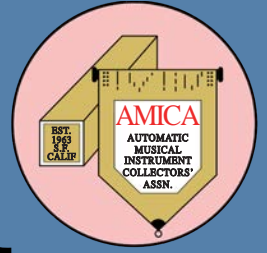


# THE AMICA

AUTOMATIC MUSICAL INSTRUMENT COLLECTORS' ASSOCIATION



BULLETIN

## ARTHUR REBLITZ:

VIRTUOSO ARRANGER,  
RESTORER, HISTORIAN, AUTHOR





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# THE AMICA BULLETIN

**AUTOMATIC MUSICAL INSTRUMENT COLLECTORS' ASSOCIATION**

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Visit the AMICA website at: <http://www.amica.org>  
to enter the "Members-Only" portal, User Name: AMICA Password: Pianola@1963

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### Front Cover:

*Art Reblitz standing in front of the Hupfeld Pan Orchestrion at the Krughoff collection*

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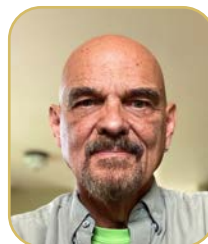
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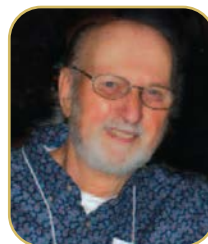
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..... EDITORIAL OBSERVATIONS.....

**Thanks for the New Printer and Graphic Design Feedback!** We received a couple dozen comments by phone, email, and postal mail about the new printed edition and graphic design. Favorable notices were about the improved paper stock, vibrant color, updated graphical style yet retaining the familiar, traditional touch, and the color-variety of different articles and backgrounds. Soft balls were tossed about some color combinations in backgrounds, text boxes, text, and captions that were a little hard to read. A few sharp-eyed readers found some juxtapositions and omissions. We appreciate all of that and will continue to tweak and improve! Let us know what you think!

**Is Your AMICA Bulletin a Few Pages Short? Where are the Chapter Reports?** – Don't count the pages, but we are down a few this issue. All the planned Holiday and other Chapter meetings were cancelled due to the rush of COVID – Omicron virus, leaving our expected 10 pages of Chapter Reports down to one page! We usually plan for and expect about 8-12 pages of Chapter-provided content, and when it doesn't come, we can't quickly materialize other stories to fill the gap. We hope you will again hold meetings and events and report them!

**SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. HERE ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS!**

**Matt Jaro's Nickel Notes: Art Reblitz – Restorer; Arranger; Author** - From the previous edition about the celebration of Jasper Sanfilippo's life, you saw a tribute written by one of Jasper's master restorers for decades. Now, Matt Jaro interviews and tells the story of Art Reblitz who for over 50 years has been one of Mechanical Music's most revered restorers, arranger, and author.

**Classical Duo-Art Rolls from London and New York. Were They Equal?** – Duo-Art roll enthusiasts will love this forensic, technical analysis of famous pianists recording Duo-Art rolls in both New York and London studios, and the differences.

**Ragnar's Ragtime Website and Using Sound Library Simulation Software** – Here's a new website with hundreds of rare ragtime recordings, simulations, MIDI files, and piano roll listings from where they were sourced.

**Who Was John Farrell?** – For decades, this historian, collector, and musician produced rare, original piano rolls on many labels in the style of the original rag, blues, and other desirable period tunes. Here's the full story and how to get some of this music.

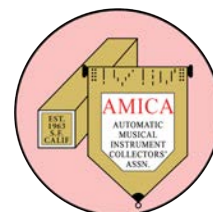
.....  
**THERE IS STILL LOTS MORE.....**

**The Studley Tool Chest**– is an amazing, portable, handy tool chest used by period piano technicians.

**TJ Fisher's "Notes from the Bay"** offers Part One of "Silence on the Sidewalks of New York" with the amazing story of period "music grinders" keeping folks awake in the city that never sleeps.

.....  
**We need your stories, content, participation, and volunteerism!** Be sure to read AMICA President Joel Cluskey's President's Corner. We want your stories, chapter reports, images of rare documents and historical artifacts. We want your participation as a candidate for an AMICA Officer or Committee, or volunteer in any of several projects. Introduce others, and especially the younger generation to AMICA!

Regards,  
**Glenn Thomas**  
Editor and Publisher – The AMICA Bulletin  
Wurlitzer165@gmail.com





## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Event	Date	Location	Sponsor / Add'l. Info.
2022 International Convention	Aug 31 - Sept 5	San Francisco, California	Jointly with MBSI
2023 International Convention	July 16 - 23	New Orleans, Louisiana	AMICA
2024 International Convention	Pending		
2025 International Convention	August 27 - 31	Los Angeles, California	Jointly with MBSI

AMICA members are encouraged to send potential listings to the editor. Chapter meeting listings are encouraged, and will be automatically listed if the editor is aware of them. Events may be local or national, need not be exclusive to AMICA or be sponsored by AMICA. Events sponsored by affiliated organizations may be included if they have a direct or potential interest to AMICA members. In submitting listings, remember the "Bulletin received date" for readers is substantially later than your notification date to the editor.

## NEW MEMBERS

Christopher Cluskey | Kent, WA  
 Ronald Drapalik | Wildwood, MO  
 Benjamin Foss | Brooks, ME

Gregory K. Graham | Brodheads ville, PA  
 Benjamin Helton | Greenwood, IN  
 Michael Kim | Los Angeles, CA

Doug Morgan | Wallingford, CT  
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# ..... PRESIDENT'S CORNER .....

Dear Members,

I am so excited that everything is coming together for the 2022 convention in San Francisco! Consider that our last convention was in the summer of 2019 in Seattle, WA. It will be over three years since we have had an opportunity to see one-another, and I really hope this motivates everyone to attend. You will find more details about the convention in this issue of the Bulletin.

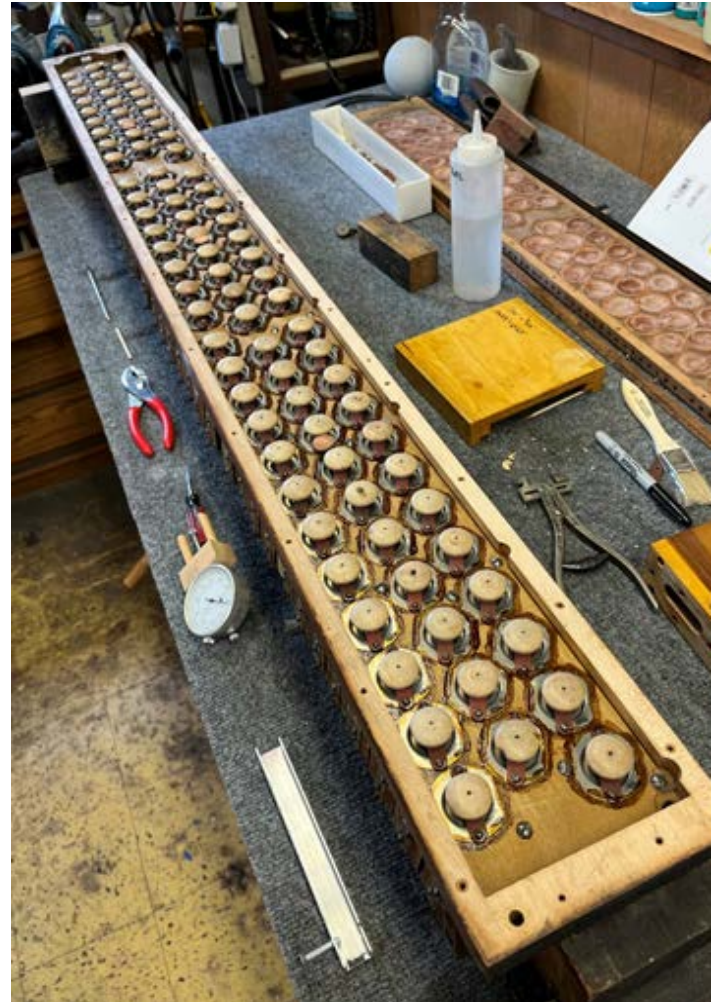
At the convention there will be a lot of business to conduct, not the least of which will be officer elections. That will conclude my second, two-year term, and I will not be running for a third term. I limited my four-year commitment for two reasons. First, I did not know what kind of time commitment it would take considering my full time + job. Second, I believe that it is important for an organization such as AMICA to involve as many people as possible. The commitment time, I found, was very manageable, and I intend to run for a committee position this year, probably convention coordinator – you're not getting rid of me yet.

My second reason leads me to the most important part of this month's President Corner. Election years require people to step up and participate in this organization. This can be through the elected positions or on any of the committees that are always looking for motivated participants (see front of bulletin for listing). Please contact me or your chapter president and get involved! My vice-president, Mike Walter intends to step up as a nominee for the president's position, leaving an open position for vice president. Please consider. We will help you through it.

Not interested in a term leadership position? How about a committee assignment? How about contributing to the *AMICA Bulletin*? The editor does not have a bottomless well and many AMICA members have collections, stories, archives, trips, and much to offer. Share it with the membership!

When I took this president's position, I committed to writing an encouraging President's Corner for each bulletin. I did not want them to be constant pleas for participation or membership – that's boring and to be expected. I tried to emphasize why we all are a part of this organization and the joy and fascination it can bring. I hope I have accomplished that and will measure my level of success in the response I get from you, the membership.

Musically Yours:  
Joel C. Cluskey



*When people play their player pianos, they often don't understand how the many parts and pieces create the music. AMICA is like this instrument because it too requires lots of parts & pieces to work properly. Don't just pump the pedals but become a "part" of the organization so that it can continue to play for your enjoyment.*





# Chicago Chapter Report

Contributor: Ken Walczak | President: Margaret Bisberg



Guests were welcomed to the Sanfilippo Foundation Celebration of Life on December 11, 2021

*Jasper Sanfilippo opened his home and collection to our local chapter meetings and National conventions for almost four decades.*

*On December 11, 2021, the Sanfilippo Foundation in conjunction with Chicago AMICA and Lake Michigan MBSI held a Celebration of Life and Holiday Party honoring Jasper Sanfilippo. This was wonderfully covered in the last AMICA Bulletin. A special thank you goes to our chapter members Marty Persky and James Huffer for their efforts which made this event possible.*

*The Sanfilippo Foundation has invited us to return to the Estate on Saturday, June 4th as the music plays on. On the following day, June 5th we will participate in a mechanical music exhibition and monkey organ rally at the former home of Herbert S. Mills, principal of the Mills Novelty Company. AMICA members who would like to attend either or both events should contact Chicago Chapter President, Margaret Bisberg at [rdecanter@aol.com](mailto:rdecanter@aol.com) for further information.*

# Nickel Notes:

## Master Restorer and Arranger: Arthur Reblitz

by: **Matthew Jaro**

For this issue of Nickel Notes, I have the honor of profiling **Arthur A. Reblitz**, the historian, restorer, and music arranger. He is one of the most important people in mechanical music. His books include:

- *The Reblitz-Bowers Encyclopedia of American Coin-Operated Pianos and Orchestrions and Related Instruments (with Q. David Bowers), 2020*
- *The Violin-Playing Machines—a Study and Appreciation (Q. David Bowers; Foreword and Technical Editing by Reblitz), 2012*
- *The Golden Age of Automatic Musical Instruments (edited by Q. David Bowers), 2001*
- *The Victorian Palace—The Sanfilippo Collection, 1996; 2nd ed. 1997; 3rd ed. 2010.*
- *Player Piano Servicing and Rebuilding, 1985*
- *The Mills Violano-Virtuoso (with Mike Kitner), 1984*
- *Treasures of Mechanical Music (with Q. David Bowers), 1981*
- *Piano Servicing, Tuning and Rebuilding – A Guide for the Professional, Student and Hobbyist, 1976; 2nd ed. 1993; 3rd ed. 2019; French ed. 2005; Japanese ed. 2019*

The latest book, *The Encyclopedia of American Coin-Operated Pianos and Orchestrions*, is comprehensive and covers the most popular machines to the most obscure. I've been reading it cover-to-cover. In addition, Art has done restorations for many of the great collectors, including Jasper Sanfilippo, Bob Gilson, Jim Krughoff, Mark Yaffe, Arnold Chase, Al Svoboda, Charlie Bovey, and many others. Art has also arranged many great rolls, including all the Ramey Banjo-Orchestra rolls, and the Barbary Coast Roll sponsored by the late John Motto-Ros, to name a few.



**Art Reblitz (left) and Bob Gilson with the Wurlitzer Concert PianOrchestra Style 32**

### Beginnings: The Seeburg KT Special



**First orchestration Art ever saw – a Seeburg KT Special now in his collection**

Art Reblitz was born in Chicago Heights, Illinois, in 1946 about a mile from Svoboda's Nickelodeon Tavern and grew up in the Chicago suburb of Riverdale. The first nickelodeon he saw was a Seeburg "KT Special". When his grandfather retired from the Pullman Company in Chicago in 1954, his grandparents retired to Clermont in central Florida. Then, Art's parents drove Art and his brother to Clermont every year for summer vacation.



Since Daytona was one of his grandparents' favorite haunts, they annually visited there for a day. There were several amusement arcades and rides right on the beachfront, along with the famous bandshell, clock tower, and pier. Of course, Art immediately found the arcade that had music machines and older arcade machines, making it a favorite stop each year.

The Midway Arcade near the pier, had several instruments in dreadful condition, including a Seeburg KT Special with a sign on top that proclaimed "The Old Nickelodeon — See and Hear It Play. Lousy But Loud. Ten Tunes — Ten Cents." Lousy was right, but loud? It could barely be heard over the noise of its added suction box and the clanging of the electromechanical pinball machines. At seven years old when Art first saw and heard the KT Special, he decided he had to have one.

The Midway Arcade also had two other instruments, each in a display case with an added electric motor and coin slot. For a dime, a Molinari barrel organ played a very fast rendition of "Yes, Sir! That's My Baby," and for another dime, a street piano played the 1934 tune "Isle of Capri," arranged for the B.A.B. Co. by J. Lawrence Cook. At other times the arcade also had a single Mills Violano and a Western Electric Mascot converted to play G rolls with a cabinet extension housing drums and an animated figure. **Frank "Doc" Johns** supposedly had been a chiropractor from the south side of Chicago, who retired to Florida in 1948, where he managed the Midway Arcade. He was also known for inventing and patenting the automatic ticket dispenser used on mechanical Skee-Ball machines, U.S. patent 2,926,915, applied for in 1958 and granted in 1960.

Art's family made these trips from the time he was in fourth grade through high school (1956-1964). The amazing thing is that Art was able to acquire this very same KT Special many years later. Upon their annual trip in 1961, the piano was gone from the arcade. Art inquired and found that Johns had sold it to **Harold Shaner**, a collector in Cumberland, Maryland. Shaner communicated with Art and made him tape recordings of the Seeburg after he got it playing. They continued

to correspond over the years until Harold passed away in 1990. Harold's son Randy knew of Art's interest, offered the KT Special to him when selling his father's collection. At that time, Randy related the story of removing the piano from Daytona in 1961 while a hurricane was approaching. Taking cover in the back seat of the car, he had visions of the car, trailer, and piano all being hurled into the sky just like in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Art bought the KT Special in 1990. He and his employees completely restored it, and he still has the original roll the first time he heard it play.

## Musical and Mechanical Background

Art's mother **Eleanor** was a fine concert-caliber pianist and teacher who had performed the Grieg piano concerto with members of the Chicago Symphony as an undergraduate student at the American Conservatory in downtown Chicago, and who studied all the Rachmaninoff piano concerti as a graduate student. With her teaching piano in their home, Art absorbed beautiful classical piano music from the time he was born. (His maternal grandmother was also a fine classical pianist.) By the time he was four years old, his mother gave him piano lessons, and he learned Grieg's *Elfentanz*, among others, at that young age. The following year, Art took piano lessons from his mother's teacher from the American Conservatory, but this ended at age six when kindergarten conflicted with the teacher's schedule, so he resumed lessons with his mother.

When Art was in third grade, his mother suggested he learn a band instrument so he could play in bands and ensembles. A friend of his mother had a daughter who was learning to play the flute. Art discovered he could produce a tone on the flute and decided it would be a nice instrument to learn. After taking lessons throughout grade school and then studying with retired Chicago Symphony flutist Emil Eck during high school, Art majored in flute under Charles DeLaney at the University of Illinois, playing in the University band under the direction of renowned band leader and orchestrator Mark Hindsley, and in the orchestra under Bernard Goodman.



Midway Arcade, Daytona, Florida



Svoboda's Decap Jazz Orchestra



**Svoboda's Chicago Nickelodeon Tavern. Left: Dave Ramey, Flo and Al Svoboda, Art Reblitz; Center: Svoboda's basement workshop; Right: Svoboda's KT Special**

Art's lifelong training in classical music was unusual because so few serious classical musicians have ever had an interest in mechanical music—especially in American orchestrions and their music. Art's father also liked popular music, so Art's interest extended to a wide range of music. While learning to play the classical flute, Art discovered Max Morath's TV series on ragtime piano, and became proficient at playing that too.

Art's father, **Fred**, was mechanically inclined, interested in learning how things worked, and adept at fixing everything around the house. (Fred's father had been a fine woodworker employed by the Pullman Company, maker of railroad equipment, and one of his jobs there was to install the fine marquetry in George M. Pullman's personal yacht that sailed Lake Michigan.) With Art's mother's musical talent and his father's mechanical abilities and curiosity about how things worked, it was natural for Art to become interested in both.

