

FOR THE RECORD

by Michael Biel

Dr. Biel wishes to make it quite clear that he alone decided what to write about here and that his opinions do not represent those of ARSC, which is well known not to have any opinions about anything.

Reviews

[Cundif, Morgan.] **Catalog of the Reproducing Piano Roll Collection, International Piano Archives at Maryland.** College Park: Publications of the Music Library of the University of Maryland at College Park, 1983. 281 + xii pp.

Piano rolls are a controversial subject, but if we are to make educated evaluations of the performances they preserve on perforated paper, we must first discover what exists and where it may be found. Here is the value of this catalog, which is a guide to the extraordinary collection of 2300 reproducing piano rolls in the International Piano Archives at Maryland, a unit of the University of Maryland Music Library on the College Park campus.

Particularly important are the 500 original master rolls made by the original recording devices during the actual sessions. These make it possible to look behind the editing, or what some might call "tampering" or "faking," which is invisible in the duplicated published copies. As the introduction states:

The edited master rolls reveal (through penciled markings, cuts, and patches) all the corrections and enhancements that were made after the fact. The unedited master rolls make it possible to hear the unaltered result of a particular performance and also offer graphic evidence of such things as rhythmic accuracy (or the lack of it), coordination of the hands, and evenness of chordal attacks.

Oh, that we had the same chance with master tapes from modern recording sessions!

The larger part of the collection comes from Duo-Art, though Ampico and Welte-Mignon are also well represented. Among the musicians represented in the Collection are the composers Percy Grainger, Victor Herbert, Igor Stravinsky, Camille Saint-Saens, Maurice Ravel, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Georges Enesco, Sergei Prokoviev, Gustav Mahler, Scott Joplin, and Jelly Roll Morton, of whom Prokoviev, Stravinsky, and Enesco are documented by master rolls. Of course many celebrated lions and lionesses of the keyboard appear here too: Josef Hofmann, Harold Bauer, Leopold Godowsky, Elly Ney, and Rudolf Ganz among the seniors, and the younger and more familiar Myra Hess, Vladimir Horowitz, Wanda Landowska, and Arthur Rubinstein. Chopin seems to be the favorite composer, to nobody's surprise, but others with many listings include not only Beethoven, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Wagner,

Mozart, Grieg, Brahms, and Debussy, but also such salon favorites as Macdowell, Anton Rubinstein, and Moszkowski. The catalog reveals; to those who did not know it, how much important piano roll material exists that has never been transferred to LP by Columbia, Telefunken, Klavier, Argo, and Oiseau-Lyre, or reissued on roll by QRS.

It is important to note that this catalog is limited to reproducing piano rolls. (The reproducing piano differs from the ordinary player piano in the degree to which the pianist's touch can be recorded and reproduced.) Rolls for standard player pianos are not listed. Hence there are no QRS rolls here--no Eubie Blake, Earl "Fatha" Hines, George Shearing, Roger Williams, William Bolcom, or (sob, sniff) Liberace. Those you'll have to find in the QRS catalog.

The catalog's main sequence is organized by performer, and each performer's recordings are listed in the order of recording company names and issue numbers. A typical entry will also include the composer and title of the selection, the box number assigned by the Archives for shelving, any pertinent notes (such as whether this is a master roll, and whether the performance extends to another roll or rolls), and in the case of master rolls, the recording date. Each piano roll contains only one selection and so it would have been just as easy, and much more informative, to arrange each performer's rolls in composer order to give some sense of repertoire. As things are, we have to flip through 12 pages of Harold Bauer to learn which of his Beethoven or Brahms rolls are in the collection, or whether he recorded any of their works more than once.

There are three indexes. Potentially the most useful is the index by composer, but it does not list each work separately, so one must go through all the references for a composer to find out whether the Archives owns one or more rolls of a specific piece by him. For example, there are 253 Chopin rolls in the collection. Is there a roll of the Sonata in B-flat Minor, Opus 35? Even if you can check a reference every ten or fifteen seconds it could take you an hour to find out, especially if the answer is "no." There's also an index by manufacturer and issue number, most useful perhaps for comparing with manufacturers' sales catalogs to find out what the Archives does not have, and a special index by performer of the master rolls.

