

Westfield

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTFIELD CENTER FOR HISTORICAL KEYBOARD STUDIES
VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER 2

*A National Resource for the Advancement of Keyboard Music
Serving Professionals and the Public since 1979*

June 2017

Tilman Skowroneck, Editor



A very warm welcome to the second issue of *Westfield* 2017. Our major event in 2017, the conference-concert festival *Reformations and the Organ: 1517–2017* at the University of Notre Dame, September 10–13, is drawing closer. With a packed program of performances and talks by many Westfield members and friends, including keynote concerts on the newly completed Paul Fritts organ in the Notre Dame basilica by Craig Cramer, Christophe Mantoux, and Kimberly Marshall, this will be an opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones, to listen to exquisite concerts and interesting presentations, and to hear another new landmark American organ. The registration form and full program details are available [here](#); since space is limited we encourage you to sign up soon—and we look forward to seeing you there.

This issue includes an interview with the conference’s keynote speaker Kerala Snyder, Professor Emerita of Musicology, Eastman School of Music, who talks about her interest in the conference’s theme, her involvement

with GOArt in Gothenburg, her interest in the Holtkamp organ, the question of why organ studies are important today, and other topics close to her heart.

The conference *Ghosts in the Machine: Technology, History, and Aesthetics of the Player-Piano* took place at Cornell University on May 4–6, 2017. We include here the conference report, co-written by Jordan Musser, Sergio Ospina-Romero, Mackenzie Pierce, Carlos Ramírez, and Annette Richards, and, with permission from *CounterPunch.org*, we reprint David Yearsley’s fascinating and detailed review of the conference’s mammoth keynote concert by pianist Rex Lawson.

These are three substantial contributions which, I hope, will demonstrate the scope and depth of Westfield’s endeavors. This newsletter concludes with the announcement of the First International Chopin Competition on period instruments, which will be held at the Warsaw Philharmonic in September 2018.

—*Tilman Skowroneck*



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AN INTERVIEW WITH KERALA SNYDER

Kerala, this interview came about because you are going to be the keynote speaker in the upcoming Westfield Center conference, Reformations and the Organ, at Notre Dame. I feel I should seize the opportunity and ask you to address the organ world of today in broader terms. Still, to begin with, what was it that made you accept the invitation to be the keynote speaker at Notre Dame?

First of all, I was truly inspired by the fact that this Roman Catholic university with the Westfield Center was celebrating the Protestant Reformation in this way, and I wanted to participate in it. Also, I was attracted by the opportunity to learn more about the organ world of today because I am not as much a part of it now as I was when I was working for GOArt and serving as a member of the reference group for the building of the Casparini organ at Eastman School of Music. But this fact made me hesitant to accept the invitation because I am a historical musicologist, not an organologist, and for the past several years I have been working mainly with vocal music, specifically with the choir library that the cantors of St. Mary's in Lübeck assembled during and before Buxtehude's time there. But in the end, the challenge of addressing the wonderfully diverse group of musicians, scholars, and instrument builders that I encounter at Westfield conferences was irresistible.



Kerala Snyder

What was your role at GOArt, the Göteborg Organ Art Center?

I am forever grateful to Hans Davidsson for inviting me to join the GOArt team; I learned so much during those years. I traveled to Gothenburg regularly to participate in their conferences and act as a member of their Senior Advisory Board. I worked as a historical musicologist, coaching their graduate students on their presentations at the conferences, giving papers of my own, and finally editing their flagship publication, *The Organ as a Mirror of Its Time*, which Oxford University Press published in 2002. The conferences were interdisciplinary, including the scientists in acoustics, fluid dynamics, and metallurgy who were working on the North German baroque organ that GOArt was building, and we had to learn to talk to

one another. Who knew that metallurgy had anything to do with musicology? But it was the metallurgists who discovered the traces of sand in the scraps of Schnitger pipes that they analysed, and that led to Munetaka Yokota's reconstruction of the technique of casting organ pipe metal on sand. I played a tiny role in that research: Munetaka experimented with every liquid imaginable to hold the sand together and found that olive oil worked best; he then asked me if I could find any evidence that olive oil was imported into north Germany during the seventeenth century. In the Lübeck archives I found a fifteenth-century shopping list from a monastery between Hamburg and Lübeck for imported items including olive oil. I was delighted to learn that Paul Fritts had cast the metal for the pipes of the new Notre Dame organ on sand. I understand that he used peanut oil, however.

One of the topics of the conference is the organ in German seventeenth-century/early eighteenth-century culture—and the later repercussions of the Reformation on it. For whom are questions about these connections important and why?

These questions are important for all of us who care about the organ. "There the organist sits, plays, and shows his art; in order that the art of one person be shown, the whole congregation of Jesus Christ is supposed to sit and hear the sound of pipes." Theophil Grossgebauer, a professor of theology at the University of Rostock, wrote those words in 1661, but I think that some people in my own congregation (United Church of Christ) feel the same way today. The more we know of our history, the better able we are to deal with contemporary issues.

In our preliminary conversations, you mentioned the name of Holtkamp and your excitement about these organs of the 1950s when you were in college. What was special about these instruments and how is it important to remember them today?

