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The Metrostyle

The Aeolian Company

The following article, reproduced more or less in facsimile, is taken from the very first Metrostyle Roll Catalogue, published by the Aeolian Company in New York in March 1903, but it previously appeared in *Musical Courier* magazine, in its issue for February 11th of that year, under the title *Revolutionary in Influence - A Marvelous Invention*. No author is credited, but the Editor-in-Chief of *Musical Courier* at that time was Mark Blumenberg.

The Metrostyle was invented by Francis Lincoln Young, an Aeolian Company musical specialist and sales executive, whose inventive skills led to his being placed in administrative charge of the Company's experimental and research department for a number of years, at the time when the Duo-Art reproducing piano was being developed.

Young was born in Lewiston, Maine, in 1871, and worked as a salesman in Boston during the 1890s. He moved to New York, roughly in 1898, for the launch of the Pianola, and in that connection he took part in many public demonstration concerts. But it was Charles Parkyn who seems to have become the main Pianolist at that time, and sometime after October 1900 (when his son, Ivan, was almost certainly conceived in New York), Young was sent to England, where he was based at the Orchestrelle Company, the Aeolian subsidiary which at that time ran affairs in the British Empire, Europe and South America. While there he developed and patented the Metrostyle, an undulating red line that could be printed along the length of a music roll and followed by means of a small pointer attached to the tempo lever, thus allowing a Pianolist to adhere to a previously laid out recording of tempo rubato. Whether Young actually invented the device in London, or whether he was sent there in order to develop an existing idea, away from Manhattan and the intelligence networks of rival piano player companies, remains unclear, but he seems to have returned to the US in time for the launch of the Metrostyle in early 1903, since he applied in March of that year for one of his subsequent US patents, and was once again listed as a resident of New York City.

For several years from 1903 onwards, Young made annual trips to Europe, where he co-operated with composers and other musicians in order to produce authoritative Metrostyle lines for Aeolian’s Autograph-Metrostyle series of rolls. He was not the only Pianolist to undertake such duties, and, for example, George Reed of the Orchestrelle Company travelled to Bergen in 1904 and worked with Edvard Grieg, while Hermann Schaad from New York visited St Petersburg in Russia and elicited Metrostyle recordings from Rimsky-Korsakoff, Balakirev, Glazounov and Liapounov. But Young was extremely influential in the development of the Aeolian Company’s musical instruments, and it is clear that he was in charge of the project to design and produce a reproducing piano, to which the Company gave the name of the Duo-Art.
The Metrostyle line remained a feature of Aeolian Company music rolls for many years, especially in Great Britain, where new Metrostyle rolls were issued until the early 1930s. Looking back from our modern vantage point, almost a hundred and twenty years since the invention was originally conceived, it is easy to smile at the dramatic rhetoric accorded to a very simple principle, but we have inherited an enormous repertoire of Metrostyle rolls, a good proportion of which bear witness to some exceptionally subtle Pianola playing. This is a huge area for future study.

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"The development of the self-playing instruments in this country, supplemented by their introduction in Europe, has attracted the attention of the musical world for a number of years past, particularly since the mechanical devices have become so unique as to exalt these instruments out of the class of automatic players.

By self-playing instruments are meant especially the Pianola, a portable piano-player which is moved up to the keyboard of an instrument and, by means of a perforated roll or spindle of paper, performs music that is transposed from the composition itself, no matter what the character, range, or difficulty of the composition may be. This Pianola has gradually been introduced into the best musical households, and has centered upon it the attention of the greatest musical authorities, for the reason that in its evolution it has finally succeeded in enabling the player who controls the music-roll to give certain expressions to the compositions in imitation of what the human player himself would do. Thus, for instance, a sonata, a nocturne, or a difficult composition of Liszt, full of involved passage-work, being transposed by
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means of these perforations into the music-roll, controls thereby a set of pneumatics through which the fingers of the Pianola control the individual keys of the piano, and thereby the player of the Pianola, having at his command all of these fingers, performs these compositions at his will, giving such expression and such dynamics to it as may please his taste or fancy or his knowledge.

