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

Plans have been made for a regular journal, public concerts, a lending library of rolls, a travelling exhibition, and in addition, a roll and information archive is to be established, with a small collection of player pianos for listening and study purposes.

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

The Directors of the Institute are:
Louis Cyr, Keith Daniels, Mike Davies, Denis Hall, Rex Lawson, Donna McDonald. Company Secretary: Claire L’Enfant.

The Patron of the Institute is Conlon Nancarrow.

It is possible to support the work of the Institute by joining the Friends of the Pianola Institute. Membership enquiries should be sent to Mike Davies, 70 Blackheath Park, London SE3 0ET, England.

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Members of the pianola world are heaving a great sigh of relief this year after the stresses of the AMICA 95 Convention in August 1995. The event forged a strong link between the enthusiasts in America and those in England and the Netherlands and will be remembered for a long time to come with much pleasure. A brief report on the background to the Convention is included in this Journal, and it was fully written up in AMICA’s own Bulletin.

The pianola is a living instrument, and it is with great pleasure that we welcome its most recent composer, Robin Walker, to our pages. Walker’s curiosity was first roused by hearing a pianola recital given by Rex Lawson at the 1994 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, and resulted in his composing *Halifax*, which was premiered earlier this year. Walker writes on his fascination with and interest in writing for the instrument.

Any instrument is dependent on having its own repertoire, and during the first 30 years of this century, the player piano attracted more than 80 composers and arrangers. Two of these, George Antheil and Paul Hindemith, wrote important works in the ‘twenties. Rex Lawson, who probably knows Antheil’s *Ballet Mecanique* better than anyone else, contributes an article detailing the background to this still startling and shocking work. A recording of the original version is available on Music Masters CD 01612-67094-2. In the year of the centenary of Hindemith’s birth, we are proud to publish the staff notation score of his *Toccata* for Welte-Mignon. This work has only come down to us by the chance survival of a copy of the German Welte roll in the Hindemith Institute in Frankfurt; its future is now considerably more secure.

We are sad to have to report the death of the last major artist who recorded for a reproducing piano. ‘Master’ Shura Cherkassky while still in his teens made a successful series of rolls for the Duo-Art system. A personal reminiscence is given by Robert Taylor of Philadelphia. Mr Taylor came to know Cherkassky well during the later years of his life and it is good to read something ‘off the concert platform’ of this enigmatic pianist. During the same year Charles Davis Smith passed away at his home in California. This modest and unassuming man worked for over ten years while battling with ill health to complete two major catalogues of the reproducing piano – the Duo-Art and the Welte-Mignon. Musicians and mechanical music enthusiasts alike will always be in his debt for the research he carried out to produce these important works.

The Pianola, the Aeolian Company’s piano playing device, was launched in the United States in 1897 and reached Great Britain in time for Christmas
1899. We are therefore about to celebrate the centenary of the launching of the world's most famous automatic musical instrument, and the one which, through the aggressive advertising policy of its brash American inventors, initiated an important and fascinating period of some 30 years in musical history. A series of events is planned to take place during the next three years including, in the next Pianola Journal, a major article on the introduction and development of the pianola worldwide.
Writing *Halifax*

Robin Walker

I have just re-read part of Robert Craft’s book *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*. Clearly mystified by his great mentor’s regard for the pianola Craft attempts, without convincing himself, to account for this interest:

Stravinsky’s infatuation with the instrument is one of the inexplicable eccentricities of his career – not the delight in the novelty of the machine reflected in the *Etude…* nor even his profligate expenditures of time and labour in transcribing his music for this dodo (since he earned substantial sums of money thereby), but in his musical enthusiasm for it. (p. 164).

Further down this same page Stravinsky himself offers two reasons for his ‘musical enthusiasm’ (neither of which, incidentally, seem to register any effect on Craft’s denigration of the instrument in subsequent paragraphs). In *The New York Times Magazine*, January 18, 1925, he firstly suggests that the player piano holds ‘unplumbed possibilities’ in ‘polyphonic truth.’ Secondly, he writes in *Les Nouvelles Litteraires*, December 8, 1928:

‘I explained to Erik Satie that I was interested in the mechanical piano, wanting to find in it not an instrument to reproduce my works but one that could reconstitute them.’

The ‘polyphonic truth’ of the pianola, and its ability to ‘reconstitute’ already-written music seem to me to be two compelling musical reasons for engaging with it. Illustration of these points can be found in the pianola version of *The Rite of Spring*. For example between figure 181 and 186 of the orchestral score, the pianola offers a clearer and more incisive rendering of lines (‘polyphonic truth’) than in the richly textured original, and from figure 186 to the end where the tonal consistency and clear attack of voices afforded by the pianola ‘reconstitutes’ the cadence as a harmonic experience, as well as it being a rhythmic one.

Composers select instruments to write for because they correspond to their expressive intentions, and this was doubtless Stravinsky’s reason for employing the player piano. The pianola’s mechanical reproduction of acoustic sound is for me a powerful symbol of the ritual control of human emotion, which – need I say – is at the heart of a composer’s artistic activity. Far from it being Craft’s ‘dodo’ I have found the pianola entirely responsive to the demands of
Excerpt from "HALIFAX" by Robin Walker
a modern artistic vision – the period of its erstwhile fashion in no way defining the period of its life or relevance.

The piece I have written for pianola is named after the town of Halifax in the West Riding of Yorkshire. I visit it regularly, always moved by the vast complex of disused carpet mills rising out of the deep stone cleft of Dean Clough, and by other examples of uniformly structured buildings placed in dramatically sculpted landscape. The piece I have written is not a musical portrait of the town, rather the landscape of the town corresponds in metaphor to the rifts and structures of my own mind. Using the vocabulary of my Stravinsky preamble you could say that the landscape of Halifax is reconstituted in the process of composition into a musical landscape of the mind.

The piece is written out on six staves and could be played by three pianists at three pianos, though in the interests of retaining ‘polyphonic truth’ I rather hope this never happens (neither do I think that human digital playing would effectively ‘reconstitute’ it in any way). At the outset of writing the piece I accepted the composer’s usual premise in writing for instrumentalists or vocalists that polyphonic movement produces the best sound. I wanted a dynamic texture manufactured by polyrhythm, and to this end I knew the pianola would give me an exactness of attack and a rigid faithfulness of rhythmic interpretation unavailable elsewhere. In carrying this through I
discovered that the pianola has an insatiable desire for notes, and without quite having got to the bottom of why this is the case I reckon it has something to do with making sure that the 'rigidity' of the instrument always works expressively for you. The avoidance of expressive rigidity is rather like avoiding over-formal behaviour or the obsessive observance of manners – such behaviour reduces your humanity to something merely mechanical, but at the same time a degree of manners and formality in behaviour is necessary to produce the ritually refreshing experience of ceremony, which at its best and most productive can unleash exaltation. The climax of the polyrhythmic working in *Halifax* is designed to bring this culminating effect about (see bb. 86-95 of the Example).

The piece can also be seen as an assembly of musical blocks, each with a volume and density and a colour, informed by a sense of line with litany-like repetitions of motive. This adds up to what could be called 'incantatory dance', a movement of images of men, machines and their surroundings whose style is governed by the nature of the player piano. Rex Lawson, who performs the piece, has described it as 'audible Lowry' – a testimony to the fact that as in that great painter's work the machine-like dominates the human. This emphasis has made me particularly alert to the question of repetition of material. The circumstances of composition I am describing suggest the use of more literal repetition than would be the case when writing for non-mechanical instruments. This turned out not to be the case; in fact the composer's basic tenet that 'variation produces mobility' is as relevant to pianola writing as to any other instrument. The variation of line, accent and harmony of bb.96-103 of the Example illustrate what I mean.

I take it for granted that in writing their works, composers adhere to the laws of building and growth observed in their surroundings. The metaphors of architecture and of organic growth are a composer's two main guides. In *Halifax* I recognise the predominance of the architectural metaphor over the organic, and I think bb.104-110 of the Example illustrates this. The material moves, accumulates and aspires, but according to laws that produce an edifice rather than those that produce the growth of organic matter. The cutting and relocation of material in these bars would adversely affect anything organic, but as an aural experience of musical objects the 'architectural' procedure at work ensures a satisfactory pacing.

In writing *Halifax* I have had no time for the virtuosi effects associated with the pianola – split-second glissandos and other high-velocity manoeuvres. Unless controlled with a rare degree of musicality these remain merely tricks, and therefore of less than human interest. They also destroy a sense of line, and therefore of continuity (which is a hard-enough virtue to establish on the pianola in the first place), and should be seen as musically undermining influences other than in exceptional circumstances.
If Robert Craft had ever written for the pianola himself he might have discovered, as I have done, an instrument that puts the ear under a consistently direct and scrutinizing pressure. It is an experience which purifies and expands the musicianship of the composer, and one that the benighted ignorance of Robert Craft obviously stands in need of.

Changing musical fashion has not disposed of the pianola as an instrument to compose for, neither is the often misguided lust for new sources of sound a reason for discarding it or confining it to history. If composers concentrated on extracting their own inner resources rather than searching for novel external ones, far from cramping their ambitions the pianola would help them to add a dimension to their expression. For me it has proved a powerful assistant in the process of controlling and displaying emotion through art.
George Antheil’s *Ballet Mécanique*

Rex Lawson

The publishing house of G. Schirmer, Inc., of New York, has just produced a new critical edition of that musical ‘bête noire’, the *Ballet Mécanique* by George Antheil. It therefore seems like an opportune moment to recount the circumstances surrounding the creation and first performances of this mammoth work, which has never yet been performed in its complete version.

**ANTHEIL’S BACKGROUND**

George Antheil was born on 8 July, 1900, the son of the proprietors of ‘Antheil’s Friendly Shoe Store’ of Trenton, New Jersey. He studied music and piano playing in Philadelphia with Constantin von Sternberg, a pupil of Liszt who also taught Robert Armbruster of Aeolian Company and Duo-Art fame, and in 1919 he was finally accepted for further study with Ernst Bloch in New York, although Bloch initially turned him down flat. Later he returned to Philadelphia, as both teacher and student at the future Curtis Institute, with a regular monthly allowance from the school’s patron, Mrs Mary Louise Bok. There is still at the Institute a set of three original rolls of the *Ballet Mécanique*.

In 1922 Antheil left the USA for a recital tour in Europe and settled for a year or so in Berlin, where he met Stravinsky, an encounter that was greatly to affect his life and music. Also while there he met his future wife, Boski Markus, and made the acquaintance of a young German music critic, Hans von Stuckenschmidt, one of the eventual proponents of the player piano as a vehicle for composition.