### Discovering Mechanical Music (Svoboda's)

When **Harvey Roehl's** landmark book *Player Piano Treasury* was published in 1961, Art bought a copy and soon bought everything on the subject that Vestal Press published. Always interested in the music arrangements, he also bought every record album of mechanical music he could find. He soon found Svoboda's Nickelodeon Tavern in Chicago Heights and convinced his parents to take him there for their Friday-night fish fry. This proved to be the most interesting place Art had seen until then, with over forty nickelodeons—most of which were in playing condition—and hundreds of other displays from music boxes and organettes to animated displays. Throughout high school, Art and his parents visited Svoboda's for dinner several times a year as Art learned about each coin piano, orchestrion, band organ, music box, etc. by reading Vestal Press publications. I asked Art when he became interested in the historical aspects of automatic instruments, and he said, "From day one".

### Gatlinburg, Tennessee

After Art's last year of high school in 1964, returning from his family's Florida vacation, they stopped in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where there was a little storefront mechanical music museum in the tourist sector. They stayed in Gatlinburg overnight so they could visit. The museum had a few nickelodeons, a player piano and reproducing piano, and some reed organs and music boxes. The owner had college-age young ladies providing tours of the collection, ending by playing a Steinway grand Duo-Art near the front door which would attract more people. None of the tour guides played the keyboard instruments, but Art could.

Art befriended the owner, who invited him to help with a tour. Art demonstrated many manually played instruments. By the end of the tour, the owner said, "I want to hire you. Can you stay this summer and work for me as a tour guide? Art's dad said "No – we want you to have the experience of living away from home for your freshman year at college first. After that time, you can come back and work here during the summer if you want to." The owner agreed. Near the end of Art's freshman year, the owner wrote Art saying he was closing his museum for health reasons, so Art wouldn't have a job.

### Dave Junchen

As luck would have it, in one of the last classes of Art's freshman music history course, the professor was discussing the role of pipe organs in classical music. A fellow classmate named Larry Chase spoke up and said that he was working on a Wurlitzer theatre organ in the Virginia Theatre in town, and anyone would be welcome to see and hear it. Art spoke to Larry, who said "You should really talk to **David Junchen**, who is doing most of the work on the 2/8 Wurlitzer. Dave was attending the engineering school at the University of Illinois at the same time Art was there (1964-1968).



Art wanted to meet Dave right away. Art was invited out to see the organ. Junchen had a phenomenal talent and ear. He not only liked theatre organs, but he liked nickelodeons and excellent music rolls. Art loaned Dave a tape of a ten tune Clark "A" roll that Art had recorded at Svoboda's. A few days later, Art ran into Dave at a campus location where there was a piano. Dave handed the tape back, said "I really like that roll", sat down at the piano, and played all ten tunes in order, including the countermelodies, ornamentation, and of course each tune in the original key, thanks to his phenomenal memory for music arrangement. Dave later said his pitch memory was *almost* good enough to tune every pipe in a pipe organ alone, without comparing it to another pipe.

So...Dave and Art became friends during that last week of school. Art related losing the job opportunity in Gatlinburg, and Dave suggested that he ask **Al Svoboda** for a job. Art said, "I tried that when I was in high school, and it didn't work. He already has a technician, **Dave Ramey, Sr.**" Dave looked Art in the eye and said "Anyone who has 45 nickelodeons needs more than one technician. **Go ask him for a job again.**" Art did, and Al immediately hired him, having watched him look inside the pianos during Art's many prior visits.

### Working at Svoboda's

Dave Ramey didn't live in town yet but lived in Danville in east central Illinois. Each week, Dave worked at Svoboda's from Thursday evening thru Sunday afternoon and went home to his regular job Monday through Thursday. Art began working with and learning from Dave, already one of the country's finest pneumatic restorers, and with **Tom Sprague**, who had studied piano repair and rebuilding at Boston's famed North Bennet St. School, one of America's finest. Art had already learned to tune pianos and organs while in high school, so he could offer that service to Svoboda's from his start there. Dave could do the pneumatic parts, Tom worked on the pianos, and Art would put the musical finishing touches on each instrument.

After Art began working there in the summer of 1965, Al bought a 92 key Decap Dance Organ (now in the Sanfilippo Collection). It needed a pneumatic restoration, including new tubing. Art worked with

Dave and Tom for about a month. When it was time to reassemble the organ, the accordions didn't make any musical sense because their tubing was scrambled during recovering the pneumatics. Dave and Tom weren't sure how to proceed, and it was dinner time. Art said, "Go ahead and get dinner; I'll stay here and see if I can solve the problem. When they left, Art immediately removed all the tubing from the accordion unit and started from scratch between the junction block and the two accordions.

While Art was working, Al periodically came in and checked on his progress, saying with the usual twinkle in his eye "I hope you have your running shoes on because I will chase you out of here if it still doesn't work." When Dave and Tom returned and Art finished the retubing, they hoisted the accordion assembly back on top of the organ, connected the junction block, and the organ played as it should. The crowd applauded and cheered after each song played, making Al very happy. He later complimented Art on his musical ability and said he hoped Art would continue working for him.

Art continued working for Svoboda's during his spare time from college during the next four years, learning pneumatic work from Dave Ramey and piano restoration from Tom Sprague. They were both very generous in teaching and answering questions, and Art said he couldn't have had better teachers. His work there also led to meeting Harvey Roehl and Dave Bowers, each of whom would become important in Art's future career.

### Svoboda's Demise

When Svoboda's neighborhood began to decline in the late 1970s, Al and his sons opened a branch called Svoboda's Junior Nickelodeon in Lynwood, Illinois. Eventually everything was moved out of the original building into the new one, but it never had the success of the original. Over the years, Jasper Sanfilippo acquired several instruments from Svoboda's. When the Lynwood business closed in 1982, Al maintained the original location as an ordinary neighborhood bar, which finally closed in 1987. As of this writing, Svoboda's original building still exists in the form of apartments.



Art posing in 1961 at Horn's Cars of Yesterday



Art with Al Svoboda on calliope trailer



*Art in the NORAD band between the two directors with Willie Wilson below tuba*

## The NORAD Band

I asked Art how he got in the military. After graduating from the University of Illinois in June 1968, he planned to get a master's degree in music from a university in Iowa. He was accepted into the graduate program, but within a week he received his draft notice. The draft board asked what his plans were, and told him "No, you're not going to graduate school; you're going to Viet Nam!"

Art called the Fifth Army band in Chicago, but they had no flute openings. He then remembered a note on the bulletin board in the U/I music school administration building, saying, "Flute opening, NORAD Band. Call L.P. at this number." Upon calling, Art was told that he could audition for the multi-service NORAD Band in Colorado Springs (at his own expense, whether he passed the audition or not). NORAD was the North American Air Defense Command (today the Aerospace Command), a joint defense system of the U.S. and Canada, and the band was a traveling multi-service military show band that publicized NORAD by performing in North America. It was one of the finest military bands in the country. The flutist responsible for the note was in the NORAD Band but wanted to transfer into the Air Force Academy Band, also in Colorado Springs, but which performed at the Academy and didn't travel like the NORAD Band.

After Art's four years in the concert and marching bands at U. of Illinois, he easily passed the audition into the NORAD band, and he was guaranteed to remain there for his full 4-year term in the Air Force (1968-1972). They rehearsed in the Band Building at Peterson Field each weekday morning and had most afternoons and weekends off except when they were concertizing. For one or two weeks each month, they toured the U.S. and Canada, mainly flying on C-118s and C-54s, the military equivalents of the old reliable DC-6s and DC-4s, but occasionally using the more modern C-130s.

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## Colorado Springs

Once stationed in Colorado Springs, one of Art's priorities was visiting the Pikes Peak Ghost Town Museum, which he had visited as a tourist when his high school band took a trip to Denver and Colorado Springs in 1963. This museum had several automatic instruments including a single Mills Violano-Virtuoso, Seeburg models L and F, an Empress coin piano, two Aeolian pushup piano players, and a Wurlitzer CX for the tourists to enjoy. All needed restoration, and Art was hired to do this, one instrument after another, doing the piano restoration on site and taking pneumatic components to his barracks room on base. With another band member who helped him with piano work, he then rented part of a house in town where he could set up a shop and begin acquiring power tools. His work on automatic pianos earned enough income for him to buy his first vehicle, a 1969 Dodge pickup truck for moving pianos. By the early 1970s, Art got to know **Mike Kitner**, who visited Colorado Springs and helped with the restoration of Ghost Town's Wurlitzer in 1971.



On a visit to his parents' home in Chicago in summer 1971, Art's aunt (his father's older sister) introduced him to a young lady, Jeannie whose family went to the same church as his aunt and uncle. Her dad was nearing retirement, and her family had bought a home in Colorado Springs, anticipating moving there when her dad retired. Art and Jean got engaged in Chicago in December 1971, Jean's family moved to Colorado Springs in early 1972, and Art and Jean married in April 1972. Ironically, the aunt who introduced them introduced Art's father to his mother in 1945 while his father was still serving in the U.S. Army 26 years earlier—a real matchmaker!

### **Piano Servicing, Tuning and Rebuilding**

Art completed his military duty in 1972 and went into business full time tuning pianos and restoring automatic instruments in Colorado Springs. He knew Harvey Roehl ever since he was in high school, having bought many publications from Vestal Press, and periodically corresponded with Harvey, who had also read several articles that Art had already written for the *Journal of the Musical Box Society International*.

On one occasion, Harvey mentioned to Art "**Larry Givens'** book *Rebuilding the Player Piano* has been selling well, but when people ask if we have a well-illustrated book on servicing the *piano*, I tell them "No, there's no such a book." Art replied "Okay, I'll write one." Harvey said he'd publish Art's book if there would be no payments until royalties were paid on sales, and Art would have to supply his own illustrations. Harvey stipulated the latter after Larry Givens refused to provide any illustrations for *Rebuilding the Player Piano*, and Harvey had to photograph his wife Marion's hands recovering pneumatics and doing a few other procedures, which Harvey then traced for use in the book. (See pp. 23 through 32 of *Rebuilding the Player Piano* for examples of these drawings.)

Art started writing in the early 1970s and it was published in 1976. It was very fortunate that the flutist who sat next to Art in the NORAD band, **Willie Wilson**, loved photography and had a fine camera. Art enlisted Willie to take hundreds of photographs for the book.



**Art creating his first arrangement in 1966**

But how would Art produce the many line drawings that were needed? Keep reading...

### **Virginia City and Nevada City, Montana**

One day in 1972, **Paul Eakins**, owner of the Gay Nineties village in Sikeston, Missouri, called Art and said that **Ozzie Wurdeman** had died. Ozzie had serviced automatic instruments for a long time in the Bovey Restoration in Montana, which included 248 buildings in Virginia City and the reconstructed adjacent town of Nevada City. This was over twice as many historic buildings as there were in Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, all furnished with historic antiques. The owner, **Charlie Bovey**, a former Montana state senator, was a friend of Paul Eakins, and was looking for someone to take Ozzie's place to maintain and repair over 40 nickelodeons and band organs in the collection, which included the final inventory of the B.A.B. organ company of Brooklyn, New York—including their remaining organs, a roll perforator, collection of master rolls, and several cardboard book punches.

Paul had heard good things about Art working at Svoboda's, and recommended Art to Charlie for the job. Although Art was in Colorado Springs, about 760 miles from Virginia City, Dave Ramey in Chicago was about twice as far away. Charlie called Art later that year and arranged for Art to come there to work in 1973.

One of Bovey's important buildings was the Virginia City Opera House where melodramas were performed for the public, accompanied by a large Cremona photoplayer in the orchestra pit. Charlie's need in the spring of 1973 was getting the Cremona working again, since a water pipe had burst in the unheated building, flooding the orchestra pit, and leaving the photoplayer frozen in a foot of ice all winter. Art spent three weeks there, and with assistance of Bovey's curator **John Ellingsen**, and using a noisy, smelly outdoor kerosene heater in the orchestra pit, they got the photoplayer fixed well enough to be played manually by the end of the dress rehearsal the night before the opening performance!



**Art hand-cutting his first paper music roll in 1969**

When Art returned the following season, he first tuned the instruments. Charlie's reaction was to tell Art his previous mechanic had been a fine repairman, but Art knew how to make the instruments *sound good*. This led Art to continue working for the Boveys for three weeks at the beginning of each summer until Charlie passed away in 1978. Some of the important instruments were a Seeburg G, Cremona J, Wurlitzer DX, the Cremona photoplayer, a Wurlitzer 180 band organ, 66-key, 87-key, and 89-key Gavioli organs, and many smaller organs from B.A.B. One of the largest artifacts in the collection was the magnificent Eden Palais carousel with its own 89-key Gavioli, which are now completely restored and featured in the Sanfilippo Collection.

This brings us back to the new piano servicing book that Art was writing for The Vestal Press. Bovey's curator, John Ellingson, shared Art's interest in automatic pianos and organs, and he also had a wonderful talent for making fine quality mechanical line drawings. Art soon saw John's beautiful artistic work and hired him to come to Colorado Springs to create the detailed drawings for *Piano Servicing, Tuning, and Rebuilding*. Between Art's text, John's drawings, and Willie's photos, it turned out that all the effort was well-worth doing, as the book remains a good seller today, 46 years later.

### The Survival of Virginia City and Nevada City, Montana

When Charlie died, his son negotiated the sale of certain antiques that were in the Bovey Restoration buildings. After this, the State of Montana Historical Society took over the Bovey properties. It was and remains a large operation, and the state is still doing its best to keep the properties open. Unfortunately, a fire occurred in the Bale of Hay Saloon in Virginia City in 1983, damaging some of the orchestrions, but the damage to the building has been repaired. Various people have periodically done maintenance on the instruments, including **Mike Edwards** of Rapid City, South Dakota, and **Jeremy Stevens** of Kaysville, Utah.

### Working for Collectors

Much of Art's business from the late 1970s through about 2020 has been restoration, tuning, and maintenance for several major collectors in the Midwest and elsewhere in the country.

I asked Art how he met **Jasper Sanfilippo**. Jasper first got started collecting nickelodeons in the 1970s; an early mechanical music contact was **Steve Gronowski**, who worked on slot machines and had several nickelodeons. Steve recommended Dave Ramey, Sr. to Jasper for repairs. When Jasper acquired an 80-keyless Gebr. Bruder fairground organ in 1976, he called Dave to see if he would restore it. Dave said



89 key Gavioli in Nevada City, MT. Music Hall

he didn't have time, but suggested that Jasper should call **John Hovancak** in Dodgeville, Wisconsin, who had also worked for Dave after Art moved to Colorado. Dave and John had worked together restoring and creating projects for **Alex Jordan's** House on the Rock attraction in Dodgeville, where John continued working on large instruments and elaborate displays over the ensuing years. (Incidentally, John and Art both attended Thornton high school in Harvey, Illinois, but didn't know each other at that time.)

Jasper hired John to restore the Bruder, which John completed with his employee **Dan Meuer** in 1981. John had known Art for years and called him to do the final regulation and tuning of the Bruder in Dodgeville. Art and Jean traveled to Dodgeville to do the work, and John then drove them to Sanfilippo's home northwest of Chicago to meet Jasper and Marian.

Jasper already knew Art by reputation, and asked Art if he could do some restoration work for him. Art began by restoring Jasper's first Seeburg G, completing it in 1984. Art had various employees from the time he opened his Colorado Springs shop in 1972, and this G was the first project that his employee **Bob Grunow** helped to restore. Reblitz Restorations had as many as six employees during their busiest years, but Bob became Art's key employee and they have worked together for 39 years—so far! Other important employees who have worked for Reblitz Restorations at length in the past have included Joseph Cossolini, Roger Hathaway, Oren "Max" Maxwell, Rex Kennedy, Eddie Lucero, Jennifer Parks, and others. Very importantly, Jeannie has taken care of most of the office work, always keeping the clerical work running smoothly.

Along with completely restoring over 35 instruments for the Sanfilippo Collection since 1984, Art continued to make several service trips each year working with John Hovancak, **Jerry Biasella**, and other technicians to keep Jasper's growing collection in tune and working well.



Art's frequent travels to the Midwest also led to long-time relationships with **Bob and Sharon Gilson** in Wisconsin, and **Jim and Sherrie Krughoff** in Illinois. Since the 1980s, Bob has sent Reblitz Restorations several dozen large instruments for complete restoration, including the Wurlitzer Concert PianOrchestra that once graced the Penny Arcade in Disneyland and later Walt Disney World, a Hupfeld Style III Super Pan Orchestra, a 56-key Limonaire Jazzbandophone, and many other American and European instruments. Art feels especially close to Bob because of their shared interest not only in the mechanics, but Bob introduced Art to the importance of a milling machine, a machine lathe, and many other tools that have dramatically increased the production capability of Reblitz Restorations over the years.

Because of the rough condition of many instruments, Art added a soundboard press to his growing collection of major tools, which has been essential for making new soundboards for orchestrions that had suffered from water damage or bad previous repairs. Several major projects have even included making whole new piano back structures including the soundboard and bridges, back posts, back frame and pinblock from scratch.

Art also developed a close friendship with Jim and Sherrie Krughoff, with their Hupfeld Pan Orchestra being one of Reblitz Restorations' most important projects, and their ongoing tuning and maintenance being an important part of his Midwest service trips.