Piano-playing has indeed become simplified through it, for the reason that those persons who are not able to reach digital dexterity in their practice of the piano could play difficult compositions through the Pianola, and those people who have never studied piano have an opportunity to play that instrument by means of the Pianola. The rolls of music comprised in the Pianola list make a very large repertory, whereby the player is enabled to cover an enormous extent of ground, so to speak, in compositions of all kinds, and thus the Pianola has been satisfying a large demand for good music.

CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT

During all of these past years there has been a constant and gradual evolutionary improvement visible and audible in the Pianola, because the company which manufactures it—The Aeolian Company—has, by incessant application and experiment, succeeded in devising a large number of special devices that have given the player opportunities to do
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more than merely to give an automatic repetition of the composition. A great deal of latitude has lately entered into the handling of the instrument, and it has therefore become not merely a fashionable instrument for the purpose of amusing people, but it has been utilized as a means toward education and toward the acquiring of a larger and more extensive knowledge of the musical field than formerly existed when the piano depended upon the playing of the performer directly.

The constant history of development of the Pianola has with each year brought out new phases in the shape of delicate adjustments, a finer control of the pedaling, a more positive response, and a more definite control of the fingerboard.

THE LATEST TRIUMPH

However, there was always this one defect, if we can call it such, associated with the Pianola, and that was the absence of an authority by means of which the interpretation of the important and classical compositions could be regulated in accordance with tradition or with individual ideas. The persons who played the Pianola played the compositions at will. Those people who did not understand music very naturally played those compositions according to their own expression, sometimes creating the most peculiar and conflicting results, while the musician, always, as he is, in doubt about the interpretation, could never feel assured that he
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was correct in the performance of a composition, and the more he played the greater became his doubt. It therefore became a matter of importance that the Pianola should be developed to such a stage that compositions of the masters could be played, not only traditionally correct in expression and in dynamic contrasts, but more than that—namely, that the rolls of music could be so controlled and so marked that any authoritative interpretation could be performed by the player with absolute reliance on its correctness.

This latest triumph—one of the most marvelous things that has been invented in music—has now been accomplished by means of an attachment called the Metrostyle.

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This is the most far-reaching achievement in the development of the Pianola, an invention by means of which it is possible to reproduce the exact interpretations of the great masters of the piano.

This Metrostyle is a finger or guide, connected with the tempo-lever of the Pianola, to which is attached a pen, and as the performer—an authority, say like Paderewski, or d’Albert, or Busoni—plays any classical or any modern composition, he guides his pen on the unwinding roll in accordance with his interpretation of the piece he is rendering, and as he plays he marks upon the roll, in red ink, a line which, as it progresses, indicates in all its
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angles and curves exactly in expression the diminuendo, the ritardando, the accelerando, or any of the various dynamic contrasts of music just as he himself plays it. After the completion of this work on the roll the pen is removed, and any performer can use the finger or the Metrostyle, following the red line that has been marked by the composer or by the performer, and he will thereupon get an exact repetition of the performance just as it was played by the authority.

SOME EXAMPLES

We give a few examples of music that have been marked on Pianola-rolls by the authorities mentioned hereafter. In the case of Moszkowski, those compositions are his own. He marked them himself, and any one desirous of playing these compositions of Moszkowski's just as Moszkowski interprets them or desires them interpreted, can do so by means of this attachment; that is to say, the performer can play the piano compositions of Moszkowski exactly as Moszkowski desires them played, to the very lightest and most subtle shading and nuance. In the case of Paderewski the same is shown in his Theme and Variations. This is also true of Mlle. Chaminade and many others. The other compositions—for instance, the Rondo in A Minor by Mozart—has the interpretation of Paderewski, and as a guarantee the interpreters themselves place their names upon the rolls. The
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same is the case with Harold Bauer and the compositions that have received his interpretation. In the case of Emil Paur, Beethoven’s overtures arranged for the piano are selected, and these compositions are played by the Pianola according to the interpretation of Emil Paur, so that persons performing the Beethoven overtures mentioned below on the Pianola with these rolls, marked as they are, will receive exactly the same interpretation of these overtures that is given by any orchestra under Mr. Paur’s direction in London or Berlin or wherever he may direct.