But in the early 1920s the magnetic hub of Europe was Paris, and on June 13, 1923, Antheil and his bride-to-be arrived there from Germany, just in time to attend the premiere of Stravinsky’s *Les Noces* at the Théâtre de la Gaieté Lyrique that very evening. The young American had summarily failed to show up for a piano recital that Stravinsky had arranged for him the previous December, but if Antheil is to be believed, his Russian ‘friend’ happily overlooked the slight, and invited both George and Boski to visit him the very next day at his studio chez Pleyel in the rue Rochechouart.

Thus, on Wednesday, 14th June 1923, the following event occurred:

‘The next day we went to see him at Pleyel’s, the great piano warehouse rooms where Chopin had often practiced; and Stravinsky himself played *Les Noces*, this time on an electric pianola. I liked the second version even better than the one which we had heard last night; it was more precise, colder, harder, more typical of that which I myself wanted out of music during this period of my life.'
'It is wonderful!' I cried. Boski thought so too, she said.'

One of the results of this audition was the acquisition by the Antheil household of a set of the rolls for Les Noces, and it is interesting to note that these have ended up, along with Antheil's other Stravinsky rolls, at the Royal College of Music, receiving their first complete public performance in a Pianola Institute concert in London in 1993.

Playel's brand of player piano was, naturally enough, the Pleyela, and while the firm did not produce its own true reproducing piano, it had what is nowadays known in mechanical music circles as an 'expression piano', with a rather more limited system of dynamic control than, say, the Duo-Art. Inasmuch as Antheil recalls Stravinsky's studio Pleyela as an electric model, it seems likely that it was such an 'Autopleyela', though for a number of years there was also a pedal Pleyela at the composer's home in the south of France.

According to the American writer, Margaret Anderson, in My Thirty Years War, Antheil reckoned that Stravinsky had lifted the idea of the four pianos in Les Noces from him in Berlin the previous year. This typically red-blooded assertion is impossible to substantiate, but it is clear that a number of mechanical music and multiple piano compositions were in the Parisian air at that time. Stravinsky and Pleyel had been working on a version of Les Noces for pianola, roll-operated cimbalom, harmonium, voices and percussion, only defeated in their object by the imminent threat of legal action by Diaghilev, to whom Stravinsky had rather rashly sold a three-year period of exclusivity before finishing the music. It should be noted, though, that the French and British premieres of Les Noces used not four pianos, but two of the patent Pleyel double grand pianos, with two sets of strings and two keyboards at opposing ends of one oblong piece of furniture.

Pleyel also had a patented system for synchronising multiple roll-operated instruments, and as well as Les Noces and the Ballet Mécanique, Antheil's music-theatre Cyclops and Darius Milhaud's ballet arrangements of Chopin sought to seduce the player-piano into public liaisons with live performers. Cyclops appears to have been scored for eleven pianos, with an array of percussion instruments linked to a central Pleyela. Since Stravinsky had abandoned the intended instrumentation of Les Noces with some haste, Pleyel were doubtless delighted to encourage other composers to make use of the synchronizing system, even though the practical attempts at multiple player piano concerts seem to have failed.

ORIGINS OF THE BALLET MECANIQUE

According to Antheil, the composition of the Ballet Mécanique began in late 1923, continuing through the winter of 1924. What seems to be the first score is now housed at the New York Public Library, with a minute dedication to Boski ('pour Böske') and the year 1924 indicated on the cover. Only the
music for the pianos is included, and it is clear from the subsequent full score that this was later copied across prior to the other instruments being added. At this early stage there is no indication in the music that player pianos were required, and on the contrary there are devices such as glissandi on white or black keys (not therefore chromatic) that suggest Antheil was thinking in terms of live pianists. In any case, there are instructions to the Pleyel roll editors (dated 1925) included in the manuscript, which explain how some clusters are to be omitted on roll, since they remain valid only for the “8-hand-four-piano version”. At the head of the music is another dedication “for my best of friends, Jack Bénoist-Méchin”, and the American journalist, Bravig Imbs, reports that Antheil promised on the night of the full premiere to dedicate the Ballet to his American pianist colleague, Allen Tanner. He was clearly liberal with his favours.

There is evidence that the composing of the work was done at one or two spaced intervals of time. There are two distinct styles of writing, implying either that Antheil was ambidextrous, or else that some other person was copying from another sketch manuscript. The tempo of the music in the third roll (of three) is ludicrously fast, and no piano action, let alone pianist, could even begin to play the notes as written. A large proportion of the third roll uses an exact double speed retrograde version of an earlier section, perhaps implying a mind distracted by other newer compositional projects.

All this evidence suggests that Antheil had the germ of an idea for a four-piano work in his head while he was in Germany in 1922, and that he communicated this to Stravinsky. In Paris in 1923 he began in earnest to compose for a real piano quartet, but his visit to Pleyel introduced him in detail to the possibilities of the player piano. Being a lover of both publicity and forceful music, the possibilities of synchronized roll-operated instruments must have appealed to him very greatly, so that the instrumentation for four times four Pleyelas took shape. The most believable chronicler of the time, Bravig Imbs, reports that seventeen Pleyelas were required, and that other mechanical percussion instruments were to be controlled from the seventeenth, which would also synchronize the first sixteen. Despite all the excuses of player pianos not remaining together, it seems fairly likely that the one essential ingredient that was missing was someone to keep the master Pleyela in time with the conductor. Admittedly the latter (Vladimir Golschmann in the case of the ballet’s premiere) might make an attempt to follow the pianola, but in music as challenging as the Ballet Mécanique this is clearly not a viable option.

The ballet was at one stage intended to accompany Fernand Léger’s film of the same name, but once again synchronization proved too much of a problem, and the film was released separately. The fact that several attempts were made to link the two works, however, implies that the music might fit,
image by image, with Léger's rhythmic visual patterns, if performed by a live pianist after a large amount of study and rehearsal.

Although the instructions to the roll editors in the piano score speak only of two rolls, the actual number in the published set was three, since there was too much music to fit on any fewer. The tempo is clearly marked as crotchet = 152 throughout, although this writer recalls seeing a set of rolls reissued on the "Compositeurs Associés" label in the late 1920s on which the roll speed is marked as accelerating gradually (70, 71, 72, 73 etc). One very interesting detail is that Antheil states the maximum number of notes in any chord to be 23, "as in Stravinsky's rolls". In point of fact he does not adhere to this rule with any consistency, and it is obviously intended more as a reassurance than a dictum, but it provides a valuable insight into the technical basis of Stravinsky's roll arrangements.

THE FIRST PERFORMANCES

Pleyel apparently had the first trial rolls ready for 8 July, 1925, which happened to be George's twenty-fifth birthday. It sounds as though someone at Pleyel had a good sense of occasion, and the resulting aural birthday present caused the composer to shower Mrs Bok, his patron, with four letters in four days, enthusiastically praising the Ballet as the "sincerest expression of America", with "the rhythm of machinery, presented beautifully".

The first private performance for an invited group of friends also took place at the rue Rochechouart, at about 4pm on the afternoon of 16 September, and since Bravig Imbs mentions that the rolls were only just ready, it would appear that they had been corrected from the first version perforated in July. Antheil himself was deliberately not present, since he had disappeared to North Africa with a voluptuous Russian lady friend, partly as an amorous adventure and partly as a publicity stunt. The rest of the audience, according to Bravig Imbs, who had been given the task of inviting them by "pneumatique" (how appropriate!), consisted of James Joyce, Sylvia Beach and her friend, Adrienne Monnier, Jacques Bénois-Méchin, the American writer, Elliott Paul, a journalist colleague by the name of Darnton Fraser, plus another unnamed American journalist, who was probably Clarence Lucas of the Musical Courier.

Imbs was in charge of the proceedings, and he was forced to seek out the young lady who was to play the Pleyela, since the seance was some fifteen minutes late in starting.

"I eventually found her. The rolls had been finished just that minute, she assured me, and they were the dickens to play; sometimes half the keys went down at once.

"When we returned to the room, we found the group scattered in expectant attitudes. I took my place near the pianola to be of assistance to the girl if any necessity should arise."
“All I remember of her is that she was very polite and had brightly rouged cheeks which became redder still as she pumped out that mastodon of music, the *Ballet Mécanique*. The terrific thumping - it was a new idea then to employ the piano as a percussive instrument - and wild chords which seemed to be torn alive amid bleeding from the maws of machines, electrified the audience.

“I had sense enough to thank the girl for pumping so diligently and she rewarded me with a weary smile. I imagine playing those three rolls was like running three miles.”

Nowhere is the young lady identified, but one possibility might be a certain Mlle Köntzler, who appears as a staff pianist in the Pleyela roll catalogue from the mid-1920s, and who assisted Stravinsky with the arrangement of his works for the instrument. Since a number of Pleyel “rouleaux enregistrés”, including Stravinsky’s, are clearly not recorded but mechanically edited, it may also be that Mlle Kontzler had herself marked up the master stencils for the *Ballet Mécanique*; at any rate, Pleyel had charged 10,000 francs for their perforation, since the Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre had underwritten this cost. Would that present-day roll commissions were as generous!

However, commissioning the rolls was only one of the many problems on the road to the first full performance of the Ballet. It took a while to persuade Mrs Bok to underwrite the copying and performing costs connected with the work, but she finally sent $2,500, and Antheil reserved the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées for 19 June, 1926. Vladimir Golschmann was retained as conductor, and the rehearsals went with predictable abandon. Bravig Imbs relates:

“One of the best conductors in town, Golschmann, was engaged. He had a matinee-idol face, lustrous black curls, a distinguished limp and considerable musical ability. I had tea with him at that little shop on the Place de la Madeleine where American layer cakes are sold. Böske was with us, very elegant in a misty blue tweed tailleur, and between bites of luscious coconut cake, Golschmann was already lamenting about the seventeen pianolas.

“‘We tried and tried, but it was impossible to have them play absolutely together,’ he said ‘only one was needed to put the other sixteen off.’

‘Couldn’t they be operated electrically ?’, I suggested, thinking of the exertion of the pretty girl at Pleyel’s.

‘Goodness, no,’ said Mr Golschmann, ‘there isn’t a hall in town with enough power for that!’

“I don’t remember exactly how the matter was finally arranged, except that real pianists were used along with a few pianolas.”

In fact Imbs later mentions that Antheil appeared on stage just before the Ballet, giving directions to movers who were pushing five pianos into place, so the clear implication is that four normal pianos took their place alongside one Pleyela. Antheil and Allen Tanner were two of the pianists, while Jacques
Benoist-Méchin appears to have operated the Pleyela and perhaps thereby controlled much of the percussion. Certainly the dearth of pianists who might manage such a futuristic premiere would account for why Antheil himself could not afford to pedal the rolls.

In his autobiography, Antheil dismisses this concert in a couple of paragraphs, and studiously avoids any mention of the *Ballet Mécanique*, a case perhaps of the older man embarrassed by the former enfant terrible. Financially it must have helped George and Boski (who had married in the autumn of 1925), since it sold out, with many fashionable Parisians being turned away. The lucky ones with reserved seats included Diaghilev, Brancusi, Koussevitzky, the Joyces, T. S. Eliot, Kiki (the model who appeared in Léger’s film), the Duchesse de Clermont Tonnerre, and Ezra Pound and friends in the pit.