When I learned that the new Fritts organ in the Basilica at Notre Dame had replaced a 1978 Holtkamp, I knew that I wanted to share with a younger audience my excitement about the organs that Walter Holtkamp Sr. built in the

early 1950s. Wellesley College acquired a 4-stop Holtkamp positive organ in 1955, on which I played continuo in its inaugural concert. I was intrigued with an organ sound and appearance that was quite new to me, and I went to explore the new Holtkamps at MIT, in Kresge Auditorium and in the Chapel. Then I learned about the Holtkamp in Battell Chapel at Yale. I had a Yale boyfriend at the time, and when I went to visit him for a weekend I remember that he was somewhat dismayed that I wanted to go to Battell on Sunday morning so that I could hear the organ. Little did I dream then that nine years later I would move to New Haven, become a member of that congregation, and hear it played every Sunday. What is special about these instruments is that they so beautifully reflect the modernist aesthetic of that time in both architecture and sound. Although Yale acquired its Holtkamp in 1951 with Bach in mind, Hindemith now sounds better to me on it. That organ is a classic, like the fifties cars with tail fins.

With John Watson's book Artifacts in Use in mind, I am fascinated by how the organ can illustrate so many things of universal appeal—in Watson's case it serves as the most to-the-point and complex example that can be found, to explain the economics, philosophy, and methodology behind a well-informed approach to the conservation of artifacts. It is possible to summon arguments that underline the organ's uniqueness and importance from many other angles. Which are your favorite ones? What is at stake in organ research today?

John Watson eloquently describes the tension between use and preservation of historic artifacts. By pure coincidence, I went to Mystic Seaport last weekend and climbed aboard the Charles W. Morgan, the last surviving wooden whaling ship in the world. Built in 1841, it sailed for 80 years and was recently restored to sailing condition, following which it made a short voyage in 2014 to a few New England ports. “We want her to be a living issue rather than a dusty old artifact,” a Mystic Seaport official had said a few years earlier. But now there are no plans for further voyages, our guide told us, because they do not want to risk losing the last wooden whaling ship in the world.

My favorite example of how the organ has taught us to deal with historic artifacts is the Övertorneå project, initiated by Hans-Ola Ericsson, with its three-part procedure of documentation, reconstruction, and restoration. (Övertorneå is a small town in far northern Sweden that I have had the pleasure of visiting and was recently featured in the *New York Times* with the headline “Swedish Town

Rejects Proposal to Grant Sex Leave to Workers.”) The seventeenth-century organ of the German Church in Stockholm was sold in 1779 to the parish of Övertorneå and its Rückpositiv placed in a neighboring village church, while its pedal got lost on the journey. Based on historical documents that remained in Stockholm and modern scientific documentation of its surviving parts, a historic reconstruction was built, and only then were the original parts restored. We have thus far followed two-thirds of this model with Eastman's historic reconstruction of the Casparini organ in Vilnius, Lithuania, but the restoration of the Vilnius organ has not yet been accomplished, much to our regret.

The core term behind an effort to keep things going on in academia is outreach. How do we reach out to the public about an object, a practice, and interest area that many find “old”? What do we need to do to keep doing what we're doing in the art world of the organ?

Above all, we need to play them, not only with old music in pure organ recitals, but also integrated into concerts with other types of music. We need to commission composers to write new music for organs in historical styles. I remember hearing a wonderful piece that Robert Bates composed for Martin Pasi's two-temperament organ in the Saint Cecilia Cathedral of Omaha; I think that was in conjunction with a Westfield conference. We need to integrate our organs with other media: improvise on them during silent movies; televise the hidden organist for the audience, so they can watch her feet; find ways to make the organ less mysterious.

When I proposed this interview, you were entirely absorbed in the preparation of an organ recital. As mentioned at the outset, you will give a keynote address at Notre Dame. What other plans do you have for the nearest future? And, if I may ask, what did you play at your recital?

At the moment, I am steeped in general-editing the final two volumes of the *Collected Works of Dieterich Buxtehude*, and after that, besides preparing the keynote address, I'll be working on concert programs containing works from the St. Mary's Choir Library and talks to go with them. As for the recital, I didn't do any of the things I just recommended: I played old music on an organ in historical style, the Fisk meantone organ at Wellesley College, in conjunction with my 60th reunion. The program consisted of Melchior Schildt's arrangement of Dowland's *Paduana Lachrymae*; Frescobaldi's *Bergamasca*; Buxtehude's

Passacaglia in D minor; Handel's Organ Concerto op. 4, no. 5; and Buxtehude's Praeludium in G minor (BuxWV 148). The final ostinato section of 148 is laden with A flats, presenting quite a challenge with the sub-semitones, but I rose to it. I love that organ, and it was thrilling to

play it on that occasion. And it was Charlie Fisk who introduced me to the Westfield Center, in its earliest days.

Kerala, thank you very much for this interview!

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE: THE TECHNOLOGY, HISTORY, AND AESTHETICS OF THE PLAYER-PIANO MAY 4–6, 2017, CORNELL UNIVERSITY

In the early twentieth century, the sounds of player-pianos and reproducing pianos were ubiquitous in multiple venues, from theaters to domestic parlors. At the birth of the music entertainment industry, these machines revolutionized how people made and listened to music. Indeed, at the turn of the century, the player-piano was much better known, and was taken as much more revolutionary and promising in the modern world, than the phonograph itself. Yet the popularity of player-pianos declined dramatically after the late 1920s. While phonograph records (and eventually LPs, CDs, and iPods) changed the trajectory of recorded sound, player-pianos found their niche among collectors, mechanical experts, and avant-garde composers. Recently, however, the player-piano has begun to re-emerge as a musical instrument and an artistic device via state-of-the-art models as well as through the activities of composers and performers. Even more so, in the last few years the player-piano has become an object of scholarly inquiry in view of the insights it has to offer into histories of technology, mediation, digitization, computation, globalization, and modernism.

Last month, the Westfield Center and Cornell's Department of Music sponsored the conference *Ghosts in the Machine: Technology, History, and Aesthetics of the Player-Piano*. The program included papers and talks organized into six academic panels, three live performances, and two roundtables, with participants from various parts of the US

and countries around the world, including Spain, England, Japan, and Australia. The conference was organized by an interdisciplinary team, led by PhD candidate Sergio Ospina-Romero, and including professors Annette Richards, Roger Moseley, and Trevor Pinch.