The sorting and indexing have been done by computer. To aid in the indexing, each recording has been assigned a reference number according to its place in the sequence of main entries. The benefit is that the indexes could be prepared before type was set and page numbers were assigned; the bad news is that yet another identifying number has been added to the two already used to identify each roll and locate it on the Archives' shelves. And of course most if not all of the reference numbers will change when and if the Archives revises this catalog to reflect new acquisitions. So to avoid confusion users are advised to refer to recordings by the Archives' shelving box number when working there, and at other times by the manufacturer's number.

The type design provides plenty of white space, which makes for a very readable book. However, hundreds of listings have been split across columns or even pages, resulting in many pages like 44 and 45 where the top of every column starts with the last one or two lines of the listing begun at the bottom of the previous column. This is the bad kind of com-

puterized typesetting, in which the machine was not given instructions detailed enough to incorporate human good sense. Adjusting the column breaks so that most listings were complete in the same column, or at least on the same page, would have made the catalog much more readable without making it unduly longer or more expensive.

The verdict: a useful and informative book that could have been made even more useful and informative by more thought about researchers' needs and more sophisticated massaging of the database.

Mackay, Andy. **Electronic Music**. Minneapolis: Control Data Publishing/Harrow House Editions, 1981. 124 pp.

I recently stumbled across this book, and although from the copyright date it has been out for a while, I don't think that this Control Data edition came out at the same time that Harrow House published the book in England. The text is written from the point of view of both a musician and an electronic engineer, with a generous helping of historical background. I like that. All too often, writings about modern music and musical technique ignore the past, as if music hardly existed before last week. This book is refreshingly different--it is current (at least up to 1981) and yet it takes in history.

Bell, Edison, Berliner, and deForest are all paid tribute. In fact, maybe too much credit is given to deForest (who could rightly be called the enemy of electronic music because he tried to suppress oscillations in his Audion), while no mention is made of Edwin Howard Armstrong, the first to understand the oscillation of electronic circuits. Mackay gives details of the Duddell Singing Arc, the Telharmonium, Russolo's Noise Machines, the Theremin, the Trautonium, the Hammond organ and other early devices, as well as of modern techniques and instruments and their use in both rock and classical music. A great many composers and musicians are discussed, and there also is a biographical section.

This book is profusely illustrated with rare and unusual photos of early electronic musical instruments which are well worth the price of the book. My main complaint is that there is no discography, which would have been handy because many recordings and compositions are mentioned in the text.

Crumb, R. [artist] **Heroes of the Blues**. A [boxed] set of 36 [trading] cards. New York: Yazoo Records, 1980

_____. **Early Jazz Greats**. [A boxed set of 36 trading cards.] New York: Yazoo Records, 1982

_____, and Nevins, Rich [biographies]. **Pioneers of Country Music**. A [boxed] set of 40 [trading] cards. New York: Yazoo Records, 1985

[All available from Yazoo Records, Inc., 245 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014, and at specialty record stores.]

Like every red-blooded American kid in the 1950s I collected baseball trading cards, but I really preferred the non-sports card sets. I collected cards showing antique autos, World War II airplanes, headlines in history, license plates, railroad box cars, wild west heroes, fire

engines, NBC stars, movie stars, recording artists, U. S. Presidents, and Tarzan in 3-D. I completed both sets of Davy Crockett cards (boy was it tough to get orange-back #16, "Every Man for Himself"!). And much as I hated rock 'n' roll then, I had the foresight as a ten-year-old to spend 75 cents to get a complete set of Elvis cards. Then there was the set of "Space Cards" with their '50s views of a lunar landing. But my favorite set was Topps' "Look 'n' See" series, which pictured historic persons with secret answers that could be seen "only" with a red cellophane strip. Other guys would try to impress their dads with their new Willie Mays or Mickey Mantle cards, but I showed off my new Enrico Caruso. (He was #91, right between Benedict Arnold--they listed his occupation as "Traitor"--as #90, and Louis Daguerre as #92.) By the way, Edison was #71, and the "secret answer" pictured the stupidest-looking cylinder machine this side of the Centennial of Sound Recording U.S. postage stamp!