The wild rhythms and thunderous dynamics of the Ballet caused the greatest musical riot in Paris since Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* some thirteen years before. The aeroplane propellors and amplified engine noises unleashed an imaginary gale of wind on the audience, so that a sheaf of umbrellas was soon opened, until “the theatre seemed decked with quite a sprinkling of black mushrooms”. During a quieter passage, Ezra Pound yelled at the audience that “Vous êtes tous des imbéciles”, and those in the gallery whistled and swore back at him.

The immediate effect of the concert was to ensure celebrity status for the young American, who was caught up in a whirl of receptions and parties. Along with fellow composer, Virgil Thomson, Antheil persuaded the wife of the first secretary at the American embassy, Mrs Virginia Gross, to host a series of salon concerts at her spacious apartment near the Eiffel Tower. Mrs Gross combined considerable private means with a desire to establish herself amongst the glitterati of Paris, and so she sponsored performances of a wide range of both Antheil’s and Thomson’s music, including what Antheil himself refers to as “the first real full performance” of the *Ballet Mécanique*.

On this subsequent occasion eight grand pianos were apparently used, with Vladimir Golschmann standing on top of one of them to conduct. The original full score rather roughly divides the pianola part into four strands of pianos, so given luck and a following wind it is always possible to perform the work entirely by hand, although the sheer quantity of notes cannot be achieved in this way. This rather unusual salon music caused guests to faint, to hang from chandeliers, and to consume unlimited cases of champagne, so the success of Mrs Gross as a hostess was assured.

No such success attended the American premiere of the work in 1927, however, and the failure of the Carnegie Hall concert on 10 April may help to explain Antheil’s ambivalent attitude in later years to his original scoring. Eight Baldwin pianos took the stage, along with one or two roll-operated
GEORGE ANTHEIL

Who conveys an awesome list of his own compositions into Carnegie Hall Sunday night.


instruments, and in view of Baldwins trade connections, it appears that Welte-Licensee mechanisms were used. Aaron Copland and Carol Robinson, of Ampico and Duo-Art fame respectively, were among the pianists. Eugene Goossens, himself the composer of a work for pianola, conducted.

Unfortunately some of the complexities presented by the unusual percussion instruments defeated the performers' attempts to keep them in order. The siren failed to sound at the climax of the last roll, and instead appeared late, drowning out the less than enthusiastic applause. The wind machine, which provided not only sound but genuine gusts, embarrassed rather than angered those whose programmes it blew away. A group of determined but amateur rioters failed to stir the audience, and the critics the next day took delight in panning the concert, no less than seven of them using the agreed pun that the performance had "tried to make a mountain out of an Antheil".

Subsequently George Antheil revised and re-orchestrated the Ballet, but the original version retains its boyish vitality and fierceness of invention. It was revived at Carnegie Hall in 1989, under the baton of Maurice Peress and the feet of the writer, using nine grand pianos, to one of which a 1911 Pianola was attached. Two years later it received its premiere recording at the State University of New York at Purchase, with similar forces. It still needs a full performance, since Antheil's original desire to have sixteen pianolas with an extra controlling roll instrument has never been fulfilled. Now that a sensibly edited score and parts are finally available, it is to be hoped that the Ballet Mécanique will one day find victory over its critics and its self presented obstacles.
Pianola:

Arno Reinfrank

Befreit von allen Hüllen
rückt man das Musikmöbel
zu seinem Platz –
nicht ohne Zähneknirschen
über die Zentnerschwere:
Mit Messingrädern,
Hebeln, Achsen,
Pneumatik-Schläuchen
sind Pianolas vollgestopft.

Stripped of its blankets,
the mighty music chest
is heaved into position –
the men gritting their teeth
against the massive load:
assorted gearwheels,
levers, rods
and heavy tubing
make pianolas a weighty matter.

Schon als der erste
dieser Apparate,
der Flötenspieler Vaucansons,
Gelehrte in Paris ergötzte,
war seinem Bauch
viel anvertraut und eingebaut
als Mitgift des Mechanikkünstlers
im Jahr des Vorspiels
1783.

While the first
of these contraptions,
Vaucanson’s Flute-player,
dazzled the professors of Paris,
its body concealed
a wealth of experience and skill,
the legacy of a true mechanical artist,
in the year of its inception,
1783.

Später entstandne Wundertruhren
setzten dies fort
als Werk musikbesessner Bastler,
die fügten Tretantriebe ein
und Tempisteuerung
und dann vor allem
die Bahnen aus durchstochenem Papier,
die vorwärtsrollend
Hammerklöppel heben.

Further miraculous machines
carried on the tradition,
the obsessions of musical wizards,
who added foot-pedals,
tempo controls
and then above all,
taut rolls of perforated paper
that wound slowly round
and lifted the piano hammers.
Ein himmlisches Geschenk war das
für jene tühlumflossnen Töchter,
die in der Sonntagslangeweile
nach Kuchen und Kaffee
dem Freier bei der Zimmerpalme
von Notenkenntnis unbehelligt
ein flottes Menuett
pedalentrampelnd
um die Ohren knallten.

They came like manna from Heaven
to every petticoated daughter,
who, in the long Sunday hours
after cakes and coffee,
threw music to the winds,
and serenaded her suitor by the
potted palms
with a fierce minuet
trampled out on the pedals,
laying siege to his ears.

Die weissbstrumpften Knöchel
und die Silberzwicker blitzten,
Zigarren brannten aus,
Tischhäkelein an;
adrett reichte die Angestellte
Likör und laue Limonade
im schönen Kreis
vulgär geäusserten Begeisterung.
Vulgäres füllt die Kasse.

White stockinged ankles flashed
and silver pince-nez glinted;
brown cigars turned white,
and white tablecloths brown;
the maidservant passed discreetly by,
serving liqueurs and lukewarm
lemonade
amidst the genteel murmurs
of simpering enthusiasm.
Where there’s music there’s brass.

Fabriksäle lackierten
mechanische Klaviere massenweise
und massenweise
sind sie heut vergessen.
Gesucht waren Matritzenmeister,
zum Löcherstanzen Frauenarbeit
und anstellige Pianisten
mit mehr Talent
als Honorar.

Factory floors polished off
mechanical pianos in their masses,
while today in their masses
they are forgotten.
Master musicians were sought to
master rolls,
women to punch out perforations,
and obliging pianists
with more talent
than salary.
Rachmaninoff
kamen und Grieg
und Paderewski, Gustav Mahler –
allen verewigten Papierschablonen
den Feinschnitt ihrer Klangkaskaden
wie Wasserperlen klar
und bislang nur
von der Computerpräzision
geringfügig verbessert.

Grieg came,
Rachmaninoff and Paderewski,
Gustav Mahler –
their musical cascades recorded
in the delicate patterns of paper
stencils;
all was crystal-clear,
hardly rivalled
by the digital precision
of modern computers.

Verzaubert starrt man
auf das Geisterspiel
des Tastenelfenbeins
unter dem Tanz der Fingerkuppen
von längst zerrütteten Meisterhänden.
Kunsttechnik wird zur Technikkunst,
die speichert Zeit im Notenbruch
zum Wiederabruf in Gefässen,
von denen eines

We stand transfixed
before the ghostly playing
of ivory keys,
dancing under the fingertips
of hands long passed to dust.
Craft turns to art, and art to craft,
storing time in broken chords
and reproducing it in many guises,
amongst which stands

Pianola heisst.

the Pianola.

Translated by Rex Lawson and the Author
Hindemith: Toccata for mechanical piano

Specially transcribed for the Pianola Journal

Rex Lawson

One of the idiosyncrasies of twentieth-century player piano composers is that so many of them have thought themselves to be the first breakers of ground with regard to the instrument. Even Conlon Nancarrow was largely unaware until recent years of the considerable repertoire produced in earlier decades. In fact the first traceable pianola composer was Homer Newton Bartlett, one of the founders of the American Guild of Organists, whose “Introduction and Andante Grazioso, Op 213” first graced the tracker bars of New York push-ups around 1902/3, though this and a couple of other essays in the form by Bartlett and Jacques Friedberger have not come publicly to light since player pianos attained scholarly status.

Hindemith and his German colleagues in the mid-1920s were at least in part attracted to the roll-operated piano because of its perceived novelty as a compositional medium. There had been articles in Der Auftakt and Musikblätter des Anbruch, including an important contribution to the latter in January 1926 by H.H. Stuckenschmidt, entitled ‘Musikautomaten’, and it was at the Donaueschinger Musiktagen in July of that year that a number of important German roll compositions received their premieres. The Toccata reproduced here was first performed in public on Sunday 25 July 1926, along with pieces by Ernst Toch and Gerhard Münch, being repeated at a number of locations in Germany during the following year, including Ulm and Chemnitz, no doubt with the willing co-operation of a Welte company sharing the imminent and general worldwide slump.

Dr Erich Steinhard, writing in Der Auftakt, vividly portrays the atmosphere of the first performances:

“A brilliant Welte-Mignon played. IT played. The hall was bathed in light from some invisible source, and you could have heard a pin drop as Hindemith adjusted the levers of the instrument, which was to replay three worthy pieces by Ernst Toch.

‘The piano begins to play: musical studies for the instrument, toccatas with row upon row of unplayable chords, with a velocity that the most accomplished virtuoso could never even approach, with a precision far beyond the capability of a human being, with a superhuman power of sound, with a geometrical clarity of rhythm, tempo, dynamics and phrasing, which only a machine can really bring out.”

What a wonderful box of tricks! The piano reaches the end of the composition and the audience hesitates. Should one applaud? There is, after all, no-one sitting there. It is only a machine.
last just a little applause, which becomes ever more enthusiastic. Cries of "Encore!" And indeed, the piano repeats faultlessly, with the same precision as the first time through.'

At this particular concert, the Toch studies were followed by those of Gerhard Münch and by Hindemith's Toccata and Rondo, after which there were performances on the Sphärophon of music by Rimsky-Korsakov, and the proceedings ended with the Triadisches Ballett by Oskar Schlemmer, for which Hindemith had written music for Welte Philharmonic Organ. Incidentally, the Rondo by Hindemith was an arrangement of a piece from his Klaviervielse, Op 37, a grouping of normal piano studies and other works that he was writing at about that time.

Inevitably, when one is transcribing from roll, the problem of metre must always be addressed. Clearly Hindemith, who was closely involved in the preparation of the original roll, intended some musical phrasing, including pauses and agogic hesitations at the beginning of imitative entries. Thus the decision whether a pause is indeed a pause or simply an extra beat devolves on the present-day editor, although there are often clues in piano rolls, such as the positioning of sustaining pedal perforations, which often occur at the start of measures. Generally the music of the Toccata appears to be in triple time, which makes sense of the accents and the pedalling, though with a certain amount of speed variation, especially during the introduction to the main fugal theme.

