

SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1211

This Compact Disc is issued to accompany an article on engineering aspects of piano rolls and a discussion with Ronald Smith of their value as evidence of performing practice at the beginning of the 20th century in *PIANO–International Piano*, March/April & May/June 2004 Editor: Julian Haylock. These notes are a brief guide and introduction.

JOSEPH HAYDN'S FLÖTENUHR [lit. flute-clock]

Playing His Original Compositions

Example 1 (A) 1792 Allegro moderato–Minuet (“Song of the Quail”)–Minuet
–(Allegretto)–Presto R 1164 85173

Example 2 (B) 1793 Vivace–Fugue–Andante Allegro R 1164 85174

Ludwig Koch [*Memoirs of a Birdman* Phoenix House, London 1955] reports that two Haydn flute-clocks were found in Vienna in the early 1930s. The first had been presented to Count Esterházy, the second to Count Liechtenstein. Koch implies that they were built in Esterházy's library by Father Niemann, a pupil of Haydn. Recorded in Vienna, 1931? for the bicentenary of Haydn's birth, 31st March 1732. N.B. It so happens that this record reproduces at A=440Hz when played at 78rpm, but this tells us virtually nothing, for “78rpm” records are notorious for infidelities to their specified speeds. And even if the record was indeed made at 78rpm it would be no evidence that the pipes are now at the (or any) pitch of Haydn's day. Likewise: Are the tunes played at the correct tempi? Such mechanisms were fitted to clocks, triggered by the clock at the hours, but not regulated by it. And, of course, if Haydn arranged an orchestral minuet for a Flötenuhr, the tempo of the arrangement is not necessarily what he had in mind for the symphony.

Remarkable machines were developed; some to simulate the sounds of entire orchestras. Beethoven and Cherubini wrote for an instrument designed by Maelzel of metronome fame. By the end of the 19th century very refined musical boxes had fine steel pins in brass barrels which plucked finely tuned steel combs mounted on sounding boards.

In very basic form the musical box survives today in holiday souvenirs, the barrel and pegs diecast in one piece, giving one brief tune.

Example 3 Fra Diavolo (Auber) Ballade with and without bells circa 1860

Example 4 Santa Lucia (Neapolitan folk-song) circa 1960

[The comparison is unfair, but instructive; the modern mechanism, its Bay of Naples cigarette box long discarded, was mounted on a large Sainsbury's fruit carton as a sounding board, thus, inadvertently giving it an acoustic advantage.]

The piano roll process, from original recording to final customer's copies, was mechanically complex; many distortions could occur. If a piano roll performance sounds quite dreadful, before shooting the pianist we must ask, was the roll originally a faulty representation of the pianist, is it now a damaged roll, or is it being played on an unrestored or badly restored machine?

Of Mahler we have no direct evidence, but he never played publicly and did not compose at the piano. This excerpt was reproduced on a well restored machine. D'Albert, however, was a Titan amongst pianists, it is inconceivable that he played as badly as this and there are discs, albeit primitive, to prove it.

Example 5 Symphony No. 5 (Mahler)-1st Movement (excerpt)
played by Mahler, Welte piano roll No.769 9·XI·05.

Example 6 Eugen D'Albert: Sonata in E minor Op.90 (Beethoven) (excerpt)
Welte-Mignon piano roll No.2971 c.1910.

Example 7 Eugen D'Albert: Study in F minor Op.25 No.2 (Chopin)
Disc xxB 5731 1912/1913

The piano roll system was often most impressive with fast-moving virtuoso pieces; with everything right remarkable results can be obtained.

Example 8 Erwin Nyiregházy: Mazeppa (Liszt) Ampico

Before the introduction of magnetic tape, to make a gramophone record either you could perform at your best for 4½minutes, or you couldn't. Piano rolls, however, could be edited, rather like tape. One of Eugen D'Albert's daughters recounted to the writer: "I went with him to the Aeolian Hall to make piano rolls. The wires underneath the keyboard, we were told, went down to the room below where the recording was made. 'What will happen if I make a mistake?'

'It does not matter, the engineer will correct it.'

'Then why doesn't he do the whole recording?'

Unassailable direct evidence of the piano roll system in top working order when built would be transfers of piano roll performances under the auspices of the original manufacturers on machines set up and serviced by their engineers.

Eight such recordings exist. The first two are an Aeolian advertisement. Alas, pressed in very poor material, they are somewhat marred. The other six are of Welte machines excellently recorded for the time and pressed in very good material. (For authenticity information is as on original labels.)