More recently, **Mark Yaffe** in Tampa has also become a close friend and important restoration customer. Other collectors and businesses for whom Art had the privilege to work have included Rick Crandall, Paul and Bob Milhous, Joel and Pam Jancko, the historic Kit Carson County Carousel organ in Eastern Colorado, Bruce Perelman, Johnny Duckworth, and many others

Art said he and his employee Bob have felt blessed to have been able to tune, service, or restore some of the world's finest automatic instruments through the decades, including three of the Mason & Hamlin Ampico grands that were sent to Italy for hand-carving; three Hupfeld Pan Orchestras; Hupfeld Helios orchestrions; Phonoliszt-Violinas; a Wendel Viola Orchestra; Gebr. Weber orchestrions; two Philipps Style III Paganinis; a Wendel Monster Paganini; a Welte Wotan, several Welte style 4 Concert Orchestrions; a Wurlitzer Concert PianOrchestra; several Mandolin PianOrchestras; numerous Wurlitzer BX, CX, and LX orchestrions; a Solo Violin Piano; Wurlitzer band organ styles 103, 105, 146, 153, 155 "Monster," 165, and 180; all styles of Seeburg orchestrions and coin pianos; Coinola styles X, CO, and SO; Cremona styles J, K, and 10; Nelson-Wiggen orchestrions; and many European dance hall and fairground organs, among many other instruments.

## The Banjo-Orchestra

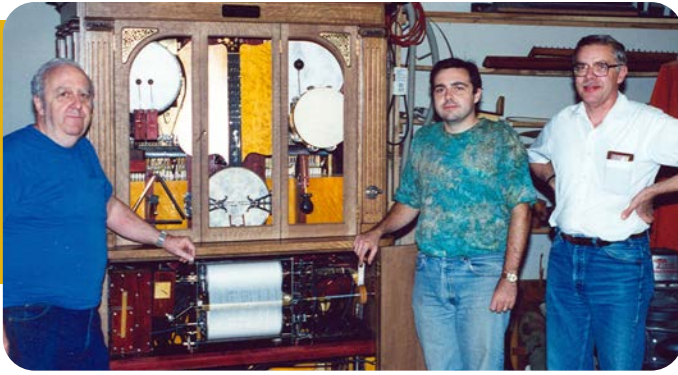
I asked Art how he got involved with the Banjo-Orchestra. Art wrote a column for the MBSI journal, called *Art Reblitz's Most Wanted List*. His first article of the series was on the Connorized Banjo-Orchestra, which was made but with no known surviving complete example. **Rick Crandall** read the article and got fired up. He found that Knott's Berry Farm had one, devoid of its banjo and percussion instruments, but including the original piano, pneumatic stack, roll mechanism, and pump. With Dave Ramey's experience restoring Encore Banjos and making several new Ramey Encore Banjos by that time, Dave was the obvious expert to go to for the banjo. Rick had already hired Art to make a roll of *If I Were a Rich Man from Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Original Boogie Woogie*, and *Michigan Fight Song* for his Popper Felix (now in the Krughoff Collection) and so was familiar with Art's music arranging. Art said he would be very interested in arranging the music if Dave re-created a Banjo Orchestra.



Back interior view of the original Engelhardt Banjo Orchestra



Rick Crandall's original Engelhardt Banjo Orchestra with new banjo and percussion



Dave Ramey Sr. and Jr. with Art Reblitz by the first Banjo Orchestra



Art at Jasper Sanfilippo's in 2006

Rick, Dave, and Art got together in Rick's home in Michigan, made preliminary plans for the Banjo Orchestra that would use the original Banjo Orchestra that Rick had obtained, and created a tracker scale for the new roll. Around the same time, Dave and Art designed the new Ramey Banjo-Orchestra, to be built around copies of the 61-note piano back that Seeburg used in their popular KT orchestrion. **Bill Edgerton** had already created his popular series of reproduction Seeburg KT Specials and gave his permission for Dave to use his piano plate pattern to have the new plate castings made. Dave had his first group of new piano backs made up, so they now had 61-note pianos to build the first batch of Ramey Banjo-Orchestras.

With a 100-hole, 9-per-inch tracker bar, Art included a multiplex switch providing either all four banjo strings with piano accompaniment, or the full 61-note piano plus three banjo strings. Both combinations also included percussion, expression, and controls. Art arranged his first tune on his roll drawing board and sent the pencil master to **Mike Kitner** for perforating (as he had done with hundreds of other rolls previously), but the timing of the beginning of each fret hole relative to each picker hole was too critical for Mike's hand punching. The roll didn't work, and the project went on hold. Then **Carl Lambie** became available to make the rolls with his MIDI-controlled perforator, and taught Art how to use a MIDI system using the Cakewalk program for DOS—which Art still uses for his music arranging. Through an interface, Art can hear the music using a modern Roland synthesizer program. Since the 1960s, Art has arranged 588 tunes for customers, including 18 ten-tune rolls for the Banjo-Orchestra.

## AMICA and MBSI

I asked Art how he heard of AMICA and MBSI. Art said that when he was in grade school, he would go to the public library to find what he could on mechanical music. This was limited, because there was no Vestal

Press yet. One of the first services Art heard of was **Ruth Bornand** in New York because she advertised in *Hobbies* magazine and others. Her brochure included a reference to MBSI. Art joined and that led to meeting many collectors and other restorers. When Art first heard of AMICA, it had existed mainly in California for several years and was starting to go national, so he immediately joined. Over the years, Art corresponded by mail a lot since there were no computers yet. Art went on to write many articles for these organizations.

## Mechanical Music Research

I asked Art how he learned about the history of music machines. In the early 1980s, he and **Dave Bowers** began researching original music trade magazines in the New York Public Library. Dave had a camera and lighting, and he got a permit to photograph documents in the archive. They sat there for hours over several days at the special collections at Lincoln Center, photographing pertinent pages of the *Music Trade Review and Presto*. Art would search very quickly and carefully, so as not to tear the pages, and Dave would do the photography. With so many years of publications and so little time, the project was held until ten years ago. Then, Dave sponsored having the magazines microfilmed for the library in return for acquiring the originals. The bindings were all cut off for the micro filming, so they were all separate pages.

There were about forty cartons full of the magazines, which were stored in Dave's home until it became possible for the Musical Box Society to scan them. En route to the MBSI for scanning, Dave sent the magazines to Art, who spent several years searching them for articles and advertising related to automatic music. After copying important articles for safe-keeping, Art sent them to Rosanna Harris, the editor of the MBSI Journal, for scanning in Denver. About ten years later, Art and Dave finished their new 904-page Encyclopedia of American Coin-Operated Pianos and Orchestrions based on their many years of research.



Over many decades, Art also collected coin-operated piano roll catalogs and bulletins and began creating registries of extant instruments. This eventually led to the creation of the [www.mechanicalmusicpress.com](http://www.mechanicalmusicpress.com) historical website, combining Art's work with years of highly detailed research by **Terry Hathaway**.

## The Seeburg Files

When Dave Bowers first visited Art in Chicago in the early sixties, they toured Chicago to see the remaining original factory buildings of coin piano manufacturers including J.P. Seeburg, Nelson-Wiggen, Mills Novelty Company, and Operators Piano Company. Seeburg was the only one remaining in business, and Dave arranged for a tour of the factory. A current executive of the company conducted the tour, where they were shown the current jukebox production line but nothing significant from the coin piano era.

After the tour, an older employee was leaving and walked with Art and Dave to the parking lot. He asked, "Did they show you the file room?" Dave said "No". Since the person who gave Art and Dave the tour said they didn't have any old literature, Art asked "What are you talking about?" The employee said "There's a room in the older part of the factory where they have hundreds of file cabinets full of old papers. There's also one of those keyboardless nickelodeons in there with the stained-glass eagle." Art said, "No, they didn't show us that," which was the end of the conversation.

Decades later, en route from Colorado to work in the Chicago area, Art decided to stop in DeKalb to photograph the old Clark Orchestra Roll Company building. After doing this, Art was just getting back into his car when a man pulled up next to him and asked Art what he was doing. Art told him and then the man said that he had retired from the Wurlitzer Company – "Come on in, we'll talk."

The man had an office next door. Art told him what he was interested in, and the man related a lot of interesting information regarding his career at Wurlitzer. He said he had his own business since he retired, dealing in used office furniture. He mentioned "I went to the Seeburg factory auction when they auctioned everything off. I was able to buy 200 file cabinets full of their old literature."



Art asked, "Did the literature go back to their days of making coin pianos and orchestrions?" The man said "Yes." Art asked what he did with all of it. The man said he threw it all away and sold the file cabinets. When Art expressed his disappointment, the man said he was impressed with the worldwide scope of Seeburg's business, adding "I tore some pretty stamps off some of the envelopes before I threw everything away. Would you like some of those stamps?" Art said, "No I don't need that, but do you realize that you destroyed very valuable history?" When Art and Dave Bowers visited the Seeburg factory in the 1960s, the executive who gave the tour didn't show them the files because they probably contained proprietary information on Seeburg's current business.

## The Future

Facets of Art's career have been mainly restoration, including finishing touches such as tuning, and making the instruments sound their best; plus arranging music, and extensive writing. I asked him what his plans are, since the *Encyclopedia of American Coin Pianos and Orchestrions* is now finished, and he has also finished writing the third edition of his piano servicing book. In the future, Art plans to continue restoring orchestrions, organs, and a few reproducing pianos; and continue with music arranging. As for writing, Art has put the brakes on this—at least for now—to catch up with other things. The current waiting list includes five Hupfeld orchestrions, more music arranging for the Ramey Banjo-Orchestra, and many other projects.

## Summary

This has been the story of Art Reblitz, past, present, and future. What a remarkable life! He has packed more into one lifetime than others might accomplish in ten. His musical taste is flawless and very broad, including all classical music, jazz and popular music from the twenties, and some more current music. He has been able to diagnose problems with my nickelodeons over the phone! It's so rare to encounter someone with interests in classical music and mechanical music. I have spent many hours on the phone with Art discussing all these aspects of music and playing each other some favorite tunes. Art has an incredible memory for all the details of these stories even after the passage of many years. It is truly an honor to know him.

Matt Jaro can be contacted at [mjaro@verizon.net](mailto:mjaro@verizon.net)

*Workers at Reblitz Restorations in the early 1990's: Rex Kennedy, Jennifer Parks, Eddie Lucero, Art, John Greg, Jeannie and Bob Grunow*

# RAGNAR'S RAG'S RAG RAGTIME AND SIMULATIONS

by: Ragnar Hellspong

**This article is about a unique ragtime website, available at [www.ragsrag.com](http://www.ragsrag.com). It contains more than 2 GB of ragtime music and documents, piano roll transcriptions, and stock orchestra arrangements from the ragtime era 1898-1918. It was established in 2010 by me out of lifelong love for ragtime music. Please take a look for yourself!**

I'm Ragnar Hellspong. I've been playing ragtime piano in the Stockholm area for more than 60 years and piano in various traditional jazz bands for longer than that. So I'm obviously an old man (78 years actually). I learned how to play the piano at an early age but it didn't catch on until I was about 12-13 when I found that one of my class mates could play the trumpet.

During that time Stockholm – and especially its western superb Bromma where I grew up – was the center of revival for New Orleans Jazz in Sweden. This was a couple of years before Elvis Presley took the youth by storm. Traditional jazz bands played at High School dances and other places and it was really cool to play in a band. So me and my school friends started one.

I couldn't elaborate a solo on the piano at that time but just played chords from a handwritten chord book. I could read and play music notation but chords were a novelty, but one that I soon mastered.

We started out with a small setting: trumpet, clarinet, piano, guitar and drums. After a few years I advanced to a better band we called the San Jacinto Jazz Band and we became the in-house band in a local jazz club consequently called San Jacinto. One highlight in the history of this club was when legendary clarinetist George Lewis visited the club and I had the pleasure of playing with him.

I continued playing as an amateur pianist in different jazz bands while studying at the Royal Institute of Technology to earn a Master of Mechanical Engineering degree and later on – but more seldom – when I made a career as sales engineer, married, got children and found other interests. I stopped playing in bands around 1988.

I first heard ragtime on a vinyl record, probably around 1958. It was a piano roll recording and I still remember some of the tunes: Magnetic Rag, Ragtime Oriole and A Tennessee Tantalizer. I was truly fascinated!

It was practically impossible to find any ragtime sheet music back then but I was lucky enough to finally find a folio of 12 classical rags by Scott Joplin, James Scott and Joseph Lamb. That's how my life long love for ragtime music started.

## WEBSITE, FILES,



Four pictures above:

1st Photo: Ragnar at the piano in 1956

2nd Photo: Ragnar's first jazz band - 1956

3rd Photo: New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis - 1960

4th Photo: San Jacinto Jazz Band - 1958



In 1996 I was contacted by Oleg Mezjuev, another ragtime enthusiast from Stockholm, and we agreed to start the Swedish Ragtime Society to organize social meetings with other ragtime players and invite interested people to come, play and listen. Oleg at this time already had his website at ragtime.nu (still alive but no longer updated). I actually composed my first rag (Rags Rag) the day I first met him!

We arranged eleven meetings between 2000 and 2006 and I learned a lot from Oleg about MIDI-files and music notation software. I had worked as a software database developer since 1990 and sold some programs via a website I developed called forkeeps.com so I was familiar with computer programming and website construction but had not come into contact with MIDI-files and music notation software before.

So I bought a notation software program called Sibelius with a sound library called Sibelius Sounds and started experimenting. In 2009 I had collected several hundred ragtime music sheets and started to enter them into Sibelius – originally only piano scores but soon also orchestra scores. Once entered, I could export them as audio files, either as a MIDI-file or as a .wav-file.

At that time I came in contact with piano roll collectors like Warren Trachtmann and Terry Smythe who had started to convert their piano rolls into digital MIDI-files. Especially Terry Smythe who had a huge collection of several thousand MIDI-files available for download from his (now defunct) website and although most of them were not ragtime related still provided an invaluable source for me to get hold of ragtime piano roll files.

At the end of 2009 I thought I had enough material to launch my own ragtime website at ragsrag.com. I wanted to include an audio file and a music sheet for each item, both playable on the site and downloadable to the visitors local computer.

But what formats should I use? Why make yet another ragtime site?

Reason #1 is that nowhere had I found each piano rag presented with both an audio file and the corresponding sheet music. Here you can look at the sheet music while listening to the audio file. For someone wanting to learn how to play a certain rag this must be ideal.

Reason #2 is that I believed it's was no longer advisable to stick to rags in MIDI-format. The sound quality for the average man (with no other sound source than his computer's built-in Wavetable synth) is poor and the fact that a MIDI-file is about 50 times smaller than a mp3-file had become irrelevant already in 2010. Broadband connections were getting faster

and faster, yet all ragtime sites carried MIDI-files only. So I decided for the mp3 audio format which gives a much better sound quality for everyone plus when downloaded the possibility to use various mp3-devices (including most mobile phones) for play back.

Reason #3 is that I felt the need for a site which also carried ragtime orchestra audio files and arrangements.

So I decided to use the mp3-audio file format. I also decided to make my own music sheets rather than use copies from my own collection of printed ragtime scores or copies of scores downloaded from digital collections on the web. All material on ragsrag.com are therefore in the public domain.

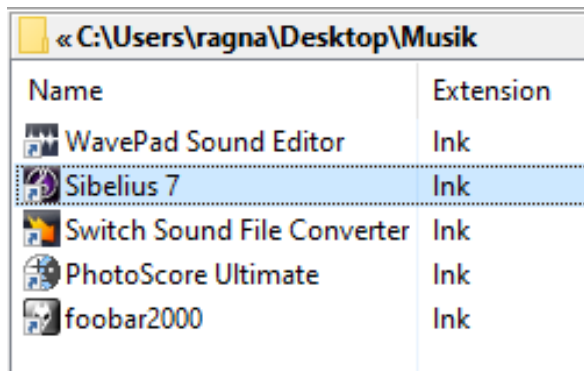
Since the start, I have uploaded 212 authentic piano roll transcriptions. Of course there are more out there but so far I haven't been able to find them. Therefore 100 ragtime pieces transcribed and sequenced by hand by me and Raymond Robijns have been added. During the ragtime era about 2000 instrumental ragtime pieces were composed. Most of them are not very exciting so using a role of thumb I would say max 20% are worth preserving. I think I have covered most of them on ragsrag.com.

Around 2011-2012 I found Frank Himpl's website with yet another golden trove of ragtime MIDI-files. When I helped him identify a piano roll rag he had classified as Unknown, it became apparent that he did not get much attention or praise from visitors for his work. Later it seems that he was so distressed that he simply took down his website and I lost contact with him. A few years later (in 2017) I tried to contact him again with the help of Terry Smythe but due to some misunderstanding (Franks mail ended up in my spam folder) he stopped our conversation.

During that time, I understood Terry did some work for AMICA, which was a completely unknown organization for me at the time. Not surprising, perhaps as I am not a collector of mechanical music instruments. Some friends in the Swedish Ragtime Society had piano players and collections of piano rolls but that is how close I came to this field of interest. What made me join AMICA in 2020 was something else: the publishing of Frank Himpl MIDI-files (for members only). I looked forward to more files from him in the years to come and when he tragically died my last hope was that AMICA could take over his collection and continue publishing new material. I hope this will be the case.

So what exactly is my ragrag.com website about? The subtitle summarizes: Free ragtime music and scores. It contains sections for piano rolls, virtual piano, virtual orchestra, virtual brass, early jazz, live performances and an about section. The "virtual" part means that they are played not by humans but by digital sound libraries.

Here are the programs I use for this purpose:



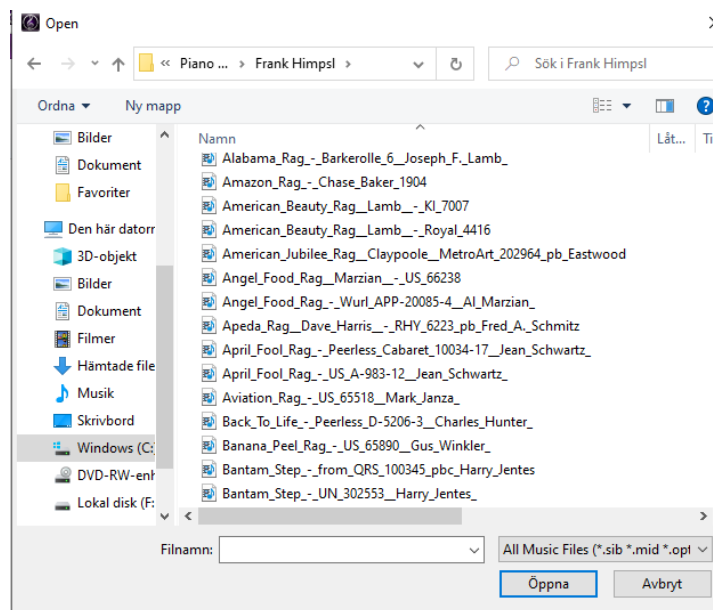
I use a music notation software (**Sibelius 7**) that can produce professional looking music scores and play back the music with the help of digital sound libraries. There are other music notation software programs on the market, the two most well known being Finale and Dorico.