The Toccata has been set by means of the Finale program for PC, and in view of the size reductions made in order to fit the music into a reasonable number of pages, the intermittent use of 8vo clefs should be noted, both in the treble and bass. Accidentals apply only to the measure in which they appear, with the exception of notes tied across measure lines, where the initial pitch remains constant. Phrasing and articulation follow the note lengths on the published Welte roll, but dynamic indications should not be taken as authoritative until a definitive recording of the piece is produced at some point in the future.

Notes:

1 This passage is of course translated from the original German, but it is interesting to note how closely the latter follows Paderewski's comments on the pianola from some twenty-five years before:

"... mit einer Schnelligkeit, die auch vom virtuosesten Spieler niemals, auch nur annähernd, erreicht werden könnte..."

"It is astonishing to see this little device at work executing the masterpieces of pianoforte literature with a dexterity, clearness, and velocity which no player, however great, can approach."
Tone-Variation and Time-Variation in relation to Tempo Rubato

John B. McEwen

This article was previously published as chapter 1 of Tempo Rubato, Oxford University Press, 1928, and is reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press

Two of the most important elements of artistic performance are tone-variation and time-variation. These have not always been considered as essential; indeed, many of the early instruments were incapable of much variety of tone, and in the period which followed the invention of notation and the development of counterpoint, the free rhythmic performance of music was replaced by a style in which there seems to have prevailed a rigid and strict regularity. Modern taste, however, demands not only the employment of constant gradations and contrasts of tone quantities and qualities, but also a considerable use of variations in time-values. Such time variations constitute what is generally known as ‘Tempo Rubato’—literally robbed or stolen time—and have generally been regarded as dependent on the taste and artistic sense of the performer.

The earliest formal recognition of this factor of musical effect seems to be the principles laid down by Tosi (c. 1650-1730), quoted in Musical Ornamentation by Dannreuther:

‘In this place speaking of stealing the time, it regards particularly the Vocal, or the performance on a single instrument in the Pathetic and Tender; when the Bass goes at an exactly regular Pace, the other Part retards or anticipates in a singular manner, for the sake of Expression, but after that returns to its exactness, to be guided by the Bass.’

In the same monument of research and musical learning, vol. ii, p. 59, is a translation from Ch. Ph. E. Bach’s Versuch, where this effect is formally defined as follows:

‘If the executant upon the clavier manages matters in such wise that one hand appears to play against time whilst the other hand strictly observes the beat, then the right thing has been done. In such case the parts rarely move simultaneously, but they fit together all the same.’

*  *  *  *  *  *  *

‘Players, singers and instrumentalists, when they are performing with accompaniments, will find this irregular sort of tempo much easier than clavier players; for a clavier player’s left hand generally accompanies his right. When the clavier is played without accompaniment the bass may here and there be allowed to deviate a little should any necessity arise, there can be no harm in this so long as the harmony remains the same.’

These quotations seem to indicate that the use of Tempo Rubato in the classical style was usually confined to music constructed in such a way that the
bass was able to control and at the same time give significance to the part played rubato by maintaining a strict and steady regularity.

The last paragraph of the quotation from C. P. E. Bach, however, suggests that, exceptionally, the whole structure of the music was subjected to these Rubato variations. We have, however, a categorical statement by Nissen that in playing adagio movements Mozart never allowed the rubato of the right hand to disturb the regular movement of the lett.

Coming to more modern times Chopin. whatever he may have actually done in performance, intended to carry out the same principle. So, he says, 'The graces are part of the text, and therefore part of the time; they must be justly fitted in— and there lies the trouble.' The singing hand may deviate, the accompaniment must keep time.' 'Fancy a tree with its branches swayed by the wind; the stem represents the steady time, the moving leaves are the melodic inflexions. This is what is meant by Tempo and Tempo Rubato.'

The above quotations, however, make it quite clear that the classical masters in employing Tempo Rubato— save in the exceptional case mentioned by C. P. E. Bach—intended that it should be confined to one part, and that it should take place against another part which proceeds steadily and regularly. Now, of recent years there has been a considerable extension of the principle, which has carried the use of Tempo Rubato far beyond that indicated by the dicta and recorded practice of classical musicians.

Observance of the practice of any great modern artist will show that these tempo variations are not wholly nor even usually confined to one part of the musical structure. On the contrary, the whole structure, melody, accompaniment and harmony, is subjected to rhythmical stresses which produce fluctuations of time affecting the music as a whole. Obviously, as in Art theory ought to follow practice, it is worth while to examine this practice as closely as possible, to see whether there will emerge from the results any general principle which may serve as a guide to the teacher and the student. Just as the practice of the great composers is recognised as the basis of the principles of composition, so the practice of the great performing artists may reasonably be expected to furnish some clue to the principles underlying performance.

Thanks to modern science it is possible to obtain from such performances a permanent record which, in the matter of time-values at least, is above suspicion, and which enables the student to observe and study at his leisure the manner in which an artist manipulates the time and duration outlines in a piece of music.

Recorded music-rolls issued for use on mechanically operated instruments are actually cut on a machine which is controlled by the keys of the pianoforte on which the artist plays. They are an exact record in terms of space, of the time relations between the sounds of the piece as played by the pianist. Many
of the greatest pianists of the day have made these records and have witnessed and attested their truth.

Before, however, going on to deal with these authoritative records I should like, in view of the obvious development of the idea of Tempo Rubato in modern times, to note the chief points made with reference to it by some of the modern writers who have discussed this subject.

In Grove’s Dictionary (the first edition) we find a definition of Tempo Rubato which is of a wider scope than those quoted above. Tempo Rubato ‘consists of a slight ad libitum slackening or quickening of the time in any passage, in accordance with the unchangeable rule (!) that in all such passages any bar in which this licence is taken must be of exactly the same length as the other bars in the movement, so that if the first part of the bar be played slowly, the other part must be taken quicker than the ordinary time of the movement to make up for it, and vice versa, if the bar be hurried at the beginning, there must be a rallentando at the end.’ This definition is repeated, practically without any alteration or addition, in the 1910 edition.

Mathis Lussy in his book on Musical Expression never mentions Tempo Rubato. There are numerous specific injunctions relating to modifications of Tempo in performance, but this idea of balancing the amount of ritardando by an exactly equivalent amount of accelerando and vice versa seems never to have occurred or been suggested to him.

In Technique and Expression in Pianoforte Playing by Franklin Taylor, p. 73, Tempo Rubato is thus defined: ‘one part of a phrase is quickened and another slackened in proportion, so that the general march of the rhythm is undisturbed, and the duration of the whole phrase remains the same as it would have been if played in strict time throughout; . . . it should be observed that any independent accompaniment to a rubato phrase must always keep strict time, and it is therefore quite possible that no note of a rubato melody will fall together with its corresponding note in the accompaniment, except, perhaps, the first note in each bar.’ Except for, first, the substitution of the word ‘phrase’ for ‘bar’; and, second, the specific statement that the time of the whole phrase remains unchanged by the use of Tempo Rubato, this definition is substantially the same as that in Grove’s Dictionary.

Later writers on musical expression have, for the most part, treated the subject with all the care and attention which this important factor of artistic performance deserves. Based on what are essentially the same principles as those quoted above, the modern definition of Tempo Rubato has been brought more into line with musical actuality by avoiding the fallacy of making it dependent on the accidents or the superficial aspects of notation. This is so much to the good. Musicians generally now realise that the imperfect conventions of notation are not the determining factors in either construction or performance.
Apart from this distinction, however, the modern theory of Tempo Rubato is that of the older writers, with certain developments and enlargements. The idea of a strict balance between the plus and the minus side is still here; we must make up for time spent, and the converse. But the dictum which comes down from C. E. P. Bach that the 'independent accompaniment to a rubato phrase must always keep strict time' has somewhat receded into the background, and there appears an entirely new conception; viz. that of an average pulse or beat, founded on the regular division of the music as played in strict time, which is ignored or disregarded in playing rubato, but which must be 'returned to' at the end of such rubato. According to the advocates of this theory, in rubato 'the only thing we can determine with exactitude is the position of this return to pulse'; which return 'always has a definite and invariable position for each phrase'.

In the old rubato as imaged by the classical writers, there was always present an audible background in regular and steady tempo. The modern theory, however, seems to mean that this background of regular and steady tempo still remains; but it is now inaudible, pursuing its course only in the mind of the performer. In this way, although he may digress and divagate to any extent during the rubato, he must so contrive that he arrives at a precise particular spot in the phrase in exact synchronization with this inaudible steady tempo.

In my own book, The Thought in Music, written some twenty years ago and published in 1912, I adopted the orthodox and traditional view of Tempo Rubato described above. At that time recorded music-rolls were not available, and I accepted without question a tradition which it did not seem possible to prove or disprove by experimental evidence; but after the publication of that book, further thought about the subject suggested difficulties and contradictions between the traditional theory and the conditions, musical and psychological, of performance.

On becoming acquainted with these recorded rolls, it seemed to me that, by reference to the practice of the world's greatest pianists, some data might be obtained which would enable the musician to test the truth of the two so-called Laws regarding the employment of those time inflexions which are generally described as Tempo Rubato.

The rules or laws of artistic practice differ somewhat from the laws which govern the working of the exact sciences, and their operations cannot be expected to be attended with the same uniformity nor scrutinized with the same rigour. Nevertheless, we are justified in demanding consistency in their application; and if their proof or disproof by experimental evidence is possible, it is necessary and right that we should examine and consider that evidence.

The two 'laws' of rubato can be put in the form of two questions. The answers to these, supplied by the examination of the recorded music-rolls, will
enable us to test the truth of these laws.
(1) Have the artists who recorded these rolls, when 'playing an independent accompaniment to a rubato melody or phrase', kept strict time in this accompaniment?
(2) Have these artists, when employing time variations (rubato), so balanced these variations, that the 'duration of the whole phrase remains the same as it would have been, if played in strict time throughout'?

Applying the test of actual artistic practice to the first of these questions let us take two contrasted examples, (a) the Nocturne in F sharp major of Chopin, Op. 15, No.2, played by Pachmann; and (b) the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven, played by Carreño. In both of these examples the musical structure is of the kind which ought to be affected by the first Law: an expressive melody with a simple regular accompaniment of uniform character. There are many other examples of this type of structure which the reader can examine for himself.

In the Chopin Nocturne the L.H. accompanies the R.H. melody with a slow, regular, rocking figure of quaver arpeggios:

![Musical notation]

The lengths of these quavers, measured from perforation to perforation on the music-roll, are (in millimetres) as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st Bar</th>
<th>2nd Bar</th>
<th>3rd Bar</th>
<th>4th Bar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Bar</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Bar</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Bar</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reader will see that so far from these quavers being equal in length, as they would be in strict time, there is variation extending from 23mm to 53mm.
In the Beethoven Sonata there are time variations in the accompanying quaver triplets which, in view of the character and date of the work, may perhaps occasion more surprise. I omit the introductory bars:

![Musical notation](image)

The table of figures immediately following gives the value of each crotchet beat in millimetres. The reader will note that there is pronounced variation in the value of these crotchets.