Thursday, May 4

An excellent introduction to contemporary problems and debates, Panel 1, titled "Player-Pianos and Piano Rolls: Arrangements, Engagements, and Re-engagements," centered on the history and aesthetics of piano roll and player-piano technologies. Independent scholar and piano roll collector Paul

Johnson delivered the first paper, "The Art of the Popular Piano Roll Arrangement." A historical project, the paper sought to periodize early experiments with piano roll arrangements into four distinct categories: first, the Literal Period (late 1890s–1907), when roll makers aimed to translate faithfully the notes from sheet music into a roll format; second, the Full-Arrangement Period (1908–1914), during which arrangers honed their craft by adding thicker, more "full" harmonies; third, Hand-Played Rolls (1911–1930), a pivotal moment when the new technology of the marking piano enabled performers to record their playing in real time and punch holes directly into a moving piece of paper; and finally, "Arranged to Sound Hand-Played" (1920–1960s), a designation refer-



"Push-up" pianola attached to a Steinway. All photos by Anna Stepler unless indicated otherwise.

ring to a phenomenon in which industry arrangers aimed to cut out the performing middleman by concocting different “personas” intended to recreate well-known performers’ playing styles. Rich with musical examples, Johnson’s presentation was a crowd-pleaser, especially among the collectors and technicians in the audience.

In contrast, the following talks piqued the interest of mainly the academics in the room. In his presentation, “Voicing Artis, Panelizing Gershwin: Piano Rolls in the Post-Digital and Post-Industrial Era,” ethnomusicologist and practicing live sound reinforcement engineer Whitney Slaten (Columbia University) considered how, in her 1993 LP *Gershwin Plays Gershwin*, Artis Wodehouse added her own expressive nuances to piano rolls that composer-pianist George Gershwin hand-played many years prior (the question of whether or not Gershwin had actually created these rolls, not touched on by Slaten, was the subject of lively discussion over the course of the conference). Situating Wodehouse’s activities in the context of recent scholarship on popular musical production and creative labor, Slaten’s analysis invoked such themes as the mutability of the work concept, deadness and post-personhood, and gender and the post-Butlerian “improvisative,” thus shifting the tenor of the day’s discussion into a distinctly (critical-)theoretical register.



Whitney Slaten

Picking up on this thread, the final paper, “‘A Baroque Thing for Anyone to Have Constructed’: Vocality, Skeuomorphism, and Anarchiving in the Player-Piano Installations of Peter Ablinger,” delivered by music historian Matthew Mendez (Yale University), brought the audience squarely into the realm of media theory/archeology. The talk focused on composer Peter Ablinger’s *Quadraturen III*, a nine-part installation that, upon subjecting a voice recording to “acoustic speech synthesis,” discretizes, sam-

ples, and transmits this information into a custom-made playback apparatus that in turn attacks the piano keys. Centering not so much on the player-piano per se but on how a machine re-mediate the “human” voice through another machine, Mendez discussed how the uncanny sound world Ablinger’s device creates draws from the player-piano’s ambivalent cultural status as simultaneously dead and alive, autonomically inhuman, yet infused with seemingly alive expressivity. A “sonic time machine,” in Wolfgang Ernst’s words, Ablinger’s mechanically-played piano effectively re-enchants the antiquated technology of the player-piano, rendering it contemporary by way of the simulacraic vocality it both de- and re-familiarizes.

In his brief presentation, “The Player-Piano Project at Stanford University,” Kumaran Arul (Stanford University) offered an overview of Stanford University’s Player-Piano Project, a one-of-a-kind initiative involving the archiving of piano rolls, player instruments, and extensive source materials relating to the industry. Arul’s presentation made it abundantly clear that anyone interested in seriously researching the history of the player-piano—in both the US and worldwide—cannot afford to overlook the Project’s collections.

After a few minutes’ break, the attendees witnessed the premiere of *Trapiche*, a piece by Colombian composer Sergio Augusto Cote (Cornell University), performed by the composer with pianist Ryan MacEvoy McCullough. With a great display of creativity, artistry, and imagination that challenges conventional ways of thinking about music instruments, *Trapiche* featured a damaged upright player-piano paired with a grand piano. By means of an intricate system of contact microphones and surface speakers, the sounds and “corporeal gestures” of the player-piano mechanism interacted with a series of sonic gestures produced by the grand piano. At some point, by



Sergio Augusto Cote and Ryan MacEvoy McCullough



Trapiche

virtue of innovative techniques of acoustic manipulation, the sounds emanating from the player-piano were heard as if coming from the grand piano.

The closing event for the first day of the conference was Live Pianola Sounds, a mesmerizing concert by English pianist Rex Lawson. A vivid account of Lawson’s performance, written for *CounterPunch* on the following morning by David Yearsley, is reproduced in full after this report.

Friday, May 5

Not long into Friday morning’s first panel (Panel 2), “Histories and Legacies of Mechanical Instruments,” it began to be clear that this conference could only hope to be the beginning of a much larger and longer-term project. There was so much to learn from each of the speakers—especially from the three brilliant experts and independent scholars Bob Berkman, Rex Lawson, and Denis Hall, each of whom had material to keep the audience interested for hours, if not days.