Sibelius files have the extension .sib and they can be played only in the Sibelius program itself. However you can export the .sib files into many formats, including an audio format with the extension .wav. These files can be played on most digital devices and can be burned to CD. However as they are huge, these files can in turn be converted and compressed to the .mp3 format for use on web pages like ragrag.com.

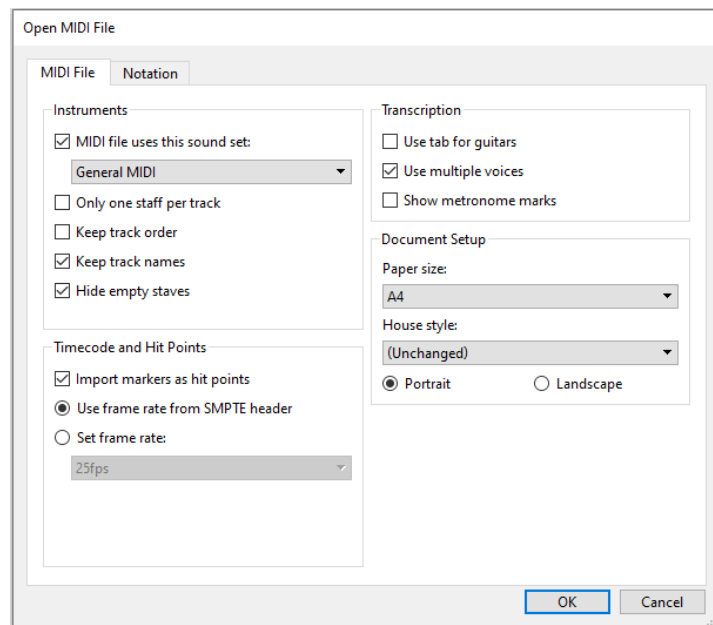
To do this conversion I use two programs: Wave Pad Sound Editor and Switch Sound File Converter. In the first, I normalize the .wav file and save it with a selected audio quality and in the second I convert from .wav to .mp3. The Photo Score Ultimate program is a scanner program that scans music sheets for import into Sibelius. It works very well if the scanned original is a printed score but is unfortunately not usable with photo copies of music sheets downloaded from the Internet.

There are several ways of entering a music score into Sibelius. The easiest way is to import a MIDI-file which is then immediately available to be exported as an audio file. I will give you a glimpse of what it takes to convert a MIDI file to an audio file.

The first step is to select the MIDI file to convert. Out of this list I chose to convert Aviation Rag by Mark Janza:

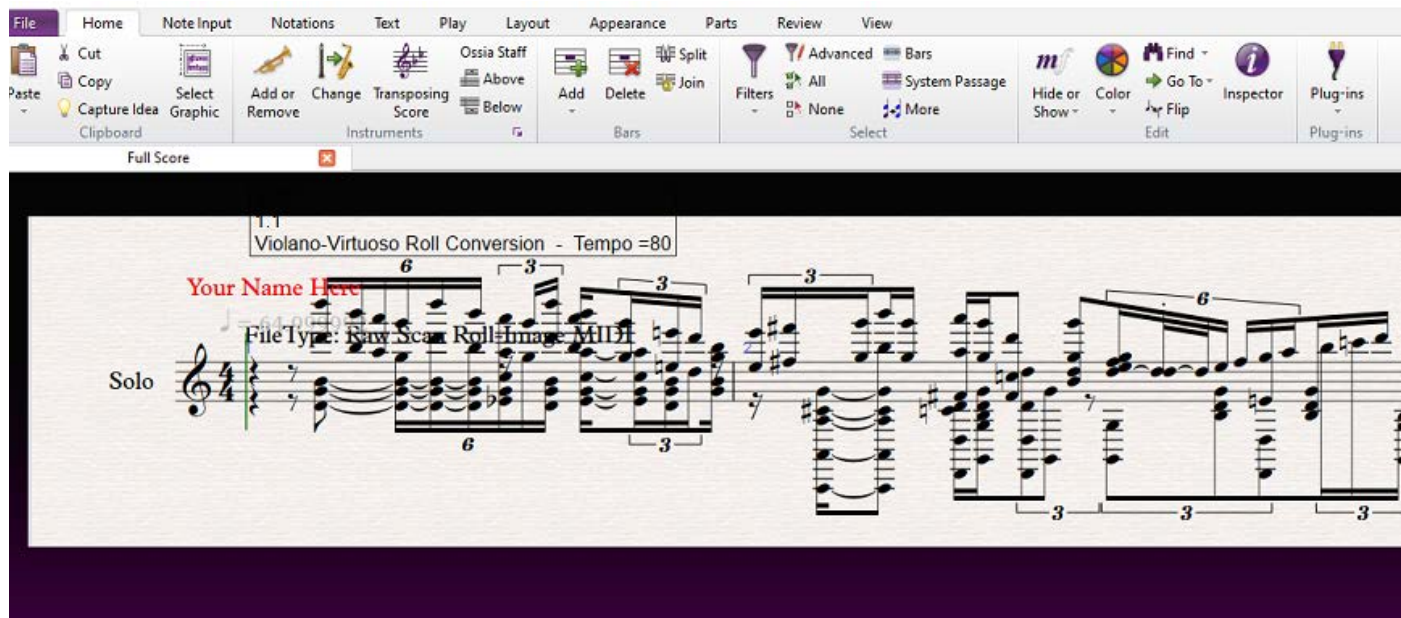


I open this file in Sibelius and click OK on the options window:





The imported file looks like this:

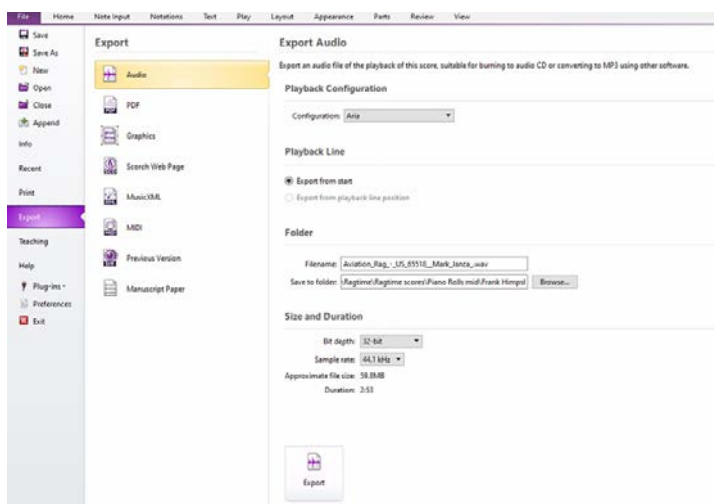


Despite the appearance this is sufficient for the audio file but not for the sheet music. It actually looks quite terrible as it does not adhere to any standard music format. It does not separate left and right hands and although it would be possible to make it readable it would take a lot of work.

A .wav file will be created. As described above this is fine if you want to burn a CD but to be used on a webpage it must be normalized and converted to the .mp3 format. Here is a comparison of file sizes between the files :

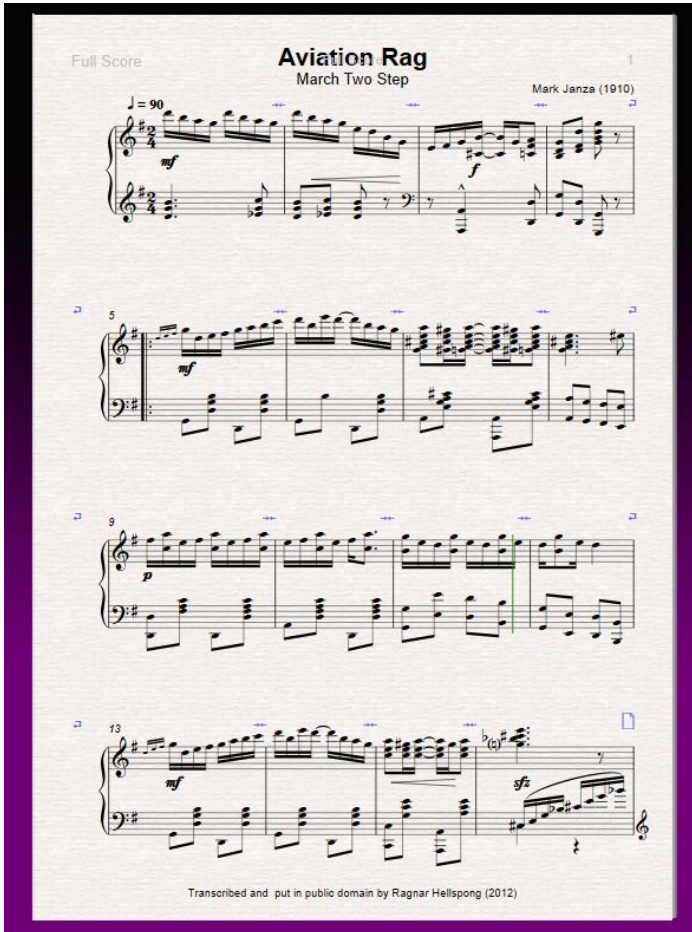
Let's look at how to produce an audio file from this sample. From the main menu select Export | Audio.

	Aviation_Rag_-_...	mp3	3 571 067	2022-02-09 10:19:38
	Aviation_Rag_-_...	wav	31 492 786	2022-02-09 10:17:34
	Aviation_Rag_-_...	sib	74 912	2022-02-09 10:12:31
	Aviation_Rag_-_...	mid	74 853	2022-02-09 09:36:49



So the mp3 file is 50 times larger than the MIDI file but roughly 10 times smaller than the .wav file.

To be able to produce a properly looking music sheet a printed score must separately be imported or manually entered into Sibelius. In that case the score must be edited note by note – a time consuming job. Here is what Aviation Rag looks like once it is edited in Sibelius. Via the export menu it can be exported as a .pdf file.



The image shows a screenshot of a music score for "Aviation Rag" in Sibelius software. The score is titled "Aviation Rag" and "March Two Step" by Mark Janza (1910). It is in 2/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 90. The score is arranged for piano and includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *f*, and *sfz*. The score is transcribed and put in public domain by Ragnar Hellspang (2012).

So where does the piano sound come from? It comes from a digital sound library which emulates the sound of instruments. Included with Sibelius is such a program called Sibelius Sounds. It can emulate hundreds of different instruments. You can also use third party sound libraries and I have tried one called Garritan and one called NotePerformer. For the piano

sound they are all equal but for orchestral sound with multiple instruments I prefer NotePerformer which has a unique way of realistically blending the instruments in an ensemble.

An orchestral score entered into Sibelius looks like this:



The image shows a screenshot of an orchestral score for "Peacherine Rag" in Sibelius software. The score is titled "Peacherine Rag" and is by Scott Joplin (1901), arranged by D.S. deLisle. It is in 2/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 75. The score is arranged for a full orchestra and includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, *f*, and *mp*. The score is transcribed and put in public domain by Ragnar Hellspang (2010).

The virtual piano section is not based on piano rolls. They are based on the original score entered as described above. That is what I call a manual transcription or sequencing process.

The same goes for the virtual orchestra (10-12 instruments) and the virtual brass section (13-24 instruments). The arrangements in these sections are all original stock arrangements for the orchestra types popular at the time.

The early jazz section contains examples from the music genre - jazz - that in just a few years superseded ragtime and started a new era of hot music. The most important year for jazz breakthrough was 1917 when the first jazz records by Original Dixieland Jazz Band were released. The collection includes 12 of their best known original recordings with the simultaneously released orchestra arrangements.



Dixieland Jazz Band were released. The collection includes 12 of their best known original recordings with the simultaneously released orchestra arrangements.

Ragtime was a written down music which was easy to recreate. Early jazz was mostly an improvised music that was not written down and therefore difficult to recreate.

I have received many requests for adding this or that to my web site over the years. Here are some requests and my answers:

**Q: Why not provide the original music sheets instead of your own?**

**A: I have used originals of extremely varied condition to make the site and have therefore decided that a uniform look is desirable.**

**Q: Why are the piano rolls used not specified?**

**A: Because my interest is in the music itself and not in the roll history.**

**Q: Why are the MIDI-files not provided?**

**A: They are not provided because I did not foresee the demand. I will however be glad to provide them to people who ask for them.**

Excuse me for taking the opportunity to ask the readers of this article for help to make new additions to ragsrag.com. I am especially interested in receiving piano roll MIDI-files to replace the 100 manually sequenced file in the virtual piano section. I would be happy if I could eliminate the need for all of them!

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ragnar Hellspong's fascinating story and history is partially told in the opening paragraphs of this essay. Here are a few other bits of information provided by Ragnar in his own words.

*I was born in Stockholm, Sweden in 1944. After high school I studied mechanical engineering at the Royal Institute of Technology and acquired a M.Sc. in 1967. Between 1969 and 1988 I worked with sales and marketing of industrial automation equipment in various companies. During 1988-1990 I was general manager of an electrical consulting company and from 1991 until recently I had my own database programming firm.*

*I married in 1972 and had three boys who are now all married and have kids of their own. After 56 years in Stockholm, twenty years ago I moved to the rural countryside near Uppsala with my wife Ulla. We are celebrating 50 years of marriage this year. Time flies!*

*P.S. My friends call me "Ragge" which in Sweden is an often-used nickname for people named Ragnar. It has nothing to do with my interest in ragtime but it inspired me to call my ragtime website ragsrag.com."*

Contact Ragnar at: [ragnar.hellspong@krusenberg.com](mailto:ragnar.hellspong@krusenberg.com)

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Readers interested in ragtime music and piano rolls, and ragtime-era music should find this essay especially interesting. Additionally, those technical hobbyists will be especially pleased to find ways to bring a MIDI file to life by using a simple software program with sound-font capability to produce an MP3 computer musical listening file. Most MIDI programs have the ability to simulate a MIDI file electronically, but to add a sound font offers an incredible upgrade, especially if you have good speakers attached to your computer!

As Ragnar and I were communicating about publishing his essay, I impressed upon him the importance that AMICA members would have with the addition of the actual MIDI files to his website so they could be downloaded and used by AMICA members for playing on their own MIDI-equipped pianos. Also, the piano roll detail with the label, roll number, and any other identifying information is important. Besides AMICA members, others would surely want this information included on the website.

Ragnar agreed, and for now, most of these actual MIDI files are available in a zip file here: <https://ragsrag.com/pr/midi.zip>. This link is also shown on his website, piano roll section. Ragnar says these files will eventually be included directly on his website to complete the picture, as his time and technical requirements permit.

# Classical Duo Art Piano Rolls

## Authenticity: London Versus New York Recordings

by: Terry Broadbent

The question posed in the title is one that player piano aficionados have discussed for many years. Some argue that American rolls are the better of the two groups, others, the opposite. In any attempt to shed light on the issue, let us examine the background to the two recording studios and look at the lives and careers of the men who ran them.

### THE NEW YORK RECORDING STUDIO

The Duo-Art system was launched in the USA early in 1914 and the very first Duo-Art, a rather nondescript piece entitled "Love's Last Word" by Octave Creieux played by Felix Arndt, was issued in January 1914, according to C.D. Smith's catalog of Duo-Art piano rolls. Soon many eminent pianists were enticed to record classical Duo-Art rolls for the Aeolian company, adding prestige to its products. Those who didn't record for Aeolian often recorded rolls for one or more rival companies such as Ampico, Artrio, Hupfeld, Philipps, or Welte, so most of the pianistic "big names" of the early 20th century were represented on piano roll. Some well-known pianists spread their talents widely and recorded for several companies. The claim that a pianist recorded exclusively for Aeolian, or some other company had to be taken with a pinch of salt as it applied only for the duration of their current contract.

From the outset, the New York Duo-Art recording studio was managed and run by William Creary Woods, assisted by other Aeolian staff members, in particular Arno Lachmund whose father was a notable pianist and former pupil of Liszt. William Creary Woods was born on 1 August 1881 in Coldspring, Putnam, New York and died on 29 May 1967 at Club Haven Convalescent Home, Wilmington Delaware, aged 85. He was the eldest of six children of James Creary Woods and his wife Rebecca Smith, 1860 – 1910.

After graduating from music college, William joined the Aeolian company in New York in 1905, initially as a development executive and stayed with Aeolian for the next 25 years. His musical talents led to his being appointed recording manager for the new Duo-Art system when it was introduced in 1913 – 14. On 11 June 1918 he married the talented young American pianist and composer Edna Belle Bentz who had earlier studied with Ferruccio Busoni and Egon Petri. Later she recorded nine Duo-Art rolls in New York

under Creary Woods' direction. Those who attended the Wilmslow meeting in 2019 might remember her spirited rendition of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March, No. 1*. As eight of her rolls were issued before 1918 one wonders whether their romance blossomed in the recording studio. Two sons were born William Creary Woods Jr. (1919 – 1980) and Elroy Bentz Woods (1921 – 1983).