Now Yazoo Records and underground cartoonist Robert Crumb, creator of Mr. Natural and Fritz the Cat (and reportedly owner of an enormous collection of 78s), have brought back these childhood memories with three sets of collector cards for all you kids out there. (Sorry, no bubble gum!) Each set is sold complete in its own box, so you won't have to trade for the ones you need.

All of the cards measure 3 3/4 by 2 3/4 inches and feature a full-color drawing of the musician on the front and a biography on the back. The drawings are usually based directly on photographs, but the styles of the three sets are distinctly different. The blues set resembles the artwork of the race records ads of the '20s and the **Paramount Book of the Blues**, with sharp and distinct outlines surrounding solid patches of color. The jazz set has softer drawings, textured backgrounds, and paler colors. The country set has more full-figure representations than the other two, and the setting is usually outdoors or has stylized shadows.

The biographies are progressively more detailed in the two later sets, and the country set even lists the LP reissues (if any) that the artists can be heard on. Only one is on Yazoo, by the way; most are on County.

If you're not much of an expert on these kinds of music, you might want to start with the jazz set. There are some names included that everyone would recognize: Benny Goodman, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong. And many of the others will be well known even to beginning jazz collectors, though some will challenge even the old hands. Here's a partial list: Sidney Bechet, Bix Beiderbecke, Johnny Dodds, Coleman Hawkins, Fletcher Henderson, Earl Hines, James P. Johnson, Eddie Lang, Wingy Mannone, Jelly Roll Morton, Bennie Moten, Jimmy Noone, King Oliver, Joe Venuti, Frank Traumbauer, Muggsy Spanier, Jack Teagarden, Joe Venuti, Joe Venuti, and Mary Lou Williams.

On the other hand, unless you are deeply into blues or country music you will not recognize most of the artists pictured in those sets. For example, #1 of the country set is Andy Palmer of Jimmy Johnson's String Band. Palmer recorded only eight sides, on Champion in 1923, and as the card states, "There is only one surviving copy of each of his three records, one of which sold a mere total of 99 copies. His fourth record has never been found." Now that's esoteric. But the card also lists a reissue on Morning Star 45003, allowing you to find out for yourself

whether he is, as the bio concludes, "a giant figure in early American music."

The biographical notes, necessarily very brief, can't be expected to be complete; no dates are given for the country musicians, most of whom are probably deceased--remember, these records were made in the '20s--and several of the blues cards lack any indication whether the musicians are still alive; their fates are probably unknown. Still, these are cards to read, not just to look at and then stash on the closet shelf.

A note on gender: with one exception--Memphis Minnie--all of the "Heroes of the Blues" are male. The cards do not picture Ma Rainey, Bessie or Mamie or Clara Smith, Lucille Hegeman, or Victoria Spivey. The "Early Jazz Greats" are also all men except for Mary Lou Williams and Lil Hardin, but 17 women made it into ten of the country groups. A note on race: all the country artists are white, all the blues artists are black, and just nine of the jazzmen are white.

Much love and affection have obviously gone into the making of these cards. They are not purely a promotional gimmick, although the jazz set may have a promotional purpose: there's a Yazoo LP featuring 34 of the 36 artists mentioned on the jazz cards. Trading cards are more fun than dry reference books or record catalogs, and they are educational too. Some of you might want to store your cards in the special mylar pages made for baseball card collectors (but make sure they are mylar, not PVC); however, I think I will keep mine in their boxes.

Part Two: The Mail Department, Junk Variety

I like to receive mail, even junk mail, but I demand a certain level of competence even in my junk mail. Lately the direct mail advertising people have been letting me down. Here are two examples.

Recently I was sent a well-stuffed envelope that screamed at me in bold red letters, "The future of audio is in your hands!" Now that's a heavy responsibility, and I don't want to be blamed for thoughtlessly throwing away the future of audio, so I opened the envelope and extracted an eight-page brochure with a picture of a compact disc on the cover and an offer to subscribe to the new **Digital Audio Magazine**. Obviously the future of audio has already gone down the tubes, I thought, and I may can this brochure without blame.