As Bob Berkman stated at the outset, there is “a great deal of work to be done in getting the ‘unfake’ news out there about what the player-piano was, is, and can be.” Berkman’s fascinating presentation—sharp, economical, entertaining, and beautifully put together—gave the novices in his audience a brief introduction into how rolls were punched, how the roll functions as a score, and how piano rolls continued to be made well after the putative end of their era in the early 1960s (Berkman himself had a long career making rolls for QRS starting in 1975), before going on to give an overview of the extraordinary and fascinating variety of piano rolls made in the early part of the twentieth century for the domestic immigrant market in the US. He presented the result of careful historical

research, with the help of captivating images, to offer a glimpse of the activities of immigrant recording stars and immigrant-run businesses catering for a vast range of nationalities and national musics—from Lithuania to Syria, from Ukraine to North Africa, and everything in between. In a brilliant and troubling final turn, Berkman also touched on the “hate” rolls—directed against such communities of Others—produced by organizations like the Ku Klux Klan.



Bob Berkman

Coming as what felt like an expert and informative footnote after his nearly three-hour recital-presentation the previous evening, Rex Lawson reminded his Ithaca audience of the important role played by upstate New York in the early history of the piano roll and made an impassioned plea for care in historical research into this instrument and its culture. Again, the project of dispelling myths and misinformation—a theme that ran through the conference—was cast into the spotlight. Lawson has much to say on the production of piano rolls and on their



Rex Lawson and Denis Hall

performance, on the importance of understanding the complex commercial pressures involved in their creation, the fraught relation between hand-recorded rolls and those cut directly into the paper by technicians effectively transcribing from scores, and the many misunderstandings that have arisen from careless research and wrongheaded reproductions: not least, the common misconception that the player-piano is mechanical and soulless rather than a versatile and exciting vehicle for musical expression (there would be more on that topic in the final panel of the conference).

This latter point was amply made by Lawson’s collaborator and partner at the UK’s Pianola Institute, Denis Hall, whose extraordinary collection of performances made for the reproducing piano by the greatest pianists in the first decades of the twentieth century tantalized listeners with evocations of pianism (or pianisms, perhaps) of another age. When played on reproducing pianos in perfect condition, as Hall’s instruments are, these rolls reveal enormous subtleties in performance that cry out to be carefully explored and sensitively documented. (We were also made aware in these presentations of the great amount of music—classical and popular—that was recorded on piano rolls but not on wax cylinders or vinyl; piano rolls offer, for example, an enormous repertoire of salon music not available elsewhere.) Of all the presentations at the conference, this was probably the one that deserved double or triple the length of its allotted time—and, as did Berkman and Lawson, Hall presented a treasure trove of research opportunities.

Later on Friday morning, Panel 3 centered on the global reach and marketing strategies of mechanical keyboards, and it was launched by conference organizer Sergio Ospina-Romero (Cornell University). In his paper, “Ghosts in the Machine and Other Takes around

a ‘Marvelous Invention’: Player-Pianos in Latin America, 1912–1915,” Ospina-Romero explored the cultural significance of the player-piano in Latin America; his research was framed by an episode in Gabriel García Márquez’s literary masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, in which the first player-piano arrives in Macondo (the fictional city that functions as a metaphor for Latin America). Ospina-Romero explored the liminal space between performance and mechanical reproduction, and he offered a survey of the strategies used by American player-piano manufacturers to gain access to the Latin American instrument market. He discussed the instrument’s reception in Latin America as both an emblem of European modernity and a vector for negotiating power dynamics between center and periphery, while considering in detail various aspects of the cultural and trade histories of player-pianos in the region.



Sergio Ospina-Romero

In the next presentation, “Alice Smythe Jay’s ‘Inspiration Music Rolls’: An Early Experiment in Film-Music Synchronization,” Peter Graff (Case Western Reserve University) introduced attendees to the industrious Alice Smythe Jay, who developed a sophisticated system for the synchronization of player-piano music and early film. In a paper that unearthed hitherto neglected sources, Graff showed that Smythe Jay’s “Inspiration Music Rolls” were both a unique document of silent film practice and an extension of longstanding discourses on gendered notions of improvisation. These early experiments with music and film were meant to provide producers with a wide range of stock musical material that they could then tailor to the needs of each film. Although her innovations were not ultimately successful—due to the difficulty of perfectly synchronizing early moving images to mechanical pianos—they nevertheless intersected two important

trends in the early film industry: improvised piano accompaniment, and the mechanization of film production. Finally, in “Upstairs the Laterna Shrieked,” Gail Holst-Warhaft (Cornell University) provided an introduction to the laterna, a hand-cranked instrument similar in many ways to the player-piano. A type of barrel keyboard, the laterna first appeared on the streets of Istanbul in the late nineteenth century and was associated with Greek working-class culture for much of the twentieth century. An instrument originally modeled after Italian barrel organs, Holst-Warhaft highlighted the ways in which the timbre, mode, and rhythm of the laterna were modified in order to perform late Ottoman popular music. With these adjustments, players could produce and perform a wide repertoire of music, making the instrument a ubiquitous part of the urban soundscape of Turkey and Greece. Showing the popularity and versatility of the instrument, Holst-Warhaft demonstrated that far from being thought of as just a mechanical device, the laterna was considered a musical instrument and its operators were highly-regarded musical artists.

On Friday afternoon, attention turned to the piano rolls as an early form of recording media. Allison Wente (SUNY Fredonia) opened Panel 4 (chaired by Malcolm Bilson) with a consideration of the ways in which positing the player-piano roll and the phonograph as early recording technologies allows us to think in new ways about technologies for generating and storing sound. Juxtaposing two recordings of Rachmaninoff performing his C-sharp minor Prelude—one on phonographic recording, the other on a piano roll—Wente argued that the advent of such recording and reproducing technologies profoundly shifted contemporary ideas about performance. Central to her argument were the different elements—such as tempo, dynamics, note length—that were either amplified or removed through these different recording media. Additionally, Wente’s research shed light on the little-known role played by women in the editing and production of piano rolls in the early part of the twentieth century.

