Art, also by Charles Davis Smith.
Grieg and Graigner, Purcell Room Concert, 13th April 1994

Confident in the knowledge that pounces, like lightning, rarely occur in the same place twice, Pouncer attended the Purcell Room on the 13th April for an evening of off duty enjoyment. Unfortunately, he has received that rare thing for an anonymous reviewer – a commission – and as a result faces the word processor as a sort of memory test.

Pouncer’s friends, hearing that Rex and Denis were playing Percy and Edvard would probably have asked what was the final score. Friends of the Pianola Institute will of course make no such error. And Pouncer is happy to report that there were no losers, although one of the partnerships did come over as rather uneven. (“Did the evening need a little evening?” he asks.)

First impressions are often the key to one’s enjoyment, and Pouncer’s were entirely favourable. The publicity leaflets and the programme, in a similar eye-catching format to those for last year’s “Rachmaninov’s Russia” concert, brought back the warm glow of that memorable occasion. And the information in them on Percy Grainger and Edvard Grieg and their recordings added the element of eager anticipation. There was even a page thoughtfully provided for notes. Would that Pouncer had even considered making some jottings.

Oh, and significantly the programme also included details of the Percy Grainger Society and the Grieg Society of Great Britain – a significance noticeable when the auditorium suddenly filled up with a great number of unfamiliar faces, whose presence in the foyer earlier Pouncer had ascribed merely to the icy wind outside. This surely must be the way forward for the pianola: introduce it to such groups and let them see its merits relevant to their special interests. The need for such education became clear to Pouncer in a conversation with Geoff Worrall (The Sheffield Player Piano Group) who spent the following weekend with the Rachmaninov Society, learning in the process that no one present had heard of a reproducing piano nor knew of Rachmaninov’s influence on the success of the Ampico system.

And so to the concert. What attention-catching master-stroke would our heroes produce this year to start things with a bang? The lights dimmed and a wonderfully scratchy recording of an early promotion for the Duo-Art system came over the loudspeakers, telling us how perfectly the performances of leading artists would be captured by the new medium – and demonstrating with an excruciating recording of a roll of Grieg’s “To Spring”. It had just gone on long enough to stop being funny when it faded out, to be replaced seamlessly by a roll of Percy Grainger playing the same piece reproduced very much better by Peter Davis’s Duo-Art push-up at one of the Purcell Room’s Steinway Grands. What a good start! We were all buzzing with interest and
amusement even before we had seen the presenters.

Immaculate in white tuxedos Rex and Denis appeared, bowed and almost disappeared again. Pouncer finds it hard to believe that the lighting in a major venue like the Purcell Room is so arranged that if you turn off the lights focussed on the right side of the platform – as was necessary because we were to have slides projected on a screen there – then you cannot have the presenters on the left hand side illuminated. Perhaps we are a little specialised in needing to light artistes who may not be sitting at the pianos that are playing, but Pouncer reckons the Hall owes the Institute a refund for poor facilities. Not that the presenters showed the slightest unease at working in the semi-gloom; still able to read their notes they plunged into their role with evident enjoyment.

Even Pouncer knows something of Percy Grainger’s involvement with and enthusiasm for the reproducing piano and in the first part of the programme on Duo-Art he was well represented, playing his own Gumsuckers March in duet and his idiosyncratic arrangement of Tchaikovsky’s Waltz of the Flowers, together with the Bach/Liszt Organ Fantasia and Fugue (G Minor) and Schumann’s Etudes Symphoniques Opus 13. What variety! Pouncer felt they came very near to justifying the claim of perfectly captured performances, with theme and accompaniment clearly differentiated and no mechanical feel to the serious pieces. Peter Davis’s push-up, silent only 48 hours before from mouse damage, had been restored to first class reproduction. Schumann’s inclusion in the concert gave the excuse for Rex’s verse on him which Pouncer appreciated very much. (Presumably neither Grieg nor Grainger featured in the series of verses). However, rhyming acumen with Schumen(n?) probably works better on paper than read aloud, so Pouncer hopes there will be a reprint.

Grieg as a performer was a little more problematical. Although we were told in the programme that he made nine recordings in 1906 for Welte-Mignon and Hupfeld as automatic reproducing rolls, the Duo-Art system was not available until after his death. Undaunted, in 1914 Duo-Art converted an earlier roll of his “Butterfly”, which he had autographed and “metrostyled”, into a reproducing roll representing his expressed performing intentions. Equally undaunted, the presenters had undertaken a similar process and, with the help of Michael Boyd and his roll cutting machine, had produced a roll from his autographed version of two of the Peer Gynt pieces. While the performances of those rolls provided the possibility of the claim to include Grieg as a performer – and an interesting insight into the process – Pouncer felt they would probably never make the top ten (or 100, or . . . ). Did the Grieg Society feel cheated, especially as he featured not at all in the second half of the concert? Were they expecting a repeat of the Piano Concerto from the last night of the proms?
The other problem was how to manage the commentary. Given the wide ranging audience, the presenters obviously felt the need to introduce Percy Grainger to everyone not of the Grainger Society, Grieg to the non-Griegians, the pianola to the non-pianolists and the accompanying slides to everyone. These included scenes of roll production as fascinating to Pouncer as the introductions to the pieces played, but so much information was included that the first half easily over-ran its allotted time. Pouncer suggests the solution must be to arrange and rehearse a fully scripted and timed commentary, and to save any gems cut out for future use.