After the financial crash of 1929 – 1930, Creary Woods joined the staff of the Curtis Institute of Music, whose founder and director was the famous pianist Josef Hofmann, his friend from their Duo-Art recording sessions. Later Creary Woods was principal of the Delaware School of Music where he remained until his retirement.

### RECORDING PROCEDURE IN THE NEW YORK STUDIO

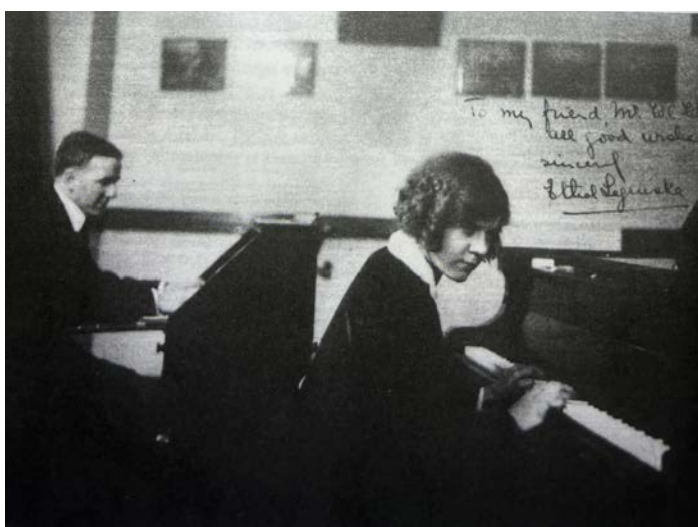


*Paderewski plays, watched by Rudolph Ganz (left), and William Creary Woods (right)*

As is clear from the photograph, Creary Woods sat at a control console to the left of the recording piano as the pianist played. A series of wires led from sensors below the piano keys to a nearby soundproofed room where a machine perforated the notes played by the pianist live onto a paper roll in accordance with the pianist's playing. Although the notes being played, and the pedaling (sustaining and half-blow) were recorded automatically, the expression degree of loudness was not. Inserting this as additional markings on the roll was the job of the recording editor Creary Woods.



Here his skill came into play. He controlled two knobs, one for theme and one for accompaniment, attempting to insert expression as the pianist played in accordance with his assessment of the pianist's dynamics and phrasing. The two large knobs were equipped with detentes (notches) so that expression was recorded at discrete levels after the piece had been played. A stencil was made from the perforated roll and the final editing could begin by appropriately marking a stencil, preferably with help from the pianist if he or she was prepared to offer it and wrong notes could be corrected. Some pianists, notably Harold Bauer, Rudolph Ganz, Percy Grainger, and Josef Hofmann were interested in the mechanics of the process and were willing participants in the editing. Others were not, collecting their fee for play and leaving the editing entirely up to the roll editor.



Two photographs taken in the New York Duo-Art recording studio with William Creary Woods at the control console. Top: Percy Grainger; Lower: Ethel Leginska. Both photographs are signed by the pianist

Later in life in 1967, Creary Woods remembers the early days of the Duo-Art system, as reported in the magazine High Fidelity:

*"There were several inventions on the Pianola that made it easy to obtain good musical effects. Through these inventions, the Duo-Art mechanism was developed. During this period the company developed a recording piano and the machine that would cut the perforations in the paper roll simultaneously while the artist played. This was a great improvement over the old method of arranging all the music on a paper stencil and cutting it by hand. As I was in the experimental department about the time the Duo-Art was ready for public sale, the company wanted me to prepare some of the records (rolls) for the Duo-Art mechanism which was quite a task since it was something entirely new. However, it wasn't too long before I had a library of about 50 rolls ready for the catalog."*

*This account seems to imply that initially no attempt was made to record expression as the roll played, this being left to the subsequent process of editing. But Creary Woods then continued:*

*"I found a much simpler way and that was to cut the expression into the rolls as the artist played. It saves much time and improves the expression in the rolls. The artist played at the recording piano while I sat at my desk. As he played, I traced his dynamics and phrasing, using a series of dials built into my desk with a musical score, previously prepared by the artist, before me. A series of wires ran from my desk to the recording device. When the performance was over, the roll was ready immediately for playing. Of course, my tracings were never completely accurate, so no matter how many times the artist and I had gone over the conception of the piece beforehand. So, we would spend long hours together, playing the roll over and over, changing inaccuracies in my dynamic indications that could not be reproduced, and erasing the pianist's mistakes."*

Some might feel that inserting the final expression dynamics after the roll had been recorded detracted from the authenticity of the recording, but it seems to have been a legitimate method. Anyone with an ear for music will be able to hear a performance in their head for some time after it is completed and a competent roll editor knew what had to be done to the expression perforations on the roll during the process of editing to make the roll sound, when played back, just as he remembered the performance. And if the recording pianist was there to assist in the process of editing, so much the better. So, a well-edited roll should give a reasonably accurate account of the pianist's performance. Some people argue the reproducing roll provided more of a portrait than a photograph of the performance, but others will say that a portrait often provides a truer indication of character than a photograph.



Two photographs taken in the London Duo-Art recording studio as Reginald Reynolds looks on. Top: Ferruccio Busoni; Lower: Katharine Goodson

## THE LONDON RECORDING STUDIO.

Although the New York recording studio started recording dual rolls at the end of 1913 under the capable stewardship of William Creary Woods and his assistant Arnel Lachman, in 1914 Britain had more important things on its mind than Duo-Art rolls. The British branch of the Aeolian company, still known as the Orchestrelle company, was unable to turn its attention from the production of aircraft parts to the concept of opening Britain's own Duo-Art recording studio until the war ended in 1918. The decision was then made to create such a studio at Aeolian Hall, London, presumably on the grounds that it would provide a convenient location for European-based pianists to record, rather having to travel to New York to do so. The British branch of Aeolian appointed Reginald Reynolds to be the recording manager assisted by Lawrence Crump, born 1875, in charge of roll production and perforation, and as Reynolds had no experience in the subject, he was sent to New York early in 1919 for a crash course in how to record Duo-Art rolls, under the tutelage of William Creary Woods. Their relationship was cordial as far as it is known, and Reynolds soon picked up the required basics of recording of Duo-Art rolls.

Reginald Reynolds was born in London on 7 August 1877 and died in Littlehampton, to which town he had retired on 10 September 1959, aged 82. Trained at the Royal College of Music and at the Guildhall School of Music, his teachers included John Francis Barnett, piano, Sir Frederick Bridge, and Sir Walter Parratt. After winning several prizes, he found a job at Maple and Co.'s store in London where he was required to demonstrate the Cecilian player piano. Further jobs at Farrand's and Chappell's brought him into contact with Henry Wood and several prestigious classical pianists. Then he moved, around the year 1910, to the Orchestrelle Company with which he stayed for nearly 20 years.

The 1911 census shows Reynolds, 33, living in Wealdstone with his wife Aline, 35 whom he had married in 1902, daughter Sarah, son John Maurice, and an 18-year-old maid. Another daughter Yvonne was not born until 1919 and died in 2009 aged 90. In this census return, the latest currently available, Reynolds' job was quoted as "player piano instrumentalist, Orchestrelle Co."

After the collapse of the player piano industry in 1930, Reynolds' worked for a year with the Sir Herbert Marshall piano company and then moved to Harrod's, promoting their concerts until 1938. He frequently broadcast piano music on the BBC and finally, from 1939, enjoyed a 20-year retirement.

After Reynolds' brief visit to New York in 1919, on the return journey from which he was telegraphed the news that his daughter Yvonne had been born, Aeolian set up a Duo-Art recording studio on the top floor of Aeolian Hall, New Bond Street, equipped with a recording piano and the console apparently identical to the one in the New York studio, and presumably supplied by the parent company in New York. Here is Reynolds' rather flowery account of the recording procedure:

*In a secluded room stands a Weber grand piano, in tone and outward appearance not different from the usual model. Upon closer inspection, the secret is partially revealed by the electric cable which can be seen coming from beneath the instrument, and if it were possible to trace this back into the piano there would be found 160 wires, half of them leading to specifically designed contacts under the keys, the remainder running to positions near the point where the hammers strike the strings, while the cable itself passes through the wall of the room coming out into a soundproof chamber, in which is installed the amazing mechanism that constitutes the Duo-Art recording apparatus. Note that the Duo-Art system used only 80 notes of the full scale 88. Here the other ends of the wires are attached to electromagnets, which operate the punches in the powerful perforating machines, each punch corresponding with each key of the piano. The pianist plays, the punches operate - the record is produced."*



Reynolds made no reference to how the expression was inserted into the roll, he only described the perforation of the notes. But to get the correct degree of expression incorporated into the rolls, the process of editing was clearly all important.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

The Aeolian company commissioned a series of posed photographs of their pianists recording in the New York and London studios. Publicizing photographs of all these famous pianists recording Duo-Art rolls obviously provided excellent publicity for the company. Two photographs taken in the New York studio are shown on page 27 and two taken at the London studio are on page 28. Several more good photographs taken in the London studio appear in the book, *The London Duo-Art Pianists*, published by the Player Piano Group in 2014.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NEW YORK RECORDED AND LONDON RECORDED ROLLS



*Harold Bauer: As well as being an excellent English-born pianist, he took a great interest in the problems of recording and editing Duo-Art rolls*

If the control console in London was identical with that in New York, which it presumably was as the American branch of the company supplied it, then why should there be any difference in the rolls recorded in New York and London? There are several possible reasons.

1. Creary Woods and Reynolds, the two recording managers, were very different people and although both were excellent musicians, they might have had different concepts of what sounded right in the recording and editing process, just as top-class pianists play a given musical composition differently from each other.

2. The recording piano in London was obviously not the same instrument as the one in New York. In each studio the pianist would have played in a way that sounded right on that piano, and the roll editor would strive to make the finished roll sound right on that piano. So, if the two pianos had different characteristics, the roll might not play as well on a piano that differed significantly from the one it was recorded on.

3. British pianos in general might have been set up [regulated] rather differently than American ones, so a roll that was arranged to sound right when played on American player pianos might not sound quite right when played on British pianos and vice versa. This theory was propounded in a letter from the well-known Duo-Art recording pianist, Harold Bauer, to William Creary Woods dated 16 June 1922, parts of which are reproduced here:

*"I heard several rolls played when I was there at Aeolian Hall in London two weeks ago, and found most of them good, except for the Busoni records which are all poor. The principal reason for this is I believe that he made no corrections whatever himself, and as his recordings are liable to certain eccentricities, it has simply happened that the person who tried to reproduce his special characteristics from memory, failed.*

*I am very curious to see if I shall be able to do work which will be satisfactory for both Europe and America, for there is of course the difficulty which has been hitherto encountered. I was particularly struck by Cyril Scott's records, which he corrected in London and revised in New York. I heard the two rolls of the same piece, and in my opinion there can be no question that, admitting the New York version to sound better in New York the original London version undoubtedly sounds better in London.*

*This is very curious and interesting, and I shall try to examine very carefully where this difference lies. One thing I have already noticed, in the American regulation of the soft pedal, the hammers are brought closer to the strings than over here, so that often pedal effects will produce more difference in New York than in London. I have examined several upright pianos and feel fairly sure that I am not mistaken but it might be well for you to compare measurements. I shall let you know if anything further strikes me. I am rather inclined to think that as public taste in piano tone here is different from prevailing standards in America, your dynamics will frequently prove too high to give the best results on instruments regulated for the greater lightness and brilliancy which has always characterized European pianos."*

## WILLIAM CREARY WOODS' CONCERNS

Whether justified or not, Creary Woods in New York seems to have had regular misgivings about some of the rolls produced in London and was aware that the British and American rolls did not always play well on pianos of the other country. In a letter to Mr. A. J. Mason of the Aeolian company dated 6 November 1920, Creary Woods wrote:

*Regarding the London rolls not playing well on our instruments, this might be due to any changes in the construction of the London instruments, such as pneumatics being of one size for the player piano action whereas the Steinway Duo-Arts have three sizes, or a change in regulation of the accordion pneumatics. Should these be the same on the London instruments as on ours, then it must be a difference in the regulation as the general impression of the London roll as that it plays too softly, and some notes or chords do not play at all.*

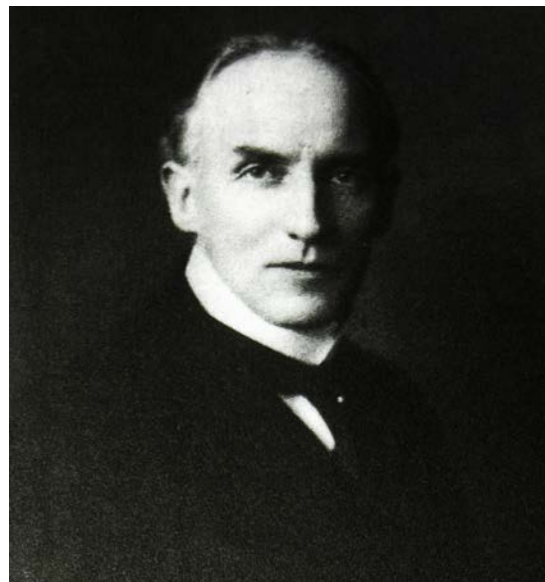
*As an example, I am sending you the Nocturne Opus 15 number 2 played by de Pachmann. In this roll I indicated several of the pedal bridges which are too long, several places where notes do not play, and other places where notes or some of these things are very bad musically and should be corrected. If not by the artists, by Mr. Reynolds. The pedal is short throughout the piece, and overall, it sounds very choppy. I have not changed the dynamics except to indicate a few places which were too loud and others which do not play.*

*I would suggest Mr. Reynolds compare our roll of the same nocturne, number 6162, played by Arthur Rubinstein. This roll will give him an idea of our pedal and dynamics. The effect of the accompaniment in this roll is that it plays very softly on our instrument.*

In a further letter from Creary Woods to Reynolds dated 7 May 1923 he complains:

*"The records you have been making in London for some reason do not play well on our pianos. By that I mean that certain notes and chords do not sound or play at all on our pianos or in many cases the pedal bridges are too long. Mr. Bauer heard some of your rolls when he returned and said they did not sound at all the same as they did in London. I think this would mean that your instruments are adjusted on a little higher dynamic level than ours. Mr. Lamond, who did some work with me a short time ago, heard two or three of his London records which he had finished with you. He said they played much better in London than on my piano."*

Some of Creary Woods letters to Reynolds seem to resemble those of the schoolmaster addressing an errant pupil, but much of the problem seems to have lain not with the coding of the rolls, but with the fact that the British and American recording pianos were adjusted differently, as were the customers



*Reginald Reynolds: The Duo-Art recording manager in London*

pianos the rolls were played on. And comparing a Rubinstein roll of the Chopin Nocturne Opus 15 number 2 with the Pachmann version seems a little harsh since Pachmann's playing at that stage of his life was very eccentric. This is not to say that Reynolds coding was necessarily perfect. He knew that some of the rolls left room for improvement, and when Audiographic rolls were introduced in 1926, he took the opportunity to revise the coding on some of the rolls he had recorded previously before they were used again for the Audiographic versions.

Paderewski, for many years the most famous pianist in the world but not the best technically, was aware of certain deficiencies in his playing, such as often not playing both hands together as required and asked his roll editor to try to rectify this fault on the rolls. Some would argue that adjusting the note spacings detracts from the authenticity of the roll, but this did not seem to worry Paderewski, who never participated in the editing process himself. Reynolds had no qualms about altering rolls in such a way as to make them sound what he thought was better. Percy Grainger, one of the pianists who did participate in the editing of his rolls, thought that American rolls sounded better played on American pianos while British rolls sounded better played on British pianos. He also went on to say that his rolls sounded not necessarily as he played but how he would have liked to have played had he made no mistakes. Much the same can be said of modern CD recordings.

## THE NUMBER OF CLASSICAL DUO-ART ROLLS ISSUED

It should perhaps be pointed out that the number of Duo-Art classical rolls recorded in New York probably amounting to well over 2,000 in a 16-year period from 1914, far exceeded the number of classical rolls recorded in London, believed to be rather more than 250, in the 10-year period from 1920 to 1930.



## **ACCELERATION OF THE PAPER AS IT PASSES OVER THE TRACKER BAR.**

This is a minor point but relevant, nevertheless. In the recording piano and in the reproducing piano, the driving spool rotates at a constant speed. Because of the finite thickness of the paper, it will clearly pass over the tracker bar gradually faster as the roll proceeds. Consequently, for a constant musical tempo, the spacing between the notes increases as the roll advances. Provided the paper used to perforate the rolls is the same thickness as that used in recording, this does not matter.

Similarly, it was important that the paper used in the manufacture of British rolls was of the same thickness as that used in the recording process, whether in the American or British recording studios. Presumably, similar paper was specified though no evidence is available. Also, we do not know whether the American and British roll perforators operated identically. If they did not it might partly account for why British and American rolls did not always play well on other country's pianos.

## **CONCLUSION**

The American and British recording managers would each have done their best to make the rolls play well on the pianos on which they were recorded, and the regulation of the pianos in New York and London recording studios may well have differed significantly. Also, the difference between how British and American rolls sound when played seems partly to hinge on which pianos they are played on, since according to William Creary Woods, Harold Bauer, Frederick Lamond, and others the results when played on British and American pianos differ, due to their being regulated differently. A further point is that to achieve as nearly perfect reproduction of the music as possible, the reproducing pianos the rolls are played on should be perfectly adjusted and regulated. Some people whose lives revolve around player pianos can achieve this desirable result in their instruments by devoting a lot of time and effort to the matter. But I would suggest that most domestic reproducing pianos operate less than perfectly as their owners lack the skill, time, motivation, and money to keep their instruments in perfect condition, and/or lack the financial resources to hire an expert technician to do the job for them, such experts being few and far between. So, most owners of reproducing pianos make do with what seems to them a reasonably acceptable level of performance rather than striving for perfection. Reproducing pianos are complicated pieces of machinery and require a lot of regular attention to keep them in good order.