The limitations imposed on performances by the process of making rolls for reproducing-pianos is also at the center of Akiko Washino’s research. In her paper,



Malcolm Bilson chairing Panel 4

Washino (Fukuoka Prefectural University) explored how elements such as tempo, dynamics, and length of compositions were usually altered in the process of converting a performance into perforations on paper; Washino focused particularly on the elements of rubato and note length. Overall, Washino’s project seeks to explore the relationship between notation and performance; in this instance, she compared performances of Chopin’s A-flat major Waltz op. 42 by artists who had recorded on both piano rolls and audio recordings. Her study showed that (1) whether on the piano roll or on an early recording, performances by the same artists tended to be quite similar despite the limitations of the media; (2) rhythmic

flexibility (rubato) was employed across all the recordings, but recordings on the piano rolls tended to render this expressive technique more mechanical; (3) the mechanics of the reproducing piano should be taken into consideration when analyzing the sonic results, as the mechanism of the instrument itself may distort certain elements of the performance such as tempo and dynamics.

An opportunity for more informal conversation was offered by the first roundtable of the conference, just before Friday evening’s keynote talk. Roundtable 1, “MIDI-ations and Other Creative Ventures with the Player-Piano,” began with a talkback by composer Sergio Cote, who offered thoughts on the creative process behind *Trapiche*. Composed for a “broken,” that is, non-operating player-piano, *Trapiche*, Cote explained, sought to problematize the ways that musicians and audiences conceive of the category “damaged.” Aside from its automatized roll-playing mechanism, the player-piano, *Trapiche* reveals, is chock-full of fascinating timbral colors: the pneumatic wind-board, for instance, when amplified with contact mics, sounds like “breath.” In order to underscore the instrument’s non-broken brokenness, *Trapiche* juxtaposes its experiments with the player-piano against the playing of a modern Steinway, whose pianistic sound world comes off, ironically, as antiquated by contrast with the revitalized heap-of-a-Welte-Mignon.

Cote’s talkback was followed by Paul Manganaro (Antique Mechanical Restorations), whose presentation, “Converting Piano Roll Data into MIDI Files with Artistic Expression,” likewise scrutinized the player-piano’s

expressive dimensions. Specifically, Manganaro discussed the technical specifications of a unique recording unit he invented in 2000, which converts piano roll information into MIDI files. While an excellent means of storage, the problem with MIDI, Manganaro explained, is that it flattens out the rolls' timbral facets, thus turning the original intent of roll artists into a blank wash of electronic bleeps and bloops. Not exactly pleasing to the ear! Seeking to rectify this problem, Manganaro's device feeds roll information into pneumatic tubes, which in turn strike the keys of an upside-down, pressure-sensitive electronic keyboard; the signals are then encoded into MIDI (via Cakewalk). The resulting files can be used for listening enjoyment, to upload into a Yamaha Disklavier, or for archival purposes.



Paul Manganaro

The final presentation, “Archiving and Accessing Recordings on Reproducing Piano Rolls,” delivered by Peter Phillips (Sydney Conservatorium of Music) shared Manganaro's interests in storage, playback, and archiving techniques. As Phillips explained, according to his research on Welte-branded instruments, the Duo-Art, and the Ampico, the performances recorded on reproducing piano rolls were in large part accurate to the artists who created them; thus piano rolls present vital documents for historians of performance. Researchers have enjoyed minimal access to them, however, typically relying on either audio recordings of rolls played on a reproducing piano or the benevolence of enthusiasts who own instruments and rolls. To redress this Phillips, like Manganaro, has developed a MIDI-encoding device with which roll data can be uploaded, stored, and then processed through a range of playback software (Phillips flagged Virtual Piano, specifically, since it is relatively inexpensive and easily accessible to researchers).

The last session on Friday was devoted to the keynote presentation delivered by Georgina Born (Oxford University). Conjuring a rich theoretical panorama—particularly seductive for the majority of academics in the room, but slightly cryptic for the group of collectors and mechanical experts—Born provided an engaging view of the field of musical robotics as a way to challenge conventional historical accounts of music instruments and music technologies. Those accounts are commonly characterized by an implicit teleological understanding of music technologies—the narratives of a series of heroic objects and inventors that transcend their cultural milieus as winners in the historical establishment of music technologies as cultural artifacts. The presentation featured for the most part a series of cases of contemporary digital music cultures and experimental technologies that Born has studied in the course of her fieldwork. Interestingly enough, however, in some of the technological genealogies of musical robotics, as understood by some of its contemporary representatives, the player-piano appears as a significant and unambiguous forebear.

Saturday, May 6

The last day of the conference included two more panels, another roundtable, and one more concert. The morning began with Panel 5, “Industrial Endeavors and Musical Enterprises.” First, Jordi Roquer (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) presented “Player-Piano Research in Spain: The Case of Victoria and the Discovery of Unknown Works by Frederic Mompou and Manuel Blancafort,” underscoring the pioneering activities of Victoria, the leading piano roll company in Spain in the early twentieth century. Even if significantly small compared with the production of American industries of the time, Victoria's catalog amounted to over 4,000 items, many of which were exported internationally. Not only does this collection allow for privileged access to music culture of the time, but the project has also revealed the existence of unreleased recordings of important Spanish composers such as Frederic Mompou, Manuel Blancafort, and Joaquín Rodrigo. The efforts of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona towards the preservation of these rolls include their digitization and the generation of audio and MIDI files.