Generous as always, Rex and Denis called the audience back after a short interval to see pedal push-ups at both pianos ready for a whirlwind second half. To make up time, the introductions had been drastically pruned. This left Pouncer rather unsure how composers Balfour Gardiner and Lord Berners fitted into the scheme of things, although we did hear that both were eccentric, which perhaps entitled them to share the platform with Percy Grainger. Such a connection would be no more tenuous than the substitution for the programmed but apparently unplayable roll of the “Irish Tune from County Kerry” of a piece by John Ireland! Did we also lose an explanation for the complete abandonment of Edvard Grieg?

Grainger continued to be well represented with the lively and tuneful Perforetur rolls of “Shepherds’ Hey” and “Molly on the Shore”, pedalled with the panache we expect from each of the artistes, and a version of “Country Gardens” for two pianolas playing together. People are never satisfied. Pouncer had heard disappointment voiced last year when “Les Noces” involved only consecutive rather than concurrent playing of the two pianolas. This time, the concurrentness was criticised for less than perfect synchronisation in a complicated arrangement that had the interest constantly shifting between the two instruments. Pouncer appreciated the piece (and its reprise as an encore at the end of the evening) in what he feels sure was the intended spirit – a joyful celebration of what is possible (and what impossible) in our medium. Thorough good fun, and full of interest to those used and unused to pianola performances.

And so, shamelessly abandoning both Grieg and Grainger, to the pièce de résistance: a belated world premiere performance of the complete arrangement of Three Folk Songs for the Pianola by Stanhope (Perforetur Rolls CR10018 to 20), promised by Rex for the (1984?) Aldeburgh Festival in a fit of rash optimism. Hearing the number of notes involved, Pouncer could imagine Rex spending all the intervening years on the cutting if the computer and Michael Boyd and his roll cutting machine had not come along. Special arrangements for the pianola are not always easily accessible to the audience but the three varied pieces held Pouncer’s attention. He had heard the third before and had been confused by the various versions of the basic tune of
“The Keel Row”; the introductory explanation by Rex that it represented a village dance with various incidents including the bandstand collapsing and the band re-grouping out of time made him view it in a fresh light, although he was by no means confident that he kept up with all that was happening. It would have been far too difficult for Rex to have named each incident while pedalling full tilt – but would this have been a possible use for the slide projector with tastefully decorated captions “Now the bandstand collapses” as a sort of cross between silent film titles and victorian programme music descriptions? Whether or not he identified the incidents correctly, Pouncer found it a thoroughly satisfying performance of a very exciting arrangement and joined in the prolonged applause of the rightly enthusiastic audience.

Pouncer spent an evening of great interest and variety both from the musical and the technical aspects and of great skill demonstrated by the pianolists and the producers of the rolls. Even after the request to write it up, it remains in his memory as a very special and enjoyable evening. He recommends Rex and Denis and their concerts, assisted by Michael Boyd’s roll cutting, to anyone interested in music and musical history. But may he see future performances off duty, please?

Contributors

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 1960s, 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.
ROY HOWAT is a concert pianist living in London. Born in Scotland, Roy studied in Cambridge and France and soon became known as a specialist in French music. He discovered and premièred some rare items by Debussy, wrote the influential book *Debussy in Proportion*, and is a founding editor of the Paris-based New Complete Debussy Edition (*Oeuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*). Besides his concert and recording work – CDs of his performances of Chabrier and Debussy are shortly to be issued – he remains active as writer and broadcaster, and has held University posts in Cambridge, Australia and New Zealand.

REX LAWSON is a concert pianist who has been involved in research and music-making with these instruments since 1971. He has travelled with his pianola to the USA, Canada and many European countries, transporting it by plane, ship, car and even, in 1986, by gondola in Venice. He has made a special study of music written for the pianola, by the eighty or so composers who have been interested in its possibilities during the course of this century. In 1989 he made his Carnegie Hall debut as soloist in George Antheil’s *Ballet Mécanique*.

POUNCER began publishing critiques in the 1960s in young Presbyterian journals. He was known, in those days, to have a variety of personae. After a period in early retirement, he re-appeared in 1993 in the Player Piano Group Bulletin, reviewing mechanical music matters, including Rex and Denis’s Rachmaninov’s Russia concert at the Purcell Room.

REGINALD REYNOLDS was the central musical figure in the British player-piano world for several decades. As a young man, fresh from the Guildhall School of Music, he gave the first public player-piano recital in London, and he went on to become the Aeolian Company’s chief Pianolist and Duo-Art recording producer. His daughter, Yvonne Hinde Smith, is a member of the Pianola Institute.