![Table of figures](image)

There is similar variety in the lengths of the accompanying quavers. The values of the first twelve quavers are displayed in the following table. There is similar variation all through the whole movement.

![Table of quaver values](image)

In view of the above facts, the answer to the first of the two questions on p.13 is obviously and clearly in the negative.

The answer to the second of the two questions is displayed in what follows.

The second so-called law of rubato states that 'the duration of the whole phrase remains the same as it would have been if it (the phrase) had been played in strict time throughout'. It is obvious that under this law a performer can bring any vagary or irregularity of time whatsoever, and justify it as 'Tempo Rubato', provided he waits till the end of the phrase before defining the value of the average pulse according to which his strict time progresses. Any performance of a phrase, the most absurd, ridiculous, out-of-time one, will give the same average beat as any other, provided it takes up the same amount of time.

To illustrate this point I have drawn out a number of graphs, founded on actual performances recorded in the Duo-Art music-rolls, which embody the above facts in a visible form. In these graphs the relative duration-values of the notes in the phrase used as an example are indicated by the dimensions of
blocks drawn on a system of spacing analogous to the musical staff. Notes which are equal in value are indicated by equal-sized blocks,, and any difference in duration-value is indicated by a corresponding difference in the sizes of the blocks. As our notation system of minim, crotchet, &c., is based on the principle of the division of the longest note into aliquot parts, the size of any block, will always bear a simple and definite proportion to any other block when the graph is drawn to represent this notation value. Thus, the block representing the value of a minim will be twice the length of that corresponding to a crotchet, four times that of a quaver, and so on. In a record of artistic performance, on the other hand, the variation of the time-values will be indicated by corresponding variations in the size of the blocks.

Diagram No. I has been prepared from music-rolls recorded by Busoni and Pachmann. It represents the first four-bar phrase of the well-known Prelude in D♭ of Chopin, ending with the third beat of the fourth bar. These two records have been reduced to the same scale, and are set out against a 'strict time' graph plotted on the values of the aliquot divisions of this scale. This does not prove that Busoni and Pachmann observed the rule that 'the duration of the whole phrase remains the same as it would have been if played in strict time throughout', but only shows the relations between their particular time inflexions. The curve No. 4 is the reductio ad absurdum of this rule. It shows how an absurdly 'out-of-time' performance can be described as satisfying this rule just as much as the best-proportioned Rubato.

\[
\begin{align*}
1. \text{'Curve' illustrating 'Strict Time'.} \\
2. \text{'Curve' illustrating record by Busoni.} \\
3. \text{'Curve' illustrating record by Pachmann.} \\
4. \text{'Curve' illustrating 'out-of-time' performance.}
\end{align*}
\]

\text{(Scale formed on average beat of the four-bar phrase.)}

The graph illustrating strict time (No. 1 in Diagram I) is set out mathematically in the same amount of space as is taken up by the other
graphs, Nos. 2, 3 and 4. Its object is to show the relations of the time-variations, illustrated in these other graphs, to strict time.

Each section between the perpendicular lines of this diagram represents the value of a quaver of strict time, and is got by dividing the whole space—which represents sixteen quavers—into equal parts. We can therefore call the quaver (or any multiple of the quaver) the average beat of the whole phrase.

It is only by taking the average beat of the whole rhythmical division concerned that the different variations in different performances can be compared. If I take the average beat of the first bar as the standard of measurement, the result will be quite different.5

In Diagram No. II this has been done. Here I have taken the average beat of the first bar of the Pachmann record and reduced the Busoni record to this new scale. The reader will see that now all three graphs complete the first bar together, but are at sixes and sevens at the end of the phrase, and therefore furnish no real comparison one with another.

---

DIAGRAM II
1. 'Curve' of 'Strict Time'.
2. 'Curve' of record by Pachmann.
3. 'Curve' of record by Busoni.
(Scale formed on average beat of first bar of Pachmann record.)

Further consideration of the conception of the average beat leads to the conclusion that we are entitled to demand that the artist who claims that his rubato satisfies and is regulated by the law, 'that the duration of the whole phrase remains the same as it would have done if it (the phrase) had been played in strict time throughout,' shall maintain the same average beat throughout the whole piece. It is obvious that rhythmic divisions of the same dimensions, will then take exactly the same time in performance; as otherwise, there will be one average beat and one Tempo in one rhythmic division, and another average beat with another Tempo in another rhythmic division.

Any pianist may test his own performance with regard to this matter by
reasonably accurate timing. If the average beat of one rhythmic division differs from that of another similar division, then obviously the performance is not regulated by the above 'law'. If the examination of the recorded performances of the world's greatest pianists shows that the performances are not regulated by this 'law', then it is surely time to question the validity of this 'law' and to demand from what and from whence it has acquired its sanction.

The analysis from this point of view of the Chopin Nocturne in F sharp major recorded by Pachmann, gives results which are noted below. The slurs show the rhythmical units and the figures the dimensions, in millimetres, of these in the music-roll.

This piece opens with an eight-bar sentence made up of three rhythmical units, the first and the second of which are two bars in length while the third is four bars. The whole eight-bar sentence is immediately repeated in a highly ornamented form. Between the two sentences there is, in this particular performance, what amounts to a pause (at *) on the spread chord of F sharp, which takes up 32mm of the music-roll.

The values of the average crotchet beats in the above range from 63mm to 89mm. Even if the 'phrasing' is not accepted, the reader cannot ignore the fact that the average beat of the first sentence equals 72mm, whereas that of the repetition is just over 81mm.

Similarly, the analysis of the record of the first movement of the
'Moonlight' sonata by Carreño shows variation in the values of the average crotchet beat, ranging from 43.5mm. to 56.5mm, on the basis of the rhythmization shown below. Even if this rhythmization is disputed the average beat in the first phrase of four bars works out at 53.9mm, while that in the five-bar phrase has the value of 49.5mm. In what can be regarded as an interpolated bar the average crotchet equals 43.5mm.

Allied to this second 'law of rubato' is the modern conception of the 'return to the pulse'. This expression seems to mean that at certain points in the musical progression (probably the climaxes or perhaps the ends of the component phrases) the same amount of time will have been spent — in spite of the variations of Rubato — as would have been required by a performance in strict time. It is therefore simply a paraphrase of the more definite rule which I have called the second Law. It is open to the same objection that even if it is a realizable possibility, it is impossible to distinguish between out-of-time performances and well proportioned Rubatos by this alone; as, failing any other determining principle, anything may happen between these returns to pulse. But a closer examination of the conditions under which this return to pulse would be achieved suggests other difficulties.

The mental processes which would accompany and control this regular departure from and return to one consistent pulse would seem to have to follow one of two alternative courses. Either (1) the performer will maintain unbroken a steady stream of these inexorable pulses in the background of his mind, at the same time as, under the influence of emotional stresses, he employs all the complex and extended Rubatos which the modern artist desires and demands; or, (2) he will disregard, during these Rubatos, this inexorable pulse, and — without hesitation, without doubt — pick it up again at that particular spot where it is due to reappear. An additional difficulty in returning to the pulse is that in some cases it may not seem ever to have been established.
Thus, when the initial phrase of a piece is played with musically eloquent rubatos, there can be no previously determined inexorable pulse, except perhaps for the actual performer. Because although the performer may privately, in the recesses of his mind, enunciate to himself a definite inexorable pulse before he begins to play, it is obviously impossible for the audience to be in possession of this; and therefore it is difficult to see how, when the performance of this phrase is finished, the audience can realise that this performance was a real rubato performance and not simply a loosely timed one. As in their minds there is no previously determined pulse, it is difficult to see how they can return to something which has never existed and which has never been established.

I do not for the present propose to discuss which of the above processes is the more likely to take place in the mind of the performer. Personally, I incline to the belief that neither is possible for the ordinary person; but it is, of course, true that great artists possess faculties which are beyond the reach of ordinary people. The evidence to be found in the recorded performances has not, so far, shown that even great artists are able to carry out successfully such mental jugglery.

I have carefully examined a large number of these records, particulars of which it is unnecessary to quote, as they only confirm the conclusions arrived at. However, the complete number of these recorded rolls runs now into some hundreds; and any one who has the necessary time and interest can extend the field of investigation.

In concluding this chapter I should like – if it is possible – to guard against misconception and misrepresentation by stating that I do not quote these recorded rolls as examples of interpretation, and I am not prepared to endorse or approve everything that is found in them. They are quoted for one reason only, viz. to see whether the artists who have made them carry out in their performances the rules of time-variation as laid down by the theorists. If these rules have any authority, we may not find them exemplified all the time, but we ought to find them adhered to in the majority of cases.

Nor are these records quoted in order to formulate new rules in place of these discredited a priori ‘laws’. It is no doubt true that there are guiding principles of artistic practice. But these cannot depend for their authority on arbitrary formulae operating with rigid accuracy.

That belief in the convincing power of his intuition, which is usually an unanswerable reason for the practice of the artist, is quite a sufficient and adequate explanation for that practice. No one except the most hide-bound pedant, will expect the artist to regulate his practice by reference to a set of rules and regulations, formulated by intellectual process and operating independently of his intuition. In the heat of artistic performance things are done, and peculiarities or treatment can be justified which are too personal
and individual ever to be crystallized into a guide or reason for universal practice, or to be compressed into the defining limits of a general 'rule' or 'law'.

With regard to the vital elements of musical interpretation – tone and time fluctuation – this is particularly the case. No two performers will ever view the emotional content of an art-work from the same angle; and – what is perhaps of more significance – will never react to it as it develops and unfolds itself in the act of performance, in exactly the same way. The equilibrium of the living performance is only maintained in a condition of stability by continual adjustment and readjustment to the musical and emotional stimulus. The fire glows, the flame leaps and flickers and its motion and its continual and ready response to the wind of feeling are the guarantee and the condition of its life.

Notes

2. These records, and the many other rolls which I have examined, are published by the Aeolian Co. New Bond Street, London, and are known as 'Duo-Art' rolls.
3. It may seem superfluous to emphasize the purpose of these diagrams, which is clearly explained in the text. Each illustrates one point in the argument. As, however, some of my critics have misunderstood this purpose, and have misrepresented Diagram No.II as the basis of my whole examination of the question of rubato, it is necessary to state specifically that this particular diagram is introduced solely as an illustration of the possible misconception of what is meant by the average beat, and to stress the fact that time variations of two different performances of the same phrase can be compared only by the use of a scale of measurement founded on the average beat obtained from the whole of the rhythmic division concerned.
Reviews:

A Pianola Prom – Purcell Room, 7th August 1995

A concert right in the middle of the holiday season may not seem to be a very sensible idea when it is always a struggle to attract an audience even in the height of the concert season. Nevertheless, there was an exceptional season for the choice of dates for the Purcell Room event on 7th August 1995. It was right in the middle of the ‘AMICA’* London ‘95’ Convention and had been very specifically requested by the Americans to be a part of their week’s events. The prospect of a captive audience of 150 before any tickets had been offered for sale to supporters and the public was far too good an opportunity to pass by, so the date was fixed.