Following Roquer's presentation, Michael A. Kukral (Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology) offered a lively presentation entitled “Edwin Welte and the Development of the Reproducing Piano in Europe and America,” of-

fering a well-documented characterization of the personal and business endeavors of the famous German entrepreneur in the early twentieth century in both Europe and the United States. Kukral also discussed the commercial and musical strategies of Welte-Mignon, paying particular attention to the elite cultural capital associated with Welte's products, the amplitude of his catalog, and the struggles faced by his business due to the outbreak of World War I.

Finally, Jeff Benatar (Eastman School of Music) presented his paper "The Evolution of James P. Johnson's 'Carolina Shout.'" Benatar highlighted the great stylistic contrast between three versions produced in 1918 and 1926 (two piano rolls and one record) and the sheet mu-

their empirical and theoretical research—that a consideration of the player-piano as a digital technology long before the so-called digital era problematizes the way in which the distinctions between the analog and the digital are usually taken for granted in historical narratives. The presentations were followed by a dynamic and extended conversation among participants that, for the most part, centered on the issue of the digitization of piano rolls and its conversion into MIDI files. Some conference attendees expressed their concerns about issues of fidelity in such processes, making more relevant, even if not conceptualized in these terms during the debate, the conundrum of the re-digitalization of digital technologies.



Anna Stepler and Rex Lawson.



Annette Richards has a go.



Rex Lawson encourages a conference attendee to play the pianola.

sic published in 1926 (somewhat frustratingly, this talk contained no audio examples—although these would have been fascinating for the audience and would have helped to clarify the discussion). Rather than attributing these changes to aesthetic considerations alone, Benatar suggested that the primary motivations behind this "evolution" were of a commercial nature.

Roundtable 2, "The Analog and Digital," was moderated by Roger Moseley (Cornell University), who opened up the discussion with a brief presentation on the digital lineage of which the player-piano is certainly a part, but that also includes ancient mechanical instruments, telegraphic systems, pre-computation punched cards, MIDI sequencers, and video games. In a similar way, Allison Wentz and Mathew Mendez argued—based on

Immediately after lunch, the audience was profoundly delighted by the player-piano recital offered by master pianolist Bob Berkman, featuring his own instrument brought from Buffalo, NY. By the same token of legitimization of the artistic character of player-piano performances displayed by Rex Lawson, Berkman made it clear that in spite of the mechanical properties of the instrument, the human input provides a crucial expressive element to the interpretation. As Berkman himself explained in his program notes, "this instrument contains no expressive devices to accent the melody and no pneumatic to automatically operate the sustain pedal. All expressive effects are achieved by varying the pressure on the foot pumps and by manipulating the five levers located in front of the keyboard. One lever controls



Roudntable 2

the movement of the damper rail via a simple linkage, effectively replacing the sustain pedal. The hammer rail is split into bass and treble sections, each controlled by another simple lever which throws either or both sections into ‘soft pedal’ position. A fourth lever controls the speed at which the roll travels (the ‘tempo’ lever). The fifth lever operates the roll transmission, providing for forward motion (‘play’) and silent reverse (‘reroll’). An intermediate position of this lever permits silent fast-forwarding (‘silencer’).” Nevertheless, while compelled by the mechanical intricacies, the audience was fascinated by the splendor of the interpretation. If Lawson’s concert featured only “classical” music as a way to defy the common assumption that pianolas were used only for popular music, Berkman privileged a repertoire of “popular” tunes in order to make a case for the musicality and artistry of domestic gatherings around player-pianos throughout the twentieth century. Before a small crowd assembled close to his instrument and temporarily unconcerned about the rush of their lives, Berkman performed a program that included, among several selections, Five Finnish Folksongs, Hoagy Carmichael’s “Georgia On My Mind,” and Chick Corea’s “Crystal Silence.” Berkman also surprised the audience with a tour-de-force act of timing and sensitivity in a performance of the Polonaise from *Mignon* by Ambroise Thomas: overcoming sound and synchronization challenges, he managed to operate a Victor Record Accompaniment Roll, on the pianola, to accompany a recording of the voice of Luisa Tetrazzini replayed on a c. 1909 Victor III phonograph. It was a fantastic performance that inspired a burst of enthusiastic applause from his listeners.

The final panel of the conference (Panel 6) on Saturday afternoon was a high point. Under the umbrella title “Craft, Embodiment, and Expressivity,” the three papers

each explored the ways in which the player-piano in the early decades of the twentieth century was understood in terms of discourses of human expressivity.

Alyssa Michaud (McGill University) opened with a lively and succinct reading of contemporary advertisements and promotional materials for the player-piano in order to show how the instrument functioned as a tool for amateurs, raising questions to do with mechanicity and expression, with the accessibility of creativity and musicality to those lacking technique, and showing how automated musical performance was promoted alongside other new household technologies in the period.

Pamela Feo (Boston University) focused on human interaction with the machine as she explored how marketing strategies for the player-piano focused on the paradoxical presence of the performer’s body, encoded into the piano’s actions. The notion of touch, she showed, was supremely important: as the instrument’s supporters and promoters stressed, while the phonograph recorded sounds, the player-piano recorded the imprint of the performer’s hand, his or her touch and caress. This was an instrument that recorded the body and embodied the absent great performer.



Pamela Feo

Finally, Christine Fena (Stony Brook University) gave a brilliant account of the reception of the player piano from 1900–1930 with abundant reference to literary and critical sources, to show how important “expression” was to the caché of this musical instrument. Indeed, what it made possible, as avid literary pianolists (from G. B. Shaw to Virginia Woolf) proclaimed, was pure expression: here was a tool not only for the amateur musician to gain access to art music without the drudgery of piano lessons, but even, for the buttoned-up Englishman (or woman), to be

able to concentrate on expression alone, practicing at last the long-suppressed art of expressing oneself. By the end of this session, fittingly closing the conference, the myth of the mechanical, soulless, player-piano had been fully dispelled. Here was an instrument “live” in the fullest sense, a ready partner between composer, performer,

and the piano itself, able not only to reanimate the finest performances of long-dead pianists but also to call up the musical essence of the pianist-operator, via those performances, in the here and now.