PADEREWSKI
Rondo in A Minor ........................................ Mozart
Theme and Variations ...................................... Paderewski
Valse, Op. 34, No. 1 ........................................ Chopin
Nocturne, Op. 37, No. 2 ................................. Chopin

HAROLD BAUER
Isalamey ...................................................... Balakirew
Impromptu, G flat ............................................. Chopin
At the Spring ................................................. Liszt

MOSZKOWSKI
Bagatelle, Op. 63, No. 2, C Minor
Fantaisie Impromptu, Op. 6, F Major
Polonaise, Op. 17, No. 1
Serenata, Op. 15, No. 1
Valse, Op. 11
Valse, Op. 34, No. 1
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EMIL PAUR

Fidelio .................................................. Beethoven
Ruins of Athens .................................................. Beethoven
Prometheus .................................................. Beethoven
Egmont .................................................. Beethoven
King Stephen .................................................. Beethoven
Coriolanus .................................................. Beethoven

THE FUTURE EFFECT

It takes considerable thought to realize what this signifies in its full bearings.

What is going to be the result of this thing?
Here we have an invention which is going to be the first to perpetuate interpretations. For instance, a Chopin Nocturne can be indicated by Paderewski, by Rosenthal, by Bauer, by Busoni, by d'Albert. These five pianists all play a composition differently, and their interpretations of Chopin differ, and yet by means of the Metrostyle and the Pianola we can obtain records of Chopin Nocturnes interpreted by these five masters, and in five, twenty-five, fifty-five, or a hundred years from now people will be able to play them on the piano exactly as these pianists play them now!

Take the Moszkowski compositions which have been interpreted by Moszkowski himself. They are on record now. At any time hereafter any performer can learn exactly how Moszkowski interprets his own compositions, and the same applies to Paderewski and to d'Albert and others.
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This will give an authoritative interpretation to be used by any one at any time on his own piano, in accordance with the roll-indications and interpretations of the composer himself.

There can be no disputes as to its interpretation. There can no longer be any question as to how Paderewski played a certain Nocturne or a composition of Schumann. There can be no question hereafter as to how d’Albert played a Beethoven or a Brahms Concerto. If any one wishes to know how the great masters interpret these different compositions, all that is necessary is to take the Pianola-roll, with the indications that are necessary, and play it.

Nothing can compare with the Pianola with its now perfected arrangement, and there is no opportunity for dispute, there is no opportunity for discussion. Here is the stamped roll, indicating exactly how the composer or conductor or the player would play or interpret or conduct the composition. Its analysis is therefore complete, and the Pianola creates a new synthesis on which to build the future musical development.

This is such a stupendous innovation on everything that has taken place in music so far that it stuns the intelligence. It is so far-reaching that it overwhelms ideals. We are completely at the mercy of an entirely new thought in musical development. We now see piano-playing taken out of the realm of automatism and placed at one step into the very highest rung of
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the ladder of individualism. We have authoritative law from which there is no appeal. We have before us now an instrument that can gratify to the fullest extent all of our desires for a higher education in music alone in our own studio or as we wish it, and at the same time it can become a source of the most intense artistic gratification; first, because it is faultless, and, second, because it gives us food in the shape of the very highest form of individual interpretation in accordance with the number and variety of masters as they to-day are known to us.

The subsidiary advantages of this new invention are too numerous to refer to at present, such, for instance, as the development of the piano or the further diffusion of the piano as an instrument of education or pleasure. Such, for instance, as the development of composition in its application to the piano through the Pianola. Such, for instance, as an increased appetite created through the Pianola for orchestral concerts. Such, for instance, as a deeper and a more profound study of music outside of technic, because technic can now be controlled through the Pianola. In fact, there is an endless number of new phases of music that can grow out of this invention, which at once places the Pianola in the very front rank of artistic musical phenomena. In the course of the next few months a large number of the most prominent composers and players of Europe and America will have their works, as well as the works of the masters, recorded according to
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their interpretation, and the repertory of the Pianola will therefore comprise nearly all of the great works written or adapted for the piano. What this will result in can only be conceived by musicians. The prospect is so great that it is difficult to dwell on it, but the achievement represents one of the greatest triumphs of the hour, and will have an enormous effect on the development of the music of the future.”—Musical Courier, February 11, 1903.