The programme was put together to be attractive to an audience in the holiday spirit while still reflecting the presenters’ usual approach to the tradition built up over more than 20 years of South Bank shows. It was also taken as a chance to show the Americans the sort of standards at which the Brits aim both in terms of the reproducing piano and the foot-operated pianola. The Duo-Art was represented by Peter Davis’s converted pianola which played well up to its usual very high standard, showing off the qualities of the house 9’ Steinway. The standard push-ups were the stalwarts belonging to the two presenters, Rex Lawson and Denis Hall.

The first half consisted of Duo-Art performances, and just to demonstrate that we Brits really did know a thing or two about roll making in the ’20s, examples from both sides of the Atlantic were played. Of the solo items, this reviewer would single out the magnificent Dohnanyi Rhapsody op.11 no.1 played in the grandest possible manner by Frank Laffitte. It brought back memories of a previous concert which was attended by a frail, elderly Mr Laffitte who touchingly acknowledged the wild applause for the performance he had recorded so many years before. High on the list, too, was the Nocturne (Ragusa) of Schelling played by Paderewski. This roll, one of the finest in the Duo-Art catalogue, not only demonstrated just how subtle the reproducing piano can be, but was particularly poignant in recalling more peaceful times in the former Yugoslavia – Ragusa is the old name for the resort of Dubrovnik, and Schelling depicts most romantically the moonlight scene.

Good as the solo Duo-Art performances were, pride of place must be reserved for Guthrie Luke, a pupil of Alfred Cortot, who came and played so beautifully. He introduced himself with Schumann’s Romance op.28 no.2, but the climax to the first half of the evening was his interpretation, with his former master, of the Variations Symphoniques of Cesar Franck. Cortot made a Duo-Art roll of the solo part of this work in the early 1920s for performance with orchestra, one of the recordings Aeolian commissioned for their promotional concerts. The version we heard had most certainly not been used
for some 70 years, and Guthrie undertook to provide the accompaniment on a second piano. Cortot’s interpretation was at times wilful in the extreme, much more so than on his two later disc recordings of the work, and Guthrie put in a great deal of effort to familiarize himself with Cortot’s ways to give us a seamless, triumphant performance. Between Guthrie Luke, Cortot and Rex Lawson, who ably gave Cortot his entry cues, we enjoyed a memorable, utterly convincing performance of a work which is heard far too rarely in the concert hall today.

For the second half, the stage was cleared of Duo-Art paraphernalia, and the South Bank Steinway and Bösendorfer grands were set up with the two 88-note pianolas. It was the chance to make a welcome break with tradition, and to show off something of the variety of which the pianola is capable to the Americans, whose usual ‘pumper’ experience is loud, non-expression popular or jazz/ragtime music. That jazz ‘hand-played’ rolls can be made to sound really musical was brilliantly demonstrated by Dan Wilson, whose appreciation of how to play this music, and his ability to project his interpretations through the pianola are unique. This reviewer hopes that at least some of the audience realized what it was listening to. Recent comments by a professional reviewer, that the rolls of James P. Johnson bear little comparison to his regular records, only serve to reveal how little is known as to how well many hand-played rolls can be made to sound.

Margaret Davis delighted the audience with her singing of Chaminade’s concert song L’Ele, followed by A Brown Bird Singing by Haydn Wood. She was accompanied by Rex Lawson (pianola). A surprise item was slipped into the second half by way of AMICAn, Earl Scheelar, winner of the 1995 International Pumper Contest, playing his entry on the pianola, and simultaneously soloing on his cornet! This brought the house down. The programme continued with the Lawson-Hall pianola duo who, in recognition of their American guests, included Dahl’s Quodlibet on American Folk-Tunes. They concluded the evening with a special two-pianola arrangement of items from Pineapple Poll, whose composer, Sir Charles Mackerras, had given his blessing to the transcription of his music.

The concert was a joint presentation by the Player Piano Group and the Pianola Institute. The capacity audience enthusiastically showed its appreciation for an evening of varied pianola fare. As the instrument approaches its centenary, occasions such as this reassure its devotees that its future lies not only in preserving its past glories, but that it is very much a living instrument, fit and ready to face its next 100 years.

* Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors’ Association.

We Europeans certainly have a way with pianolas. Not satisfied with mere residential collections or the odd (often very odd) museum, we also strive for public recognition by means of concerts, CDs and broadcasts, so there is very little that we haven’t seen, heard, or otherwise experienced. At least, there was very little until Carles Santos arrived on the scene!

Senor Santos, who speaks Catalan volubly and hails from Barcelona, must be one of the most original theatrical musicians in the world. He mixes Salvador Dali with Billy Smart’s Circus, flamenco with minimalism, the Rite of Spring with page 3 of the Sun, to produce a stunning mixture of visual and aural entertainment. How can one begin to describe the effect of a very competent violinist playing chamber music whilst hanging upside-down from a rope and flying round the stage like an antipodean Peter Pan? What kind of imagination comes up with a pianola that weaves its way across the stage in fully automatic fashion, pirouetting, bowing, darting here and there, engaging in musical conversation with a mermaid, a ship’s captain, and groups of scantily clad sirens?

The evening’s title, in Catalan, means “The Splendid Embarrassment of a Deed Badly Done”. This writer is not greatly accustomed to theatregoing, so any deeper significance of the evening’s spectacle may have passed him by, although on an immediate level the music and the performance were rivetingly memorable. The mermaid’s hair ran on and on across the whole stage, a rather unorthodox ménage à trois (with discreet hosepipe) gave a good imitation of urinating into an open and constantly gargling mouth, and the ship’s captain, who wore his ship on his head, serenaded the mermaid as she lay over the piano keys, and steered the Steck by means of a capstan around his neck. People jumped in and out of fridges and wardrobes, slamming doors and chanting tribal rituals - you get the general idea.

Of interest to the readers of this journal will be the technical details of the performance. It should be said that all the cast were genuinely proud of the pianola and its additions, and gave us a guided tour of the assorted push-buttons and relays after the show. Xavier Garcia, of Parts Pianos in Barcelona, modified an American Aeolian Steck upright pianola piano, with very great expertise, both pneumatically and electronically. The instrument was controlled offstage by two remote handsets, the messages running through long cables that travelled via the flies and so came down vertically to the piano as it moved around. One handset looked after the piano’s motion, while the other dealt with musical effects, setting the tempo and the overall loudness, and pausing and restarting the roll, as at a Duo-Art concert.

The Steck had been mounted on a low platform, with wheels at each
corner, so that without power it could roll along much more easily than with the normal small castors. In addition, a rotary dolly with several wheels attached was fixed under the centre of the instrument, but normally retracted when the piano was to remain still. If movement was required, the central dolly was forced downwards by means of a powerful motor and rotary thread, and then different sets of wheels were able to turn and to move forwards and sideways. The musical remote control only had a limited ability to affect the dynamics, but nevertheless the duet for (swinging) violin and pianola was strangely beautiful, with no worries about the roll drowning out the live musician.

Rolls for this and a previous music-theatre entertainment of Carles Santos had been perforated by Michael Boyd, with the masters transferred to computer by Rex Lawson. It is good to know that Britain still has a useful place in the European Community! Unfortunately the Companyia Carles Santos were only invited for three performances at this year’s Edinburgh Festival, but there are apparently plans to return to these shores in the next year or two. Leave your inhibitions at home and go to see it - you will never sit down to the pianola in the same way again!
Steinway and Sons
Richard K. Lieberman, Yale University Press, 1995

The Steinway Saga
D. W. Fostle, Scribner, 1995

Denis Hall

It seems extraordinary that these two books, which cover so much of the same ground, should be published almost simultaneously. Extraordinary also that neither of the authors claims any specialist knowledge of pianos, either as a practising musician or from having had connections with the piano trade. In the light of this, then, one needs to consider the books on their own terms, and not look for a technical dissertation on the development of the Steinway piano, or a detailed history of the company.

Lieberman calls his book Steinway and Sons, and this is exactly what it is about – the Steinway family, and how its fortunes (or otherwise) affected the famous company and the pianos it designed and manufactured. Lieberman is an American, and he approaches his task from that angle. The Steinway family emigrated from Germany to America in the middle of the last century, and settled in New York where Germans were the largest single immigrant group in that part of the country. Initially under the guidance of Heinrich Steinway (Steinweg), the founder, and subsequently led by one of his sons, William, the company prospered, and became an unstoppable force in the life of musical New York. William took care of the marketing of the name, backed up by his brother, Henry Junior, and after the latter’s early death in 1865, by Theodore. Henry Junior and Theodore between them designed an instrument which to all intents and purposes is the modern piano we know today. William seems to have been the most potent force in the whole Steinway story, having been president of the company from 1865 until his death in 1896. Allowing for a number of trade depressions, Steinway and Sons prospered until the death of the third president, Frederick Steinway, in 1927. Up till that time, there had always been two members of the family actively involved in the organisation who gave each other support and sparked off the initiatives so necessary to the success of any company. After that date, when Theodore reluctantly took over the presidency, it was more a question of survival than anything else.

The depression of the ’30s, followed by the second world war, and then by competition from cinemas and television, all conspired to relegate the once ubiquitous piano to the backwaters of society. In 1957, the firm was taken over by Henry Ziegler Steinway, a businessman, and the last family president. He vowed that Steinway and Sons would not kill him, as he thought it had done his father, and in the face of competition from Yamaha, in 1972 sold out to CBS. Although Henry was nominally kept on the staff, he no longer had
influence on what went on, and the accountants rather than the piano men became all powerful.

Since that date, the famous make has survived, although from time to time, there have been serious questions raised as to the quality of the pianos being built. Steinway and Sons are now owned by Selmers, the manufacturers of woodwind instruments, and Henry Z. Steinway still has a desk in Steinway Hall in New York, but that is about the extent of his involvement in the firm.