—*Jordan Musser, Sergio Ospina-Romero, Mackenzie Pierce, Carlos Ramírez, and Annette Richards*



The assembled conference presenters and participants.

THE RITE OF THE PIANOLA

BY DAVID YEARSLEY (REPRINTED, WITH PERMISSION, FROM *COUNTERPUNCH*, MAY 5, 2017)

It's not just Rex Lawson's bald head and spreading white beard that puts one in mind of Charles Darwin. Both kindly and brilliant Brits demolished received wisdom, the latter informing Victorian ladies and gentlemen that they descended from apes far hairier than he was even in his later years, and the former insisting that almost everything you read about, and hear from, vintage player-pianos is, as Lawson puts it with emphatic diction and an even more emphatic waggle of the finger, "rubbish." Lawson is probably the present age's most indefatigably expressive, engagingly expert, charmingly witty, and vigorously erudite virtuoso of the pianola. This music-making creation evolved rather more quickly than its *homo sapiens* inventors. Devised in 1895 (three years after Darwin's death and six years before Queen Victoria's) by Edwin Votey in Detroit, the instrument was within three years being manufactured in large numbers by the Aeolian Company of New York, which Votey had in the meantime joined, eventually rising to become its vice president. Soon the pianola was being heard in major concerts like that given in 1912 by the London Symphony Orchestra under Arthur Nikisch with Aeolian's chief demonstrator, Easthope Martin, playing Grieg's Piano Concerto and Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody at Aeolian Hall in London. Following in these footsteps and even to some of the same venues where the instrument first enthralled audiences, Lawson made his international debut in 1981 in Paris in the world premiere of the 1919 version of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* under the baton of Pierre Boulez. Lawson's wide-ranging career has taken him from Carnegie Hall to London's Royal Albert Hall for the Last Night of the Proms, as well as Paris for a performance of *The Rite of Spring* in the Théâtre des Champs Élysées—the very place where the work was premiered in 1913. In 1984 he and his colleague, Denis Hall, founded the Pianola Institute in London.

Until World War I the pianola was Aeolian's Cadillac line. The company built the apparatus into uprights and grand pianos, but also manufactured a so-called "push-up" model—a complex pianistic prosthetic whose mechanism is housed in an elegant secretary (the piece of furniture not the administrative assistant). This wooden cabinet can be placed in front of any piano keyboard so that the machine's felt-covered wooden and metal fingers hover over each key. A piano roll is inserted into the apparatus

and the pianolist animates the machine, using his hands to operate four levers set in a hatch at the top of the cabinet and his feet for the two pedals below. Bipedalism and opposable thumbs are required of the pianolist: call it—as Lawson does—the human factor. This is a machine that needs a thinking, moving, reactive being at its helm if it is to make music.

When Lawson plays the pianola his gaze is intensely focused on the roll unspooling before him so he can anticipate the dynamic, rhythmic, and other interpretative interventions he intends to make. His limbs are always busy. With his ever-treadling feet, he supplies not only power to the machine, but also controls the volume—from long crescendos to whispered pianissimos to crashing accents. The left hand works a lever for the damper pedal, while the right uses the other bars to manage the voicing (bringing out melodies and counter-melodies in the various registers of the piano) and timing. Lawson can produce rubato, grand pauses, and subtle hesitations. Grounded by an encyclopedic knowledge of the instrument's history and having demonstrated its expressive capabilities, Lawson debunks in both act and deed the pervasive misconception that the pianola merely plays itself: to pump the thing mechanically yields monotony not music.

A master can even play chamber music on the pianola, as was done for paying audiences in the early twentieth century and again (for free) in the not-so-early twenty-first at Lawson's concert last night at Cornell University. His appearance was the marquee event of a conference on player-pianos called *Ghosts in the Machine* that has brought experts and enthusiasts from around the world to upstate New York this weekend. For last night's concert—more like a salon evening with informative asides, memorable vignettes, quirky polemics, and heaps of eye-and-ear-opening music—Lawson brought his own pianola, manufactured around 1910 at the Aeolian factory in Garwood, New Jersey, and flown in from London

Hear David Yearsley playing the pianola:

https://youtu.be/Ah_aTo6PvIg

<https://youtu.be/5nWsa2iM5gw>



Chamber music: Rex Lawson with Alexa Schmitz and Elizabeth Lyon. Photo by Anna Steppeler.

earlier this week. Lawson and his pianola were hooked up to a mammoth Steinway grand, the performer ready to go solo, but also eager to take on all comers.

After some tempestuous Chopin and pastoral Percy Grainger, Lawson was joined by Alexa Schmitz on violin and Elizabeth Lyon on cello. The three presented the ardent drawing room debate and sweeping declarations of love (assuming there's a difference between the two) of the first movement of Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in D minor, op. 49. To play the pianola in time with others while also shaping the ever-shifting nuances that bring chamber music to life requires great finesse, intuition, and training. Lawson and his pianola have these attributes and many others here unnamed but equally as necessary. The Steinway the pianola was attached to was itself nested with another black beast of a modern grand. It was at this second piano that a succession of human pianists took the stage and faced-off against the visitor. No stranger to mechanical organs of his own time, Mozart was represented by Cornell doctoral student Shin Hwang in the first movement of the Sonata in D major for two pianos, K. 448, the human and the mechanical in buoyant equipoise. Cornell professor Roger Moseley was next up for a Mozart-Busoni concerto frolic, the man (Moseley) keeping frenetic pace with the man-machine duo (Lawson and pianola). Russian-born Cornell pianist Miri Yampolsky took on Lawson in Rachmaninoff's dance-till-you-drop Tarantella. She danced with the demonic pianola but did not drop. Interspersed among these contests and collaborations were two pieces conceived for player-piano by Lawson's late friend, the American composer Colin Nancarrow, a figure whose fascinating oeuvre explored the vast potential of the mechanical in music. Lawson unleashed a crazed, sprawling canon by Nancarrow and,

later, a lolling five-beat-to-a bar evocation of a simpler, less regulated world, the pianola dreaming of days gone by.