In my experience, I cannot generalize by stating that British rolls play better or worse than American ones on my Duo-Art instruments. Some British rolls sound good and some don't; the same applies to American recorded rolls. Some of the Busoni rolls do sound odd when played on my pianos, but whether this is due to imperfections in the recordings, or the fact that my pianos are not perfect, or whether the problem is partly because of eccentricities in the playing of Busoni, reputed to be one of the world's all-time great pianists is impossible to say. On the other hand, some British rolls play brilliantly on my pianos e.g., Lamond's roll of Beethoven's Sonata Opus 31, 4th movement - an incredibly lively piece as do many American - recorded Duo-Art rolls when played on my pianos. Both my pianos have been played by one of Lamond's students. Maybe that's why the Lamond roll sounds good!

To summarize, this article is not meant to be a comprehensive treatise about the comparison between British and American Duo-Art rolls, as the subject has been dealt with at much greater length previously by other writers; it is intended merely as a brief reasonably succinct account of the personalities involved and some of the relevant technical problems. As much has been written on the subject elsewhere, anyone interested enough to pursue the topic in more detail is referred to previous lengthy articles by authors such as Julian Dyer, Patrick Handscombe, the pianists Rex Lawson, and our member Denis Hall and others, which have appeared in the *Pianola Journal* and elsewhere, as well as various contributions to player piano Internet forums.

Thanks are due to our technical advisor Francis Bowdery for drawing my attention to some of the relevant previous articles and providing copies of several of them.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Terry Broadbent is the Journal Editor and Researcher of the North West Player Piano Association in the United Kingdom, where this article first appeared. He is an accomplished author of many articles and books on Player Pianos (Pianolas), their artists, and music. Terry wrote the biographies for the PPG book 'The London Duo-Art Pianists' (2014). See <http://www.leginska.org>.**

**EDITOR'S NOTE: AMICA and the North West Player Piano Association in the United Kingdom have a reciprocal agreement where each organization may publish content that was written for and first appeared in each other's journal. AMICA is pleased to publish this article by Terry Broadbent that first appeared in the Spring/Summer 2021 edition of the Journal of the North West Player Piano Association.**

# Who Was John Farrell? (1936-2007)

## Getting to Know John

by: Jan Myers

***This article was compiled from several sources, including a 2009 AMICA Bulletin tribute to John Farrell, with contributions from Bob Billings, Julian Dyer, and others. Also features tributes posted by family and friends on Mechanical Music Digest (MMD). Another source was a now-inactive 2007 website devoted to John's memory, published in the UK.***

**Jan Myers**

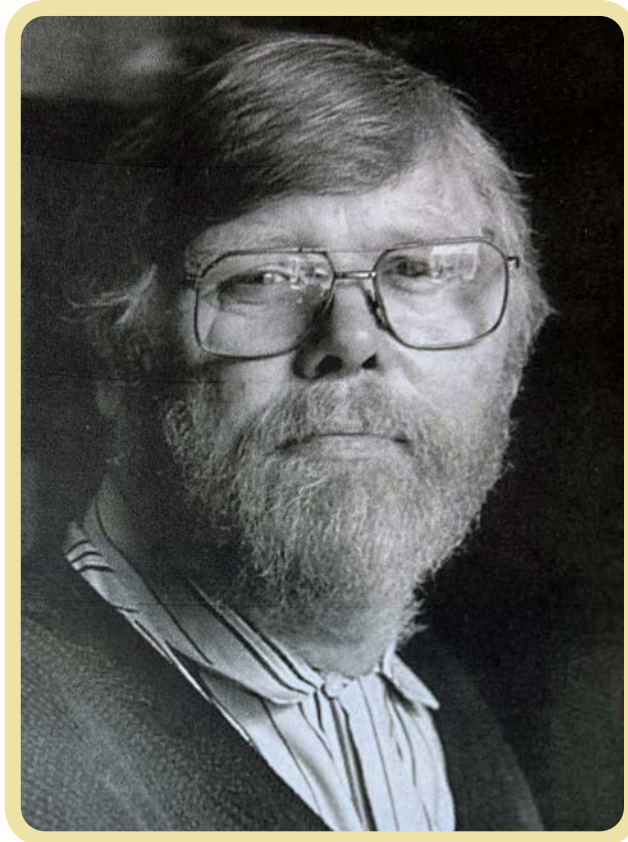


*John Farrell doing what he does best: working on piano rolls*

People might laugh if you suggested that one man could successfully run a piano roll business, producing over 600 titles in relatively few genres, and have only one artist! But John Farrell did it, and a legacy was born!

Known as a world leader in piano roll arrangements, John transcribed several hundred songs, sometimes one-of-a-kind for special friends. Speaking of one-of-a-kind, that description fits John Farrell to a "T." John was considered a true English eccentric who dedicated his life to his family and his music and shared his talents and love of music with friends and customers all over the world. He was known to his friends as "Ginger" due to his red beard.

In addition to being an outstanding pianist, he was an accomplished transcriber, composer, and arranger. Good piano rolls were hard to come by back in the 60's and 70's, as QRS had a limited selection of John's preferences of jazz, blues, and stride. So, he did what



any dedicated enthusiast without the trappings of modern technology would do; he set out at his kitchen table with a Stanley knife and cut them by hand! And the rest, as they say, is history.

In 1976 John formed his own piano roll company, simply named "The Piano Roll Company", in Essex County, just northwest of London. He eventually had his rolls cut in the United States, producing rolls under several labels, including RagMaster, Jazzmaster, Hot Piano Classics, JAM (John and Mary), and JazzMan. In the beginning, the JAM rolls were sold on a subscription-only basis, but in 2002 the subscription-only format was dropped, (to the applause of a growing number of serious fans), and after which all the Farrell rolls were produced on the JAM label.

Not only was John Farrell a piano enthusiast, but he had a passion for big band music as well. He transcribed much big band music from the likes of Count Basie and Duke Ellington, then formed his own big band, with musicians from all over the region.





Some examples of John Farrell's piano rolls through the years

They performed all over, including at the Open University in Milton Keynes, in a converted chapel with good acoustics. They would do big one-night performances in the village hall, where people would come in droves and "raise the roof." He played with his group, "The Black Bottom Stompers" for several years, quite often piling into John's VW camper van for various venues in Europe, usually somewhere like Dusseldorf, to play a few gigs. One of John's friends made the comment, "I suspect that whatever they got paid barely covered the booze bill, judging by the state of them by the time they managed to crawl back."

American boogie masters Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons, and Mead "Lux" Lewis were before Farrell's time, and where he had previously been somewhat less than enamored with boogie woogie, he came to embrace it and was soon transcribing their already hot music and turning it from mere toe-tapping to vigorous foot-stomping. You can find Ammons and Johnson boogie on CD's LP's and old 78's, but not directly on piano rolls. Fortunately, John took care of that with his genius transcriptions. As Bob Billings once said, "Some of his Boogie would knock your socks off."

It has been said, and shown, that John's jazz transcriptions are almost beyond comprehension. He could listen to anything; a 78-rpm record, an LP,

a tape recording, or a live performance, then put it to paper, and soon have a hit piano roll master. He couldn't explain or understand the ability, but he did recognize it and put it to good use, to the benefit of piano music lovers all over.

John has been called Europe's answer to J. Lawrence Cook, with his chameleon-like ability to accurately imitate pretty much any pianist's style. The artistry of such American artists as James P. Johnson, "Fats" Waller, Jelly Roll Morton, Lem Fowler, Jimmy Blythe, Willie "The Lion" Smith and others came to be fodder for Farrell's heated transcriptions, raising their octane levels a few notches. One of John's prized possessions was a signed photo of "Fats" Waller.

In John's English cottage, his piano faced a window through which the bus stop was visible. People walking past or waiting for the bus would "wonder where the incredible jazz was coming from. The locals, of course, knew it was John, and that the kitchen door was open if they fancied dropping in for a whisky." (A quote from one of his friends.)

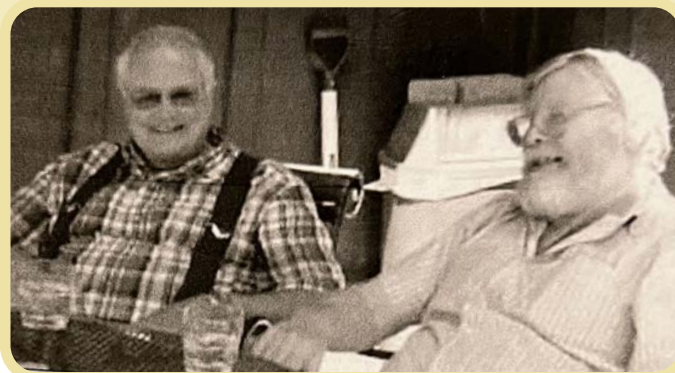
John hated banjos and tied for first place on that list was the accordion, and even classical music was held in low esteem. We do know that he was fond of stride, jazz, good whisky, cigars, crossword puzzles, and his cat, Ellington.



*A young John Farrell*

John was close friends with Ed (“Eddie”) Sprankle, a well-known roll California roll collector and producer of the popular “ECHOES” recuts. During one of John’s numerous trips to the United States, Ed introduced John and his wife Mary to long-time major players in the roll business, Bob and Ginny Billings, and a lasting friendship was begun. Pretty soon, Bob was doing all of John’s roll cutting on his own perforator in Reno, Nevada. When Ed passed away in 2003, it hit John Farrell hard, as he and Ed had been best friends for over 35 years. In fact, John credited Ed with getting him into the piano roll business and considered Ed his “surrogate brother.” John flew to Oakland for Ed’s memorial service. The following year, Ed and Joan’s daughter Debbie was married, and John flew back to California to give her away at the wedding. At the reception that followed, John came up with a liter of excellent whisky as a gift for Bob, which was naturally opened and sampled, and, as Bob put it, they got “pretty jolly”. It wasn’t long before John and Bob & Ginny were the best of friends.

John’s health began a steady downhill slide in 2007, and he was eventually hospitalized. Doctors were stymied as to cause. If he could, John kept Bob up to date on his declining status, and when John



*Ed Sprankle (left) with John Farrell at Bob Billings’ home in 2001*

passed away on May 30, it left Bob and Ginny in tears, completely devastated. Immediately after his passing, cards, letters, and emails began to pour in from all over the world. Bob Billings was first to post an expression of mourning on the MMD website, just hours after John’s passing. A lady submitted one from Australia. The most poignant MMD posts came from John’s family, clearly demonstrating the love and affection that the family members held for each other. John’s grand-daughter Violet, age 16 at the time and already an accomplished pianist, commented lavishly on John’s knowledge and skills, and his willingness and desire to share the same, as well as his modesty. Even at that young age, she recognized the impact he had on the world of jazz music. “He led,” she said, “what can only be described as a rock and roll lifestyle.” His son Kim, while seeking input in preparation for the upcoming eulogy, reflected on his and his dad’s “whisky-filled discussions that carried on into the early hours” the two of them had shared over the years, unabashedly confessing that “Yes, I’m a whisky fiend as well.” They shared a closeness too rarely held today by many fathers and sons.

One of John’s all-time favorite songs was “Barney Google.” A long-time friend placed a copy in his casket at the funeral service.

**AUTHOR’S NOTE:** *After a two-decade void, with an arrangement between Bob Billings, John’s daughter Alison, and roll collector Jan Myers, jazz, stride, and boogie woogie lovers will again be able to enjoy John’s rare keyboard talents, much of it unpublished and unissued. Jan has gleefully accepted diving head-first into the 600-roll pool of John’s already issued rolls, resuming issuing (NOT recutting) as many as possible, while issuing for the first time more than 20 titles never issued. That’s like finding a never-driven classic Corvette in an old barn! Julian Dyer of the UK will be the roll puncher (a perfect fit, as John Farrell was also a proud Brit! Due to the number of titles, quantities will be limited, so when available, get an order in, as once a title has been sold, it is unlikely another run will be made. Many titles are highly sought, and don’t turn up often. Included in the initial offering, in the spirit of nostalgia, will be HPC-1, “Freakish,” a Jelly Roll Morton composition, and JAM 1, “Chopin’s Charleston Dream,” composed in 1928 by Alfred Gattari..*

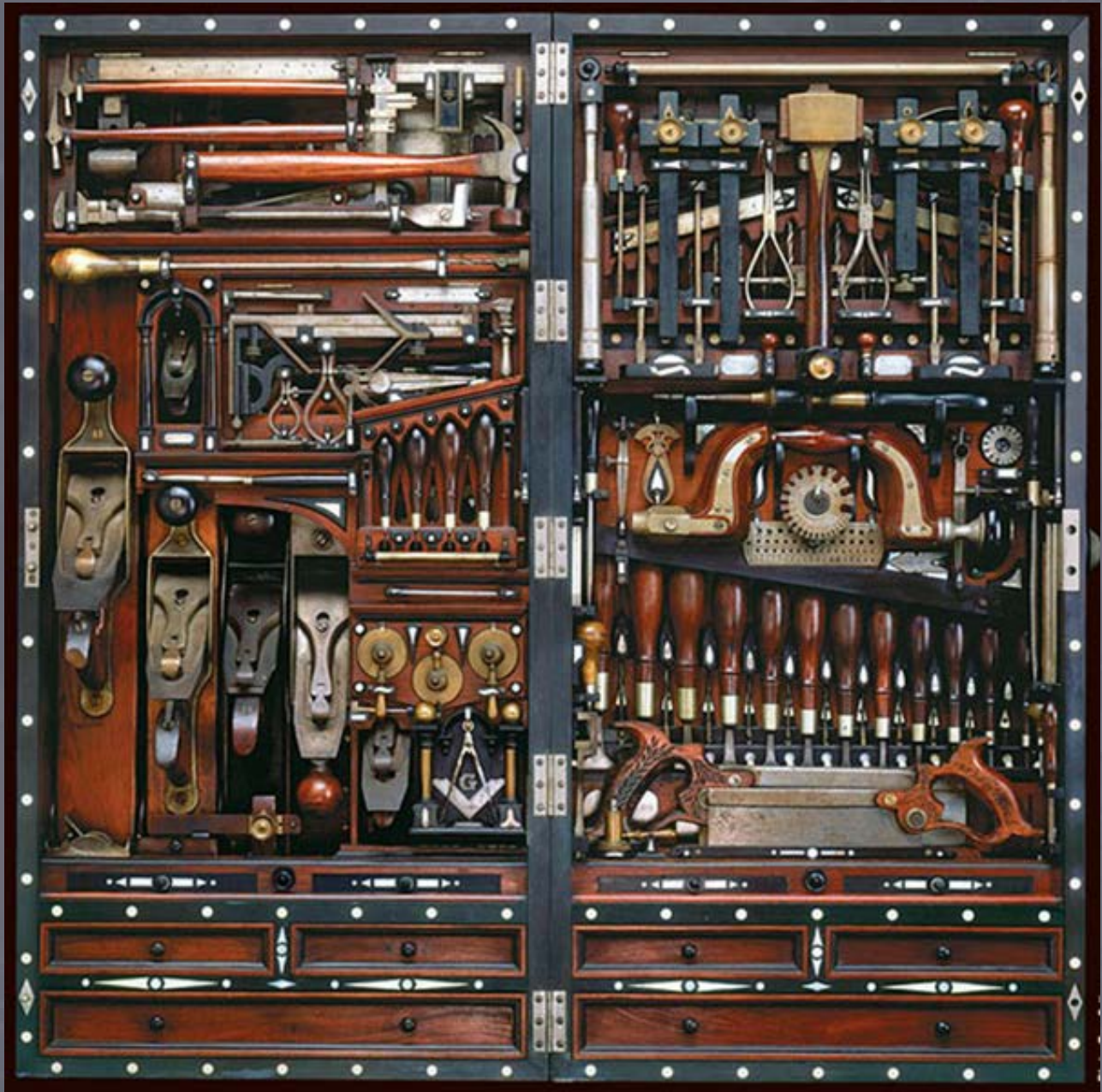
*You now may have insight about John Farrell, and hopefully soon hearing for yourself why he was such a special gift to all.*

*For information on how to get aboard the John Farrell Revival Train, email Jan Myers at [rollauction@aol.com](mailto:rollauction@aol.com), give him a call at (303) 885-5570, or send a snail mail to Jan Myers, Rag Daddy’s Music, 6319 Willow Hill Street, San Antonio, TX 78247-1116.*



# THE STUDLEY TOOL CHEST

by: Rick Alabaster



*The open Studley Tool Chest as it hung on inventor Henry Studley's workshop wall*

## A Humble Piano and Organ Technicians' Lasting Legacy

While attending a Piano Tuners & Technicians Convention in Washington DC, I became aware of an interesting item held at the Smithsonian Museum: The "Studley Tool Chest".

The tool chest was put together by Henry Studley, a Piano and Organ Technician. Born in 1838 in Lowell, Massachusetts, Studley enlisted in the Massachusetts Infantry in 1861 and was held as a prisoner of war in Texas during the American Civil War. He worked for the Smith Organ Co. and later for the Poole Piano Company of Quincy Massachusetts. Sometime after 1880, he started building his ingenious tool chest. Over the years, his Tool Chest was a work in progress as he modified, improved, and added additional tools to it.

He continued working as a Piano and Organ Technician until his death in 1925.