But some pale gray writing on the envelope caught my eye: "Edison," "tinfoil," "Bakelite disc." How do Edison and his phonograph tie in with the future of audio? And what's this about a Bakelite disc? Now I was hooked, and I opened the brochure to find the famous photo of Edison after his ordeal developing the white wax cylinder, set off by ominous black letters nearly a half inch high reading: "Do You Know This Man?" (Well, not personally, but I have met his son.) The text continued, "You should, because the origin of every vinyl record you now own can be traced to the clutter on his desk (...and to his invention of 1877)." Assuming, probably wrongly, that CD freaks will be fascinated with events that took place four generations ago, the anonymous author then provided an outline history of sound recording, squeezed into a series of one-liners at the tops of the remaining pages:

A revolution has occurred.

Sound will never be the same.

1877: Thomas Edison invents a talking machine that uses tin foil.

1885: The wax cylinder. - 1888: the Bakelite disc.

1898: Magnetic tape. - 1948: The vinyl record.

1982: The Compact Disc. - Now the world is ready.

CHARTER OFFER - LIMITED TIME ONLY

Oh, that Bakelite disc. Actually, of course, the discs that Emile Berliner was working on around 1888 were usually made of zinc, though he also tried glass, copper, plaster of Paris, and other materials. Over the following decade he experimented with pressings from zinc masters using materials such as Celluloid and hard rubber before settling on a shellac-based compound. But one of the few substances that Berliner and his contemporaries never used is Bakelite. How do I know? Because the substance wasn't invented by Leo H. Baekeland until 1907--nearly 20 years later! And although discs have been made from many unlikely materials since then, Bakelite seems never to have been used for this purpose at all.

There are other boners that **Journal** readers will have spotted. Discs were made from vinyl long before 1948--there are vinyl broadcast transcriptions dating from 1931. World B S used Union Carbide's name Vinylite, while Victor called the stuff Victrolac and also used it for some of its long playing Program Transcriptions. Probably the author meant "the LP"--but Victor started selling long-playing records in 1931, as Ted Fagan's discography in the **Journal** shows. How about "microgroove"? Wrong again; Edison marketed records with far finer grooves long before Columbia coined the term for its first LPs. Well, we all know what development the poor copywriter is referring to, don't we? But he hasn't managed to say what he meant. And as for the claim of magnetic tape in 1898, well, wasn't it really wire? Magnetic recording would have been a more accurate term.

So these people are going to give me authoritative information about the future of audio, when they can't even get some simple facts right about its past? They have got to be kidding.

Here's another case. Recently Time-Life has been promoting yet another of their classical record series, "Great Ages of Music." I've gotten three mailings for the set during the past six months. The brochure informs me that I can buy either "fine European-pressed records or Dolby-encoded cassettes," and that "UNSURPASSED QUALITY STANDARDS include careful inspection of records and tapes." To prove it, Time-Life provides color photos of a disc (duly labeled "Pressed in Holland") and an exploded cassette. Unfortunately, they have not inspected the cassette photo as carefully as we hope they inspect the cassettes. The tape has been wound back onto the feed hub the wrong way, so that the tape appears to come off both reels counter-clockwise from the right! That is an obvious error, but the photo also reveals that the cassette itself is not of "unsurpassed quality." There are no corner posts or tape rollers. The plastic slip sheets are not full width, lubricated, or dimpled. The pressure pad is not a spring-loaded felt pad but a block of foam rubber which might become soft or sticky with age. The viewing window does not appear to have a sealed cover to protect against dust. The cassette is a

welded type (itself an undesirable feature) which would have hidden some of these shortcomings had the brochure not let the cat out of the bag.

This brochure has been revised and reprinted for each of the follow-up mailings I've received, yet nobody caught the obvious error nor seemed to understand what are desirable features in a cassette shell. Kind of lowers your confidence in those unsurpassed quality standards and that careful inspection, doesn't it? And the advertising geniuses get testy when we call this stuff junk mail.