THE 'PIANOLA' PIANO
ACTUALLY RECORDED BY THE INSTRUMENT
THE AEOLIAN COMPANY LTD. LONDON

Example 9 Side 1 Spoken introduction and demonstration

Example 10 SALUT D'AMOUR (Sir Edward Elgar)
Played on the "Pianola" by MR. J. H. CLAPHAM

Example 11 Side 2 Spoken introduction

Example 12 SPRING SONG (Edvard Grieg)
Played by PERCY GRAINGER

Reproduced on the "Pianola" by "Duo-Art" Music Roll

Recorded Summer 1927 by Vocalion for Aeolian on Matrices M 0446 and M 0447

Odeon "Historic" Series

Example 13: EDVARD GRIEG 14th February 1930
38266 Norwegischer Brautzug im Vorüberziehen (E. Grieg op.19, Nr.2)
O-4748 a Welte-Künstlerrolle von 17. 4. 1906

Example 14: TERESA CARREÑO
38267 Kleiner Walzer (T. Carreño)
O-4751a Welte-Künstlerrolle von 2. 4. 1905

Example 15: KLOTHILDE KLEEBERG 2nd April 1930
38399 Etüde F-dur ["Die Quelle"] (Chopin op.10, Nr.8)
O-4748b Welte-Künstlerrolle von 11. 11. 1905

Example 16: BERNARD STAVENHAGEN
38400 Chant Polonais - "Meine Freuden" (Chopin-Liszt) op.74, Nr.5 *
nach persönl. Erinnerungen an Liszt
O-4751b Welte-Künstlerrolle von 9. 12. 1905

Example 17: THEODOR LESCHETIZKY 29th November 1930
38843 Die beiden Lerchen [Les deux Alouettes] (T. Leschetizky)
O-4753b Welte-Künstlerrolle von 18. 2. 06

Example 18: ENRIQUES GRANADOS
38844 Spanischer Tanz Nr.5 [Andaluza] (E. Granados)
O-4753a Welte-Künstlerrolle vom Herbst 1912

* My Joys is No.5 of 6 Chants Polonais, transcriptions by Liszt from Chopin.
There seem to be many variants, including the ending, c.10 bars, in accordance,
presumably, with the pianist's personal memories of Liszt.

The following three examples show how the gramophone improved: Grieg on an early acoustic record can fairly be said to tinkle charmingly, by 1923 the young Cherkassky is astonishingly vivid and, with the coming of electric recording, Grainger is, relatively, on the verge of "Hi-Fi". Actually the last item is not a particularly good instance of early electric recording, but was chosen to allow direct comparison between piano-roll and disc, each in early and late development. It is also interesting to compare master and student.

Example 19 Au Printemps (Grieg) played by the composer
Matrix 2147F Paris, 2 May 1903

Example 20 Ecossaises (Beethoven) Camden, N.J. early 1923 Matrix A 28821
Master Shura Cherkassky (Recorded at the age of eleven)

Example 21 TO SPRING (Grieg) PERCY GRAINGER Matrix W 98358, 15-vi-27

Example 22 TURKISH MARCH (From "Ruins of Athens")
-Beethoven- JOSEF HOFMANN disc 15057 ?1928

Example 23 Josef Hofmann: Turkish March (Beethoven) piano roll

The pitch of the roll is as transferred on an early LP. Hofmann plays his teacher Rubinstein's transcription. The piano roll has a greater dynamic range and better piano sound than the gramophone can manage, but the disc is much more fluent. Incidentally, we are distinguishing the systems as roll and disc, but both are, however different, records.

Example 24 Lhevinne:Étude Op.10 No.11 in *Eb* (Chopin) disc CS89883-2 10.vi.35

Example 25 Lhevinne:Étude Op.10 No.11 in *Eb* (Chopin) roll ?100375 1927/8

a piano roll, probably Ampico, transferred to a 78rpm disc 4022 D289 c.1945

Ronald Smith observed that Josef Lhevinne used a more modern edition in the later gramophone record of the study.

Example 26 Lhevinne La Campanella (Paganini-Liszt-Busoni-Lhevinne) 63903

a piano roll, probably Ampico, transferred to a 78rpm disc 4022 D288 c.1945

And of La Campanella, "A very good performance, but do pianists play like this? Lhevinne could play probably as fast as that, but you wouldn't hear every note with that kind of absolute almost diamond like individuality and clarity at such a speed."

Example 27 Scharwenka Polish Dance Op.3 No.1 disc A 5260 30606

Example 28 Scharwenka Polish Dance Op.3 No.1 piano roll (excerpt)

Ronald Smith, hearing Scharwenka for the first time, commented, "No mean pianist. It could not be played better, obviously; it's incredible. Yes a great artist, a great aristocrat." That was of the disc, but of the roll, "Of course that's dreadful."

Epilogue. By the late 1920s, with sales in serious decline, the leading piano roll firm was using its arch competitor, the gramophone, to advertise its wares. With piano sales likewise falling to the same competitor, a piano firm did the same.

Example 29

AUTOMNE (Chaminade)

Played by MARK HAMBOURG

on a KEITH PROWSE MODEL "C" UPRIGHT PIANO

Example 30 NOCTURNE IN F SHARP MAJOR, Op.15 No.2

Played by MARK HAMBOURG

on a KEITH PROWSE MODEL "A" UPRIGHT PIANO

5819 Bb 8063-1 and 5820 Bb 8064-2 February or March 1926

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