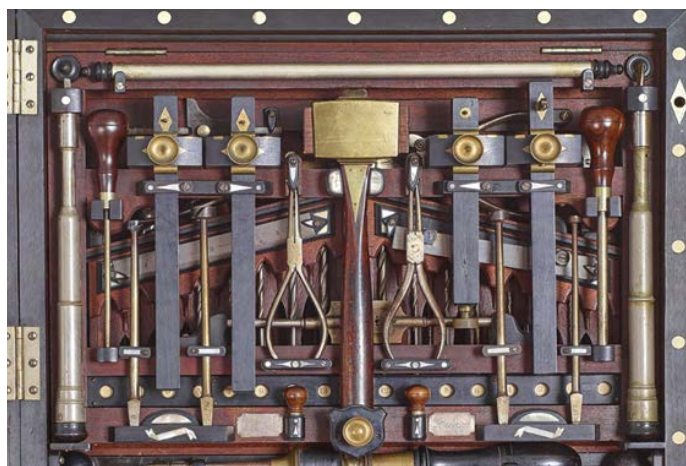
When closed, the tool chest takes up an area of approximately 40 inches by 20 inches with a 9-inch depth. The lid is hinged to open up a full 180 degrees and is designed to be hung from a wall in his workroom.

It opens to become a 40-inch by 40-inch wall hanging tool chest holding some 218 tools. It is made from Mahogany, Rosewood, Walnut, Ebony, Ivory and Mother of Pearl - probably scrap material taken from the Poole Piano Company. The fine craftsmanship is exhibited by the way each tool fits snugly into its space, often with an audible click as the tool snaps into its close-fit cavity. Sections of the chest swing out to allow access to a second or third layer of tools. The tool chest also features Masonic symbolism.

A work of art itself, the Studley Tool Chest is full of fine detail, with mother-of-pearl and ivory inlay that speaks to his career as a piano and organ man. It weighs 33 Kilos (72lbs.) when empty and some 71 Kilos (156 lbs.) when complete. It requires two men to safely move it.

Studley bequeathed the tool chest to a close friend and after his passing to his grandson Peter Hardwick. He loaned the chest to the Smithsonian in the late 1980's and it became part of an exhibit at the National Museum of American History. It was subsequently purchased by a private collector who continues to lend it to the Smithsonian and other venues.

The chest has become legendary amongst American Piano Technicians and in the woodworking community. It was featured in a copy of "Fine Woodworking" and a limited-edition poster was printed that promptly sold out. After many years out of print, the poster is now again available.



*Note the layers of tools in the chest*



*The closed Studley Tool Chest for transportation*

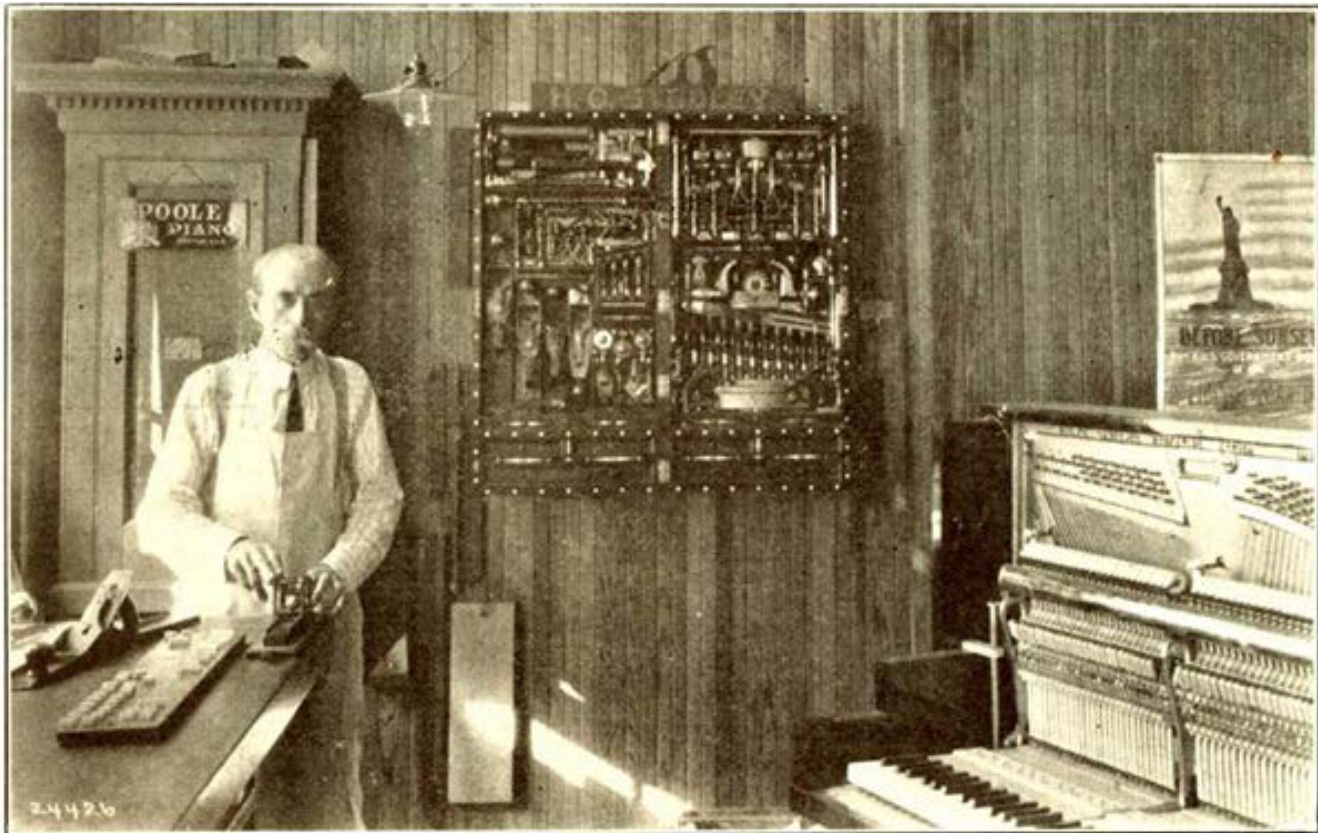


*Fitted dovetail drawers*





*Some of the fine ivory and Mother of Pearl inlay*



*Henry Studley at his work bench at the Poole Piano Factory circa WW1*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Rick Alabaster's articles are written and first appear in the local Melbourne collectors group called the Mechanical Music Society of Australia (MMSA). They then may appear in the Australia Collectors of Mechanical Musical Instruments (ACMMI) journal. Rick graciously allows AMICA to reprint his fine essays. Acknowledgment also to Peter Phillips of ACMMI for gracious cooperation.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Rick Alabaster has been a collector and restorer of mechanical music for many years. He is on the committee of his local collectors' group in Melbourne Australia. He has supplied the world market (up until Covid-19 hit) for rubberized cloth and leather. He has also been asked to be a guest speaker at earlier Chicago and St. Louis Conventions. He is widely published including the UK "PPG Journal" and the Bulletin of the NSW based "Australian Collectors of Mechanical Musical Instruments". Email Rick at Rick Alabaster [orchestrelle@yahoo.com.au](mailto:orchestrelle@yahoo.com.au)



# TECHNICAL WORLD MAGAZINE: PHOTOGRAPHING MUSIC

by: Robert H. Moulton | Contributed by: Alan Lightcap





**During the early 20th century in the great glory days of journalism, there were many newspapers, magazines, and other publications that gripped the nation. Most print, audio, video, and electronic diversions that we routinely accept today didn't exist, so a world of clever publications were the normal pastime. All that was technically encouraged by inventions and improvements of the typewriter, printing press, photography, movable type, and document reproduction.**

Most of these publications and the mechanisms to produce them are long relegated to the land fill and scrap heap, but occasionally something turns up. AMICA member **Alan Lightcap** of Lambertville, New Jersey found an original copy in remarkably good condition of *Technical World Magazine* from July 1912. This 150+ page magazine is full of interesting articles and display ads that are an informative and entertaining read. Alan Lightcap's interest was peaked by an article, "Photographing Music", about the great Melville Clark of Chicago, Illinois who designed an electronic device that enabled musicians to add to a standard or player piano to record their compositions. Many readers will recognize the Melville Clark name as later involved in piano roll and mechanical music enterprises including the Clark Music Roll Company. We present that article on the following pages. This story adds another chapter, previously and mostly unknown, about another device Mr. Clark contributed to mechanical music.

There are so many interesting articles and full-page display ads in this magazine, only space and our focus on mechanical music prevent me from more images and offerings. Here are a few other articles in this edition:

- Trading a City for a Tunnel
- Making Steam Work Harder
- Moving a Railroad Six Thousand Miles
- New Black Magic Finds Water
- Feeling the Skyscraper's Pulse
- Every Householder His Own Gas Company
- Irrigation Frauds in Ten States
- State Road from

# PHOTOGRAPHING MUSIC

By

ROBERT H. MOULTON

ASK the average musician if he thinks music can be photographed and the chances are that he will either yell for the police or push you down into a chair, while he summons a doctor. This is not surprising. It sounds as feasible as "hearing a picture." Explain to him, however, that what you mean is a temperamental photograph—so to speak—a mechanical record of a person's performance on a piano, and then, relieved of the fear that you are in need of restraint or medical attendance, he will likely give vent to an emphatic "NO."



THE COMPOSER AT WORK.

His composition is taken down by the recorder, which is in the closet behind the piano. A wire at the rear of the piano connects an electric light current with the dynamo which operates the recorder.

He may add, for your edification, that many of the ablest minds in the commercial field of music have been turned to the solution of this problem—that of devising a means for the making of music that shall be an actual and permanent record of a performance, instead of a mere musical score, and have pronounced it an impossibility.

There is a man in Chicago, however, Melville Clark, for whom the word impossible has never held terrors. So he quietly set to work a couple of years ago, convinced in his own mind that he would succeed where others had failed. Mr. Clark is generally acknowledged to be one of the greatest designers and builders of pianos and piano players in the world. He was the first to build a piano player to operate over the entire keyboard.

Consequently when he announced a short time ago that he had perfected a device which would not only make a permanent record of a performance on

a piano, but do it so faithfully and accurately that not a single eccentricity of the pianist's individuality would be lost, the respectful attention of the musical world was immediately forthcoming.

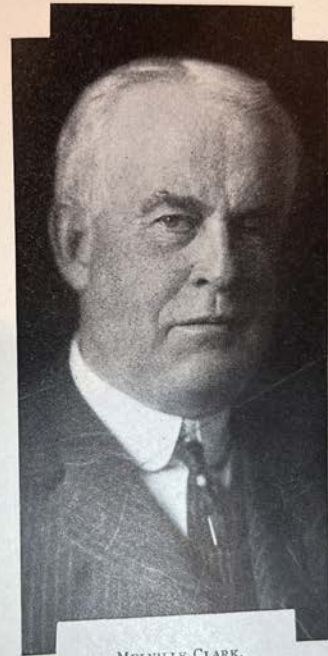
Naturally there were many skeptics—men who desired to be shown. One of these was a pianist and composer of international reputation.

"Of course, Clark," he said, when told of the new invention, "I know you have accomplished wonders in your line. But in this case your claims sound, ah—"

"Preposterous?" said Mr. Clark. "Sure! I don't blame you at all for thinking so. But just come along to my office and see for yourself."

Together they repaired to Mr. Clark's private office, where a piano was in readiness. In one corner of the room stood a little closet. The pianist also noticed that a wire ran from the middle of the room into the closet.

"Just a moment," said Mr.



MELVILLE CLARK.

His invention enables musicians to record their compositions.

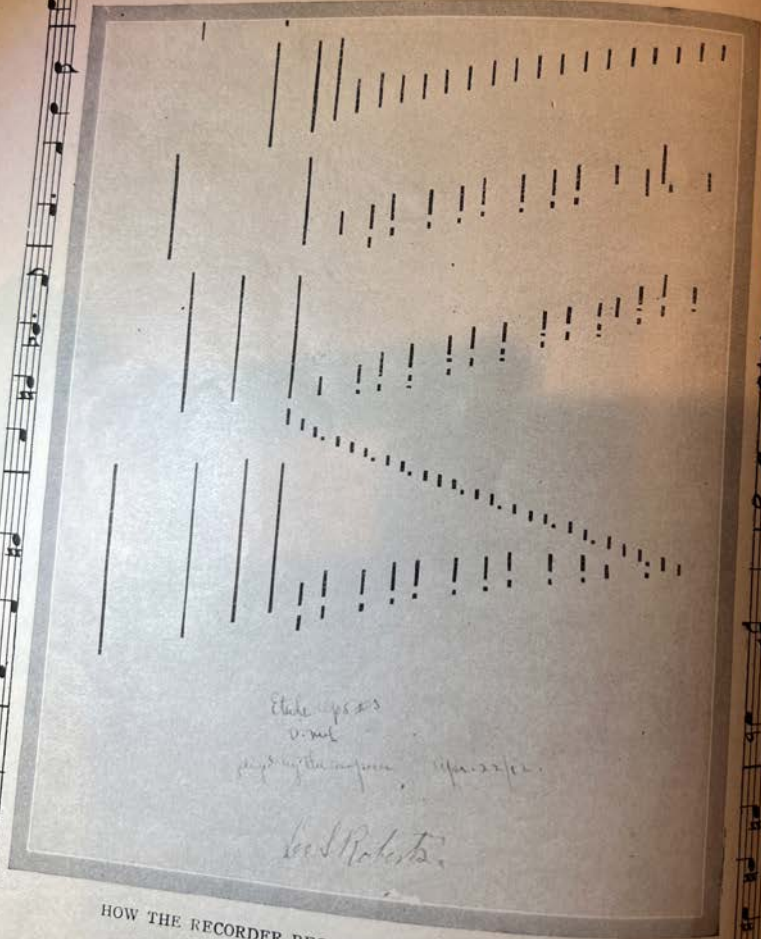


Clark, as he turned on the current. Immediately there issued from the closet the soft hum of a tiny dynamo.

"The recorder is in that closet," explained Mr. Clark,

"and this current operates it. Now all you've got to do is to fire away, and the recorder will do the rest."

The pianist fired. Resolved to make the job a good one and



*Etude op. 25  
D. 934  
played by the composer, Apr. 27/12.  
Lud. Beethoven*

HOW THE RECORDER REGISTERS THE PLAYER'S NOTES.

test the instrument to the limit of its capabilities he improvised a selection as fiery and brilliant as a thunderstorm.

When he had finished, Mr. Clark went into the closet and returned with a roll of paper, similar in appearance to those used on piano players. Placing the roll in another piano with a reproducing attachment, he set the reproducer in motion with his feet.

The effect was startling. The exactness of the record—even to the cunningly introduced "accidentals"—made the very presence of the composer at the piano seem a certainty. His tempo, his style, his pedaling, the power of his stroke on the keys, and the sensuous element—the expression—were reproduced in such an accurate way that the mechanism seemed to be endowed with a human mind.

The operation of Mr. Clark's device—which he calls a recorder—may best be explained in the simple statement that the pressure of a button, turning on the electric current, sensitizes every playing part of the piano—keys, pedals, and all—to the slightest touch of the performer, and secures in perfect relation every playing movement made.

While the importance of this achievement in the field of the mechanical player can be readily appreciated, its influence upon the development of musical history represents its chief value. It is from this standpoint that it appeals most to its inventor. He



REPRODUCING A RECORD ON A PIANO PLAYER. The student gets all the value of the pianist's or composer's composition and individual style of performance.

frankly states that he does not think it has commercial value.

To be able to sit down at the piano, imprint one's individuality in all its phases upon the interpretation of any given musical composition, have the music so produced cut, and then to use it on a piano player and hear oneself play, certainly seems the fulfillment of the composer's wildest dream.

But that is not all. The recorder relieves the composer of the manual drudgery of putting his thoughts down on paper with pen or pencil. Also, it enables him to preserve the continuity of his thoughts, which is difficult when he is forced to stop to jot down his composition.





## MBSI / AMICA Joint Convention 2022 San Francisco: August 31 – September 5, 2022

by: Robert Thomas

A rare joint convention is the best way to meet others passionate about your hobby. As an AMICAN, I enjoyed working with MBSI members on this convention, so I joined MBSI and attended the great MBSI convention in Ft. Myers, Florida. You will enjoy new friends from the other club. San Francisco Summer weather is never too hot. Bring a jacket, you'll be comfortable. The Bay Area is visually stunning, and the steam-train ride is in a beautiful redwood forest. Plan to attend the MBSI / AMICA convention, you'll have a great time... here's why!

The detailed schedule will be available at the registration site, here are the event highlights:

### Workshops

Workshops will cover a variety of interesting topics: Bruce Newman will discuss adventures in restoration and Dave Corkrum will show how he manufactures and duplicates music-box discs. Other sessions will cover music-box comb tuning, photographing your instruments, publishing magazine articles, and various restoration projects. A harp concert is also scheduled.

### Tours

Tours are optional, with an additional price not included in convention registration, and include bus transportation and lunch:

- Thursday, spend a day on the **Roaring Camp Steam Railroad** and a rail trip to the **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk Carousel**. The redwood forest and the rail route are photogenic.
- Friday, Dave Calendine will play a stunning Wurlitzer organ concert at the art deco **Paramount Theatre** in Oakland (if the organ restoration is not completed, another beautiful theater will be visited).

We are planning the following choices for Friday afternoon:

- The Victorian house tour in San Francisco includes time for a comprehensive visit to the **Reutlinger / Skinner and Philip Straus collections**. Phil's Mason and Hamlin AMPICO has a vast roll collection. You will find some of your favorites to play.
- **Fisherman's Wharf and Bay Cruise** for those who do not wish to navigate steps on the Victorian Tour. The wharf has great restaurants, and you can visit the wonderful **Musée Méchanique**.
- **Alcatraz Night Tour** is exciting at dusk and affords a magnificent view of San Francisco Bay!

### Entertainment

We have four of the best. You will be impressed! YouTube is a great place to check them out and their live performances will be memorable.