In the early 1920s Igor Stravinsky made arrangements for piano roll of some of his best-known works; this music is the most celebrated associated with the pianola. Accordingly, Lawson played the Infernal Dance of King Katschei from *Firebird* early on in the evening and then closed the nearly-three-hour-concert with *The Rite of Spring* in its gripping, exhausting entirety. The original Stravinsky rolls made for the Pleyel Company in Paris purport to be "joué par l'auteur"—played by the author. However effective as a selling point such tag lines were, Lawson has demonstrated that the metronomic regularity of the rolls' perforations prove that these do not represent a "live" performance in any sense: Stravinsky made the fascinating arrangements of his music, but did not sit down and perform them. Therefore the rolls do not offer an interpretation that goes back to the composer himself. This is one of the biggest myths Lawson wants to dispel. He maintains that the majority of piano rolls that claim to record performances by the likes of Stravinsky, Scott Joplin, and many other composer-pianists actually do nothing of the kind. There were indeed recording pianos (Duo-Art and Welte-Mignon are the two best known brands) that captured "real" performances by the likes of famed Polish pianist Ignacy Paderewski. But among the hundreds of thousands of rolls made, those that conjure the invisible fingers of the performing artists themselves make up only a tiny proportion. Most rolls—many later consigned to the flames as heating fuel in the very factories where they were produced but which had moved on to other technologies—were stamped out by workers.

The pianolist must interpret Stravinsky, and so, two hours into the concert, Lawson launched into the composer's arrangement of his *Rite of Spring*. The primeval bassoon solo that starts the piece is no less plaintive and terrifying when pulled from the Steinway by Lawson at his pianola. Pounding away at the keyboard with more fists and fingers than a rugby side, the machine took on the character of a mini-medieval siege tower making war on an ebony-plated Steinway bastion: the resulting melee showed human artifice in all its atavistic glory. At the end of the program even the indefatigable Lawson had to admit he was quite "weary."

This mechanized, humanly-inflected presentation of a watershed work of musical modernity that is itself a terrifying depiction of history awakening reminds one that for most people the pianola evokes times past and

passing time. “That pianola sure brings back memories,” Orson Welles’s corrupt and soon-to-be-has-been sheriff, Hank Quinlan tells Marlene Dietrich’s sumptuously forlorn bordello madame in the 1958 TexMex film noir *Touch of Evil*. The music the lawless lawman hears during this reverie is by Henry Mancini. Its out-of-tuneness would doubtless rankle the ears of those like Lawson, who are among the very few people who restore, maintain, cherish, and use these vital mechanical instruments. Yet the sound of the *Touch of Evil* pianola perfectly evokes the moral and physical state of the film’s antihero. The playing is faltering, percussive, as if the machine is out of kilter, in need of repair: its lack of expressivity expresses the

hardened emotional state of the on-screen characters. The clanging sonority picks at the scab of a bygone love.

But this lurching music, both mechanical and uncannily unmechanical, is in fact not emanating from a pianola at all. It is performed by a pianist named Ray Sherman and was added in postproduction. Here the human tries to sound like a machine. Lawson wants to do the opposite. However important to the black-and-white magic of *Touch of Evil*, such nostalgic violence to the historical legacy and contemporary value of the pianola has only emboldened Lawson to show the world that without the man, the machine makes only noise.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CHOPIN COMPETITION ON PERIOD INSTRUMENTS WARSAW, SEPTEMBER 2018

The First International Chopin Competition on period instruments will be held at the Warsaw Philharmonic in September 2018. The aspiration to revive the authentic sound of this brilliant composer’s music, which has borne fruit in the form of this unique event, is one of the fundamental ideas behind the work of the Fryderyk Chopin Institute.

The competing pianists will have at their disposal historical pianos from the Institute’s collection, as well as copies of period instruments, including instruments especially commissioned for the competition. The jury of the world’s first ever Chopin competition on historical instruments includes outstanding representatives of the musical world, whose artistic and professional work places them among the foremost specialists in the domain of historical performance and eminent interpreters of Chopin’s works. The competition timetable features three rounds: the first two rounds are solo recitals and in the third round finalists will perform selected Chopin works for piano and orchestra accompanied by the legendary Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century. Besides monetary awards, the prizewinners will receive the proposition of

giving prestigious concerts with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, as well as an invitation to recording projects realized by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute.

The Fifth International Master Course for Young Pianists will take place on August 14–23, 2017, at the Palace in Radziejowice, Poland. Young pianists, especially those who are interested in performance on period instruments, will have a unique opportunity to perfect their skills in playing pianos from Chopin’s period as part of preparations for the competition. Master classes will be led by distinguished artists and internationally renowned professors, such as Alexei Lubimov, Andreas Staier, and Tobias Koch on period instruments, as well as Nikolai Demidenko and Katarzyna Popowa-Zydron on modern instruments.

Link to the competition: www.iccpi.eu

Link to the master course: www.kursyradziejowice.nifc.pl

For further information or questions, please contact iccpi@nifc.pl (competition) or kursy@nifc.pl (master course).



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