Lieberman, a professor of history at the La Guardia Community College of the City University of New York, has had access to the Steinway Collection which is housed there, and so has been able to sift through much previously unavailable material with the eye of the professional historian and writer to produce what he acknowledges is ‘a good history . . . for a popular audience’. This is one of the book’s weaknesses; to this writer, an amateur pianist in a very small way, and a lover of pianos, the subject under review could to advantage have been aimed elsewhere than at a popular audience. Nevertheless, the book is a well-balanced view of America’s most famous piano manufacturing firm. A big omission is the absence of adequate reference to the European operations. Steinway Hall in London was opened in 1875 to sell American pianos. The Hamburg factory was set up in 1880 to exploit the cheap labour there and to assemble parts imported from New York. In the early days, Hamburg Steinways were considered inferior to their American counterparts, and even in later days when the quality was no longer in doubt, the output from Germany was comparatively so small that New York appeared to regard the European operation as a rather poor subsidiary. Very few pianos crossed the Atlantic, and the standing of Steinways in Britain and on the Continent demonstrates the importance of the German factory; indeed, for quite some years (probably since the sell-off to CBS), many American pianists have preferred the Hamburg instrument to that made in New York. In spite of this, there is scant acknowledgement of the importance to Steinway of that part of the business, something which will be particularly noticeable to European readers.

Lieberman, by setting out to be popular, gives us a good read; D. W. Fostle offers us something rather different. He is an author with a background in business, technology and finance. The dust cover of his book tells us that is the author of Speedboat, where he first recounted the exploits of William Steinway. He appears to have had full access to the diaries of William, and up to the date of his death, 1896, the book is overfull of detail. What we have is a remarkable insight into the industrial life of nineteenth century New York, with the firm of Steinway and Sons taking its rightful place in the action. The book rambles, but in this first and most important period of the Steinway saga, we learn why and how the name of Steinway achieved its supremacy – through the superiority of its pianos, and William Steinway’s interest in the success of
the firm, his love of music, and his involvement in the social, artistic and commercial (but not political) life of the city. The detail at times becomes tiresome, but it is a fascinating story. After the death of William, the book somehow loses direction, and the remainder of the history of the family is dealt with rather sketchily.

The European organisation gets even shorter shrift than is allotted to it by Lieberman, and after the sale of the firm to CBS, Fostle hardly has a good word to say about the piano manufacture. Whether or not this is justified, it somehow reads like second-hand criticism rather than something he really understands and appreciated. The final chapter of the book attempts to analyze the unique quality of the Steinway tone by utilizing the services of a minor concert pianist and getting him to play a Steinway, a Baldwin, a Yamaha and a Bösendorfer concert grand. In addition to the subjective decisions of the pianist, scientific readings of various aspects of the pianos' qualities were taken, but the experiment does not have credibility.

The important association with the player piano receives scant attention in both books. From 1910 until the early '30s, Steinway had an agreement with the Aeolian Company, manufacturer of the 'Pianola' and the 'Duo-Art' reproducing piano. The arrangement was that pianos would be provided, with specially adapted cases to incorporate the player actions, to Aeolian who sold the completed instruments through their own sales network. Steinway's attitude to the player piano was always lukewarm, but the additional sales made a substantial contribution to the company's turnover, particularly in the years immediately following World War One. Steinway in Germany had a rather closer relationship with Welte & Sohne, manufacturer of the important Welte-Mignon reproducing piano, and Steinway-Welte pianos were sold from the Steinway showrooms in Europe. Neither of these arrangements is adequately covered by either author.

While both books have their limitations, in some ways they complement each other, and it is good that they have been written. It would have been even better if someone with some sympathy towards the splendid pianos there were writing about had undertaken the task.
AMICA London '95

The 1995 annual convention of the Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors’ Association of America.

Denis Hall

AMICA holds an annual four day meeting for its members each year, and these events have taken place in various parts of North America since the Association was founded in 1963. As a result of a suggestion from an enthusiast in England in 1989, AMICA made a decision to investigate the practicality of holding a convention in the United Kingdom. At the 1992 convention held in Chicago, Rex Lawson, Malcolm Cole and Denis Hall were approached to seek their help in the organisation of such a convention in 1995, and Dorothy Bromage of AMICA, whom Rex, Malcolm and Denis had known for a number of years, was appointed Chairman.

Realising that the instrument collections in England could not vie with those in the States, a draft programme of events was submitted which alternated mechanical music interests alongside more general sight-seeing visits. With a view to making the convention more international and attractive to the Americans, for whom the cost would be considerable, it was planned to last a whole week rather than the usual four days, and would take place partly in and around London, the rest of the time being spent in the Netherlands. By the middle of 1993, the arrangements had been finalised to the point at which the accommodation in London and Holland had been booked, and transport arrangements for the whole week made. A total number for the convention was fixed at 150, which was as many as could reasonably be moved from one location to another, and which could also be accommodated at some of the events. In May 1993, Dorothy Bromage came to London for a week to agree the plans.

By the summer of 1994, the final programme had been fixed, and a working party of 10 people was set up. This met regularly from the autumn of 1994. Three couples, Paddy and Tony Austin, Margaret and Peter Davis and Eileen and Jack Law were appointed guides for the whole week and travelled with the convention. Rex Lawson and Denis Hall co-ordinated the arrangements, part of the time being with the convention, and at other times operating behind the scenes.

Mike Davies and Bob Wilson were busy in England, and Jo Jongen and Frits Speetjens were in charge of the events in Holland. Of those originally involved, Malcolm Cole had to drop out because of ill health.

The convention was fully booked, the numbers being 135 Americans, 7 Australians and 10 English. Many of the participants arrived early in Europe
or stayed after the convention to continue their holidays. The complete schedule of events is set out below, this ambitious programme being successfully carried through only because of very detailed planning, particularly as to timings. A few highlights of the week were the opening dinner on board the Silver Barracuda, the Purcell Room concert (a sell-out!), the visit to Amsterdam when 500 tall ships were in port, an occasion which only occurs once in 5 years, the alfresco dinner at Oirschot, the visit to the National Museum van Speelklok tot Pierement, and the final relaxing day in glorious sunshine in Oirschot. A full description of the week has already appeared in the September/October 1995 issue of the AMICA Bulletin, to which readers are referred.

For a considerable number of Americans, this was their first trip outside the North American continent, and it was therefore the intention of the organisers to try to give a taste of Europe generally, rather than to restrict the convention to just mechanical music topics. This balance was successfully achieved, and many of the members expressed their thanks both for the programme of events and for the smooth running of the visits. While it may be invidious to single out particular individuals from the working parties in England, Holland and America, specific mention must go to Rex Lawson for his imaginative programming of the week and detailed planning, Eileen Law, the European Treasurer, Jo Jongen for the organising he carried out in Holland, and Liz Barnhart, Registration Secretary and Treasurer, and, of course, Dorothy Bromage, convention chairman.

Although AMICA's request for help was made to specific people, all those who became involved were active members of the Player Piano Group, the Nederlandse Pianola Vereniging and the Pianola Institute, and these organisations enjoyed the opportunity to meet friends with similar interests from different parts of the world.

**CONVENTION SCHEDULE**

**SATURDAY:**
- **Morning:** Arrivals and Registration at Tower Hotel. Lunch on your own.
- **Afternoon:** Introductory coach tour of London.
- **Evening:** Pianola Dinner and river cruise on Silver Barracuda.

**SUNDAY:**
- **Morning:** Visits to Musical Museum and Steam Museum.
- **Afternoon:** Open Day at Dulwich College including Cricket Match, Mart, and Convention Photograph.
- **Evening:** International Mixed-Up Dinner and Pumper Contest.
MONDAY:  Morning:  Free time including optional activities with Brits.
           Lunch on your own.
        Afternoon:  Free time.
           Dinner on your own.
        Evening:  Purcell Room Concert at 7.30 pm – A Pianola Prom.
TUESDAY:  Morning:  Visit to Cambridge, including punting on River Cam and lunch at Kings College.
        Afternoon:  Visit to Ely Cathedral.
        Evening:  Visit to the Thursford Collection.
WEDNESDAY:  Morning:  House visits.
           Afternoon:  House visits.
           Evening:  On board Stena ‘Koningin Beatrix’ to Holland.
THURSDAY:  Morning:  Visit to Amsterdam including lunch on the canals.
        Afternoon:  Arrival and Registration at Oisterwijk.
           Evening:  Civic welcome to Oirschot and Alfresco dinner with carillon concert.
FRIDAY:  Morning:  Visit to Carillon Museum at Asten with lunch at Gaviolizaal.
        Afternoon:  Free time in Utrecht.
           Evening:  Visit to National Museum van Speelklok tot Pierement.
SATURDAY:  Morning:  AMICA Annual Meeting and free time in Oirschot.
        Afternoon:  International Lunch at Hof van Solms Street Organ Fair and Mobile Carillon Concert.
           Evening:  Dinner on Stena ‘Europe’ on return to England.
           AMICAns disperse to Airports for return home or continue on holiday.
Obituaries:
Shura Cherkassky – a personal memoir

Robert Taylor

Robert Taylor became a good friend of Shura Cherkassky over a number of years, and offers this personal reminiscence of their friendship.

The sixtieth anniversary celebration of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia was 21 April, 1984. I had met AMICA honorary member Abram Chasins at the 1980 Pasadena Convention and we became good friends. It was therefore, quite natural that Abram and his wife, Constance Keene would use my apartment (a mere 5 blocks from Curtis) as ‘home base’ for the day and evening festivities.

At the conclusion of the program, Curtis (where Shura Cherkassky had been a student of both Josef Hoffman and Abram Chasins) there was a grand reception where I first met Shura Cherkassky. We exchanged pleasantries, as one would do at such an occasion; then Abram told Shura what a good friend of his I had become, and Shura became much more friendly. As the crowd thinned out, and several of us headed towards the door, I thought to ask Shura what he was doing now the reception was over, and if he would like to walk back to my apartment with Abram, Constance and I. He leapt at the idea, and we proceeded to my apartment.
Although Abram Chasins was 82 at this time, his idea of walking was something akin to a charge. He and I proceeded at a rapid pace, and let the others walk at their own speed. I later learned how Shura walked in the city: in slow regal fashion. When the others arrived some ten minutes after Abram and I, Abram wanted to know where they had been and Shura said, in his innocent way, 'just walking and taking our time'.

After we had looked at the view from my thirtieth floor apartment, I offered my guests some refreshments. I keep a variety of juices on hand, and when I offered them, Shura wanted to come to the kitchen and sample them. (I did not then know that one day a week Shura had only black coffee and juice.) I sat in the living room chatting to Constance and shortly afterwards we heard a great deal of laughing and scolding going on in the kitchen. Shura had decided to mix several types of juice, and pronounced the result 'simply marvellous'. Abram, ever the teacher, disagreed.

It was then that I experienced Shura's infamous selective memory. I asked him to autograph my copy of his Prelude Pathetique (Duo-Art 6692), and he looked at it rather puzzled and said 'I had forgotten that I wrote that'. A few minutes later, he sat down at the piano and played it, and then said, 'I don't think that was too bad for a 10 year old to compose'. A great story – except that I recently discovered that he had played it in 1982 at Queen's University, Belfast (London Decca 433651-2)!