- **Adam Swanson** is an amazing musicologist and ragtime pianist from Durango, CO. His song introductions are filled with neat information and his music is "sunshine from the fingers." (Wednesday evening)
- **Frederick Hodges** performances flash musical fire and excitement. He specializes in polished piano music of the 20s and 30s bringing your favorite novelty piano rolls to life. He will present his orchestra at the banquet on Sunday.
- **Matt Tolentino** plays and sings early 20th century music, and his accordion will echo in your imagination. His amusing song selections, full of surprises, bring smiles to everyone. (Saturday evening)
- **Dave Calendine** (musical voice of the Detroit Red Wings) at the Mighty Wurlitzer!



## Registration

The AMICA Board and MBSI Trustees Meetings are Wednesday morning, August 31 with Adam Swanson's concert in the evening.

## Mart and Banquet

The Mart and Banquet with the Frederick Hodges Orchestra will be Sunday September 4 after the business meetings.

## Collections

Visiting local collectors is a highlight of the convention with optional, charged bus tours on Monday.

- The **Caletti's** have rare music boxes, musical clocks, wonderful pianos, and orchestrions.
- The **Swirsky / Merithew's** collection includes rare juke boxes, a Ramey Banjo Orchestra, a Hupfeld Phonoliszt Violina, and beautiful stained-glass art and quilting they have created.
- The **Kaufman's** have an extensive rare music box collection, musical clocks and a Steinway Spirio reproducing piano full of great music.

## Hotel and Registration

The Marriott San Mateo / San Francisco Airport is the convention hotel, about twenty minutes south of San Francisco International Airport on US101. The convention room rate is \$119.00 per day plus tax, including self-parking and guest room WIFI. The restaurant is open 6:30AM to 10:00PM. The convention rate will be available when the registration site opens.

Registration materials, when available, can be obtained from the MBSI website <https://mbsi.org/> and via a link to the MBSI website from the AMICA website <https://amica.org/>. Registration information will also be sent in the Mechanical Music Journal and the AMICA Bulletin's July / August edition.

## Need More Information?

Contact: Lyle Merithew and Sandy Swirsky, 1-408-227-9284 and [sswirsky@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sswirsky@sbcglobal.net). Prefer email contact as we will not return non-US phone calls.



*Great entertainment: top to bottom:  
Adam Swanson; Frederick Hodges; Matt Tolentino*



*Oakland Paramount Theatre*



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# TJ'S NOTES FROM THE BAY SILENCE ON THE SIDEWALKS OF NEW YORK: PART ONE

BY TJ FISHER

by: Robert H. Moulton | Contributed by: Alan Lightcap

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The proprietor of the shop across the street from my flat has done everything possible to make sure that I'll think of him first the next time I'm in the market for a hairdresser. In the year or so he's been open, he's gradually filled his window with several signs in faux LED neon: his business' logo, "open" surrounded by twinkling lights, and "no wait." These have also been joined by a scrolling text sign, a screen one might expect to show hairstyles which instead features snapshots of the shop's dog mascot, and not one but two barber's poles illuminated from within. Sometimes it gets to be a little much and I'm grateful for thick blinds, and if a few of those signs are ever turned off, I haven't yet been up late enough to find out. Most of the time, however, I enjoy the electric glow into my front room well into the evening.

There are plenty of quiet side streets where I could have taken an apartment, but I picked the main drag, so I don't see that I could reasonably complain about a business advertising the old-fashioned way even if I wanted to. Of course, not everyone takes the realities of living in a dense area in stride. Even less well tolerated than city lights, it seems to me, is city noise. As far back as the 6th century BC, when the council of the Greek colony of Sybaris required tradesmen to live outside the city walls and banned roosters, the sonic landscape has been subject to regulation. Manifestations of the same spirit today concern us, as complaints related to volume and other aspects of the music keep many of our instruments which might otherwise play for the public silent. I wondered what relevant lessons might lie in one of the big noise abatement campaigns of the last century, which directly affected the trajectory of automatic music. rectly affected the trajectory of automatic music.

New York City of the 1920s and 1930s was by all accounts no quiet place. The historian Emily Thompson compiled hundreds of complaints from city records during this period, addressing a variety of subjects from industry

to neighbors. A Murray Hill resident wrote to Dr. Shirley Wynne, the city health commissioner, to thank him for dispatching officers to visit his "annoying musical neighbor," who now stopped playing at precisely 11:00 each evening, albeit "with an emphasized chord."

Dr. Wynne also corresponded with a resident of Sunnyside Gardens, Queens, who had complained about noise at an animal hospital: Wynne advised him that inspectors had found no noise there, and the complainant responded to thank him, noting that the situation had been "greatly improved." Harry Weisburg, member of a Nottingham Park residents' association, was furnished with copies of city noise ordinances, having offered to volunteer "in any way to help the cause" of abating noise from automobile horns.

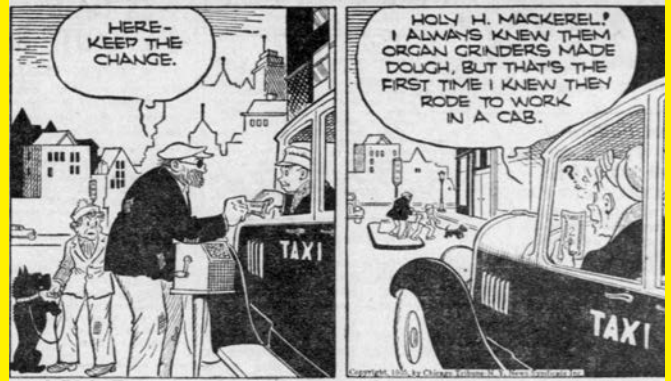
In these clamorous times, street organs remained part of the soundscape, and were often remarked upon as humorous or charming parts of quotidian life. Bessie Gould on the Upper West Side wrote to the *Daily News* in April 1928: "Walking down the street, I saw several coins in front of me: a quarter, dimes, and nickels! There were several women and children on the walk, and it seemed strange they didn't see the money. As I stopped to gather up the coins, the women and children began yelling at me. Looking up, I saw a green-coated monkey and an angry organ grinder gazing at me!" Vera Pilny, a teenager from Long Island City, wrote in May 1933: "After an afternoon of shopping, I found I had only six cents. This left me a nickel for the subway, however, which was all I needed to get home. In front of the subway station, I was attracted by an organ grinder. After listening to the music a few minutes, I opened my purse and gave the monkey a coin and rushed into the station. A moment later, I discovered that I had given the monkey my nickel instead of the penny. I was obliged to go back to the organ grinder, explain my predicament, and get back my money."





## Happy, Healthy, Childhood Memories

*This idealized depiction of happy days as children enjoying the music of a street organ was considered pure and wholesome enough to sell milk with. Courtesy Kraft Heinz.*



*Ongoing familiarity with street organs in everyday life is evident in this 1935 "Dick Tracy" comic, featuring the detective and his sidekick Pat Patton undercover as organ grinders. Courtesy Tribune Publishing.*

Businesses also used street organs as quintessential representations of old-fashioned values, meant to evoke pleasant memories. "Remember when life's biggest thrill was in following Tony, the organ-grinder? How gay were the tunes he ground out. How they set your feet a- dancing. Let your youngsters enjoy these marvelous childhood days in the fullness of good health. Give them a quart of Sealect [milk] every day," urged Sheffield Farms dairy in June 1928. "All New York City was happy in the gay and golden nineties," wrote Hearn's Department Store on the occasion of its 104th anniversary sale in September 1931. "Parents laughed over Harrigan and Hart and children gaily sang the 'Sidewalks of New York' with an organ grinder as accompanist...But there was more than pleasure. Big business was coming to the fore... The Hearn store was expanding too. But the same principle of satisfying customers still prevailed."

Still, not all press was good press for street organs still playing at that time. For instance, the tribulations of at least three organ grinders' monkeys named Jocko were also reported in the pages of the News. In September 1926, John Fiorelco's monkey was "performing tricks for his master" in Astoria when "a boy in the crowd accidentally stepped on Jocko's tail." This "filled Jocko with resentment," and he took revenge in the form of a bite to "the legs of little Wilma Miller," whose screams dispersed the crowd. "The consequence was that few pennies were flipped into Jocko's tin cup," the paper notes, before adding that Wilma was not badly injured. Antonio Mastroico of the Bronx was fined \$2 in May 1933, worth about \$43 today, "because he was accused of jerking his monkey by a collar," and was "ordered keep keep Jocko off the city street hereafter." His defense was that the jerk signaled "Jocko to doff his hat like a gentleman and collect coins" and "he did not...know he was violating any law." Similarly, Alfred Fiorella was arrested in Sugar Hill on a warm June

1934 day "for refusing to take a jacket off the trained monkey that does his collecting for him": a father of two unable to afford a \$10 fine for cruelty to animals, Fiorella was jailed "and let others take care of Jocko's sartorial appearance."

Complaints addressing the volume of the organs themselves also became increasingly common in the News and other publications. In October 1931, someone identifying themselves only as "T. T." invoked a pioneer in engine mufflers and firearm silencers: "I wonder if we couldn't persuade Percy Maxim to implement an effective silencer to be applied to organ grinders, street singers, and musicians begging for money." One Celeste Bertuzzi was brought before the 7th District Magistrate's Court in September 1932 after "prankish Barnard students sent [him] to play his organ beneath the faculty windows, saying: 'You'll get a lot of nickels there.'"

Dean Virginia Gildersleeve had ordered Bertuzzi away from the building, but he claimed to have mistaken her for a student. "The beautiful lady looked so young - how could I know? I thought it was all a joke, you know...they joke me always...they steal my organ, but they give it back and they give me nickels, so I always joke, too," said Bertuzzi, with "his very broadest and most ingratiating smile." The magistrate handed down a suspended sentence for disorderly conduct, and Bertuzzi and his organ were soon "once more making the night melodious around Columbia." Gildersleeve later distinguished herself in international relations, including as a member of the United Nations Charter Committee, while Bertuzzi, whose naturalization papers indicate that he had worked as a musician since immigrating to the United States, seems not to have been mentioned in major New York papers again. An extreme example was printed in January 1930



*An unnamed "old organ grinder" in New York City, ca. 1910. Courtesy Getty Images.*



*"One of New York's last organ grinders in Washington Heights, ca. 1935." This man's name is not recorded. Courtesy Museum of the City of NY.*



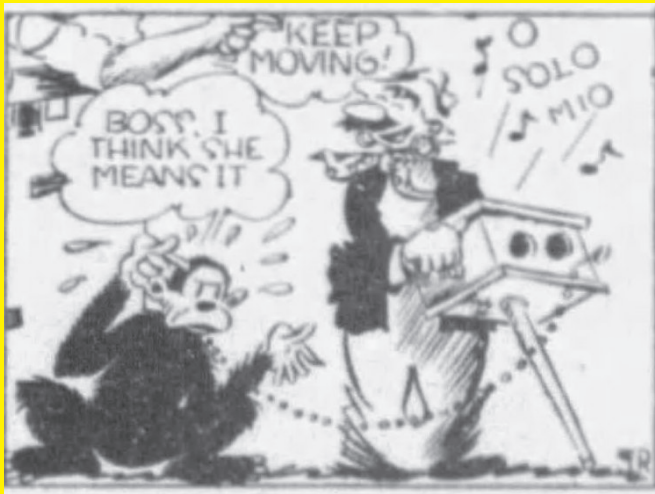
*Tony Negri carts his instrument to "gather dust" in a warehouse in January 1936, after the passage of Mayor LaGuardia's ban. Courtesy Daily News.*

under the headline "Hurdy-Gurdy Men Not in Season, Even at 3 A.M., Air Gunner Told": a grumpy Astorian shot James Tsaveras in the head because Tsaveras "was playing a hurdy-gurdy outside [his] window at 3 a. m." The magistrate told the assailant: "You have my sympathy and if it were not for the law I should be inclined to act otherwise in this matter. However, I can do nothing but hold you on a charge of third-degree assault. If those of us who have our slumbers disturbed...by the neighbors were justified in seizing guns, it would sound as if a world war had started all over." The paper does not elaborate in the following weeks on Tsaveras' condition or the disposition of his neighbor's case. Even your laidback correspondent must admit that 3 a. m. would test his patience, if not to violence.

Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia took office in January 1934. He quickly enacted previously drafted legislation expanding licensing requirements related to street noise. A year later, one Sebastino Lupica brought his accordion to City Hall, seeking LaGuardia's office and an opportunity to prove his musical prowess, outraged that his permit had not been renewed. A police captain intervened on Lupica's behalf, only to be told that the licensing of street musicians had been banned on LaGuardia's personal orders, and it was intended that all such music be illegal once current licenses had expired. A shocked Lupica left City Hall among the ranks of the unemployed, wondering aloud how he could earn a living. He and the city's other street musicians, including licensed and unlicensed organ grinders, had become pawns in a political debate over the merits of self-sufficiency and government oversight, as their chosen vocations had been deemed unnecessary noise. What to do?

In the next issue, I'll discuss contemporary public reaction to this ban, two historians' reads on why LaGuardia took this approach, His Honor's traumatizing childhood experience with a street organ, a proposal by the "Songbird of the South" that might have left us with many more organs still being cranked and enjoyed, and a humble suggestion about what we can apply from New York of the '20s and '30s to our mutual goals in 2022.





A Daily News artist's impression of Celeste Bertuzzi and his monkey as Dean Gildersleeve approached. Courtesy Daily News.

**ABOUT THE COLUMNIST:** TJ Fisher, a recent transplant from the Washington DC area to the San Francisco, CA Bay area writes a continuing column on a young person's perspective on life and mechanical music.

Email TJ Fisher at: [853fisher@gmail.com](mailto:853fisher@gmail.com).

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**DEADLINES:** Submissions must be received no later than the first of the odd months (January, March, May, July, September, November). The **Bulletin** will be mailed no later than the first week of the even months.



# MECHANICAL MUSIC RESTORATION AND RESOURCE REGISTRY

The AMICA Bulletin is pleased to offer this complimentary resource for anyone looking for someone to repair, rebuild, or restore their mechanical music; provide resources, material, and supplies, or general assistance in any way for anything that qualifies under AMICA's broad definition of mechanical music. Listings will be by state, without regard for type of service or resource.

Submissions may be made by the resource provider, AMICA member, or anyone else. To provide the broadest possible array of listings, AMICA membership is not required but encouraged. Before publishing any listing, The AMICA Bulletin will confirm with the provider the interest and accuracy of the listing. Beyond verification of the listing, there is no implication of the quality, voracity, or integrity of the service provider. AMICA's resource serves only to provide a forum bringing together interested parties who will make their own connections and arrangements. AMICA takes no responsibility for the communication, service, or other arrangements between the parties. Listings with all complete information should be sent to Bulletin editor, Glenn Thomas.

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It is with pride and pleasure that I resume production of the great rolls played by the late John Farrell, one of the most gifted hot jazz and boogie composers and artists ever to have graced a keyboard!

With exclusive rights granted by John's daughter (who owns his copyrights), and the able and welcome assistance of fellow **AMICA** members Bob and Ginny Billings, I've begun producing and issuing specially selected titles from the more than 600 titles issued between 1975 and 2004 on several labels, **plus 20 more that were never issued, and will now be available to discriminating collectors for the first time ever!**

Consider yourself fortunate if you possess any of these highly sought-after and collectible Farrell rolls, and even more so now that many more will be available to you! Those of you who are not familiar with John Farrell's incredible artistry can now experience the joy of new discovery!

John had the uncanny ability, which even he couldn't fully understand or explain, to listen to a 78 rpm record or an LP or a tape recording, or read a piece of sheet music, and immediately commit it to memory, put it to paper, add a little of his own heat, and produce a hit roll master! **John had type B blood (B for Boogie) and his DNA was laced with strains of stride and jazz, apparent in each of his rolls!**

*{ John passed away in 2007 at the age of 71, a sad day indeed for player piano enthusiasts everywhere }*

For more on John Farrell, see the article "Who Was John Farrell?" elsewhere in this issue.

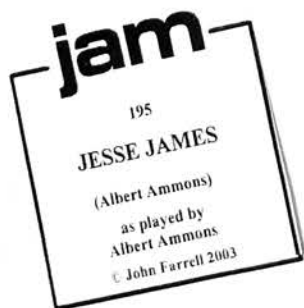
**Note: all my Farrell rolls are new issues, NOT recuts, as they are produced from the original files.**

These rolls will be issued in very limited numbers, so as they become available, you'll want to act fast. If you snag one of the never-before-issued rolls, you'll have the pride of owning one of only a handful that exist!

**These John Farrell rolls will be punched in the UK by the highly-regarded roll producer and AMICA member Julian Dyer (which is fitting, since John Farrell was also a proud Brit!)**

In addition to his own knockout compositions, many of John's original sources were jazz and boogie greats such as American pianists Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons, and Mead "Lux" Lewis, names familiar to the true boogie aficionado. Other sources for John's genius were James P. Johnson, "Fats" Waller and Jelly Roll Morton, to name a few. He raised the heat a level or two on several of their works with his own high octane fuel injections.

For information on what's available and upcoming on the John Farrell project, as well as my own new rags and blues recuts, and old roll auctions, just send me your email address & Have Fun! - Jan Myers



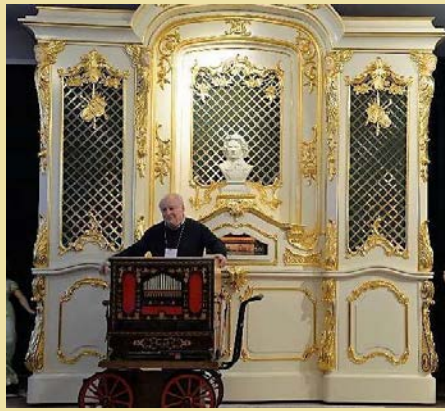


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