As my guests parted to go to the Curtis Alumni dinner, I asked Shura what his plans were for the next day. He replied that he had to practice in the morning 'for exactly four hours as Josef Hoffman told me to do', but that after that he had only to catch a plane in the late afternoon. I offered to pick him up with his luggage, and wander around Philadelphia the next day. I arrived at the hotel a few minutes ahead of schedule (I did not know of Shura's obsession with time then). Shura came out at the precise moment with an enormous wheeled steamer trunk that barely fitted into my car's boot. We set off to explore Fairmount Park, Independence Hall National Park, and various other areas that Shura remembered from his youth. Shura was particularly excited to visit the Liberty Bell and wanted his photo taken with it (he was very proud to be an American citizen).

That day was Shura's liquid diet day so we went and 'dined' at a Roy Rogers restaurant on coffee and juice. He was particularly enjoying the contrast with the fancy formal events of the previous day. Even though we had known each other for only 24 hours, we were settling into a comfortable friendship. I delivered Shura to the airport, we exchanged addresses and telephone numbers, and said we hoped we would meet again soon.

Within a few days, I received a post card from Shura that said, in part, 'thank you for treating me as a person, not just a celebrity'. It helped me to understand Shura and the distance he kept with most people he came into
contact with. This was the beginning of our correspondence which proceeded in fits and starts over the years.

Our paths crossed in New York, Chicago, London and Philadelphia. Sometimes backstage, sometimes for dinner (always in Shura’s room - he disliked most big city restaurants), sometimes at receptions after recitals (a ritual he generally disliked).

If you read the following interviews/reviews from various publications, you begin to get a sense of Shura’s eccentric personality. Going to pick out a piano with him at Orchestra Hall in Chicago in 1955 was an experience. The ride from the hotel to Orchestra Hall started unexpectedly with a reckless taxi driver playing loud rock music. When we asked him to turn the radio off, he replied ‘what’s the matter - don’t you like good music?’ We explained that his passenger was about to play a recital and he had his music all memorized… the silence was a relief. Fussing around with the concert grand Steinways and various piano benches began. Which sounded better…which had the best touch. Finally, it came down to the piano that had lots of scratches (‘that means it has been used in lots of concerts, so it must be good’), and a bench with a torn place (‘that is good luck’). Then the fruit for his room at Orchestra Hall, and ‘I always step on the stage with my right foot - it is good luck’.

I visited Shura at his home (actually a room) at the White House, a residential hotel in London. There was a remarkable amount of clutter, sheet music, and tired old furniture crammed into the room. Shura had the things he really loved close to him: a Steinway and lots of sheet music. There was also a photograph of his mother, and Shura said to me (is this another example of Shura’s selective memory?) ‘I only wish that I had been as successful when my mother was alive – there were times when we didn’t know where our next meal was coming from.’

Shura loved to travel to hot, sunny places on vacation. A post card would arrive from Greece, Thailand, Hawaii, Japan, usually written with a broad-nibbed fountain pen in his childlike handwriting that was at times barely decipherable. It seemed that he recharged in the sun, and then poured it all out in his recitals and concerts. In one post card he reported he had been on television several times (something new might really fascinate him).

Curiously, Shura was always concerned with what the reviewers were saying about him. ‘I don’t care what they say about me as long as they don’t say I played poorly.’ Shura was amused by the public’s favourable reception of Morton Gould’s Boogie Woogie Etude, which he came to play often in encore. In one recital he might mix: Bach, Busoni, Chopin, Strauss/Schulz-Evler, Stockhausen, Mozart (only rondo alla turca), Scriabin, Hoffman and Ives altogether in one heady brew that nobody else would dare – and then play 5 or 6 encores! What an original. He could play fast, but it was the soaring
emphasis of particular notes and that inner voice he brought out that caused his recitals to be so breathtaking.

On several occasions, we discussed the process of making recordings. His experience at Nimbus, where he could stay in their castle in Wales, and make recordings more or less when he wanted to, led to some very fresh and spontaneous performances. Nimbus issued a boxed set of 8 compact discs in honour of Shura’s eightieth birthday and he was particularly pleased by that. I don’t know what led him to switch to Decca in the last few years – perhaps merely the prospect of wider distribution and marketing. Unfortunately, I was unable to get Shura to talk much about the Duo-Art roll recording process. Had he forgotten, or was it that he never liked being questioned about anything?

It was better not to try and talk technique with Shura. I tried it just once, saw the defences go up, and heard him exclaim ‘I don’t know how I do it – I just do it’. One could imagine that Shura would not have been much of a teacher, and I do not think he ever had students.

After Abram Chasin’s death, Shura played a small recital at the Manhattan School of Music, where Constance Keene (Abram’s widow) was on the piano faculty. Shura had insisted that a certain model B Steinway had to be used for the programme, and a Steinway service engineer came along – just in case. After the other performances, Shura came out and began. The first piece went well, and he began to play Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2. There was a sudden snapping and the rod that connects the soft pedal to the mechanism dangled helplessly. Shura stopped for a moment, looked under the piano and said, ‘I won’t be needing that any more for this piece’, and tore into the Rhapsody with such gusto that it was a wonder the entire piano did not collapse at the end.

Shura did not particularly care to be called ‘the last of the romantics’ – I suspect because it made him feel old. I do not think that Shura made friends readily, and as those of his youth, and younger adult years died, I think he was somewhat depressed. Not that this slowed Shura down, because at the time of our last visit in 1995, he told me of plans for tours for the next 3 years. Alas, it was not to be, and his last recital was at Wigmore Hall in London, in November 1995. Shura was one of the most fascinating and challenging people I have known.
In Memoriam: Charles Davis Smith
1924-1995

Richard J. Howe


Charles was born 1st August, 1924 on a farm near Phoenix, Arizona. During the early years of his life, he exhibited a strong interest in music. Although his parents were hard-pressed financially, they were able to purchase a piano which he learned to play proficiently. During his teens he played piano recitals and accompanied instrumentalists and vocalists. He also learned how to play the organ, soloing on a concert Hammond. He later played a Wurlitzer theatre organ which had been installed in a local church.

After graduating from high school in Phoenix, he served a four-year stint in the Army Air Corps. Following that he entered the University of Redlands in 1950, earning two degrees. After graduation he taught piano, organ and voice in southern California.

For the last 26 years of his life he was co-owner, with his partner and colleague, Ronald Sanchez, of The Player Shop in Monrovia. Sanchez continues to operate this shop, specializing in restoration of mechanical musical instruments.

The Duo-Art catalogue was published in 1987. It is a 325 page hard-bound book, heavily annotated, which contains a nearly complete listing of Duo-Art piano rolls issued during the teens, twenties and thirties.

The 975 page Welte-Mignon catalogue and history, published in 1994, was Smith’s magnum opus and his crowning achievement. It was co-authored by Richard Howe of Houston, Texas. Howe took over completion and publication of the book when Smith was no longer able to proceed due to a series of severe medical problems resulting from his second coronary bypass operation. Fortunately, he eventually achieved a partial recovery and was able to enjoy a reasonable quality of life during his final few years.

The catalogue portion of this work contains information on some 8,000 Welte-Mignon rolls. The book also contains a detailed 150 page history of the individuals and companies responsible for the production of the Welte-Mignon rolls and mechanisms.

Another important feature of this reference work are hundreds of biographies of pianists and composers active in the early years of the 20th
century. Much of this information is not available elsewhere, at least in a single reference.

At the time of his death, Charles was working on a combined history of the Aeolian Company, American Piano Company and Aeolian American as well as affiliated and successor companies. Unfortunately, this new research project had not progressed to a point where it could be completed by others.

So, those of us who are interested in the field of mechanical musical instruments in general and reproducing pianos in particular, have lost a colleague who did much to advance our hobby. Charles David Smith, we bid you a fond adieu and wish you Godspeed.

* Editor’s Note:

Duo-Art: A Complete Catalog of Reproducing Piano Recordings was published by The Player Shop, Monrovia, California. It is still available from Keystone Music Roll Company, P.O. Box 650, Bethlehem, PA 18016 USA, for $47.50 plus shipping and handling.

The Welte-Mignon: Its Music and Musicians was published by the Vestal Press for the Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors’ Association. It can be purchased through Janet Tonnesen, 903 Sandalwood, Richardson, TX 75080 USA, for $89 plus $10 for overseas shipment.
Contributors

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 and CD reissue.

RICHARD J. HOWE lives in Houston, Texas, and has been an active member of AMICA since 1969. Since his retirement from the position of President of Penzoil he has been building a library of documentation connected with mechanical musical instruments. This unique collection of pamphlets, instruction books, advertising material and patent specifications will eventually be handed over to a suitable institution for safe keeping for posterity and will be available to students for reference purposes. He has collaborated closely with Charles Davis Smith in the completion and final publication of the Duo-Art and Welte-Mignon catalogues.

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.

JOHN BLACKWOOD MCEWEN was born at Hawick in 1868 and died in London in 1948. He studied at the University of Glasgow and the Royal Academy of Music, becoming a professor there in the last years of the 19th century. Around the time of the First War he was musical adviser to the Orchestrelle Company, though resigning on his appointment as Principal of the RAM in 1924. In the late 1920s he joined with other meritorious musicians as a member of the Honorary Advisory Committee on the Educational Use of Piano-Player Rolls. McEwen’s music often has a Scottish flavour, as heard in his well-known Grey Galloway, one of three Border Ballads for orchestra, of which the composer made a special arrangement for Pianola, Themodist roll number T955.

ARNO REINFRANK born 1934 in Mannheim, left for Britain in 1955 in disagreement with the political developments in Germany at that time. He worked as a general handyman and gradually developed a free-lance career as a journalist, poet, essayist, playwright and film script writer. He published poetry from 1956 onwards, with 45 book titles to his credit so far. Since 1970 he has developed his ‘poetry of facts’, a literary interpretation of natural
sciences and modern technology on the basis of materialistic dialectics of historical events. Although the majority of his writing is in the German language or in the Pfalz dialect of his homeland, *Berlin – Two Cities under Seven Flags* and *Wisdom, Wit and Wine – My Funny Palatine* appeared in English. For nine years he served as general secretary of the Pen Club of German Speaking Writers (Exilees) Abroad. He now lives in London.

ROBERT M. TAYLOR is a businessman with a great love of music, and he is a frequent concert goer. He has interests in mechanical musical instruments, and in particular the Duo-Art reproducing piano. As a result of this he was AMICA International President from 1980 to 1982, during which time he encouraged the search to trace some of the surviving artists who had made piano roll recordings in the 'twenties. He is also actively involved in one of the piano roll manufacturing companies now operating in America. His home is a thirtieth-floor penthouse apartment in Philadelphia.

ROBIN WALKER was born in York in 1953 and attended schools attached to the Minster for ten years. He studied composition with David Lumsdaine at Durham University before becoming a full-time composer. His large orchestral work *The Stone Maker* was played by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra earlier this year. He lives in the village of Delph on the Pennine moors.