

October 22, 1992

I lied! October was not a share session as promised in last month's newsletter. Instead, over twenty of us shared a most entertaining evening of amusement and education with Ron Palmer and his "player piano revisited".

The first clue of something unusual was the size of the player piano. Anyone expecting 1000 pounds of musical machine was puzzled to find only a portrait size frame around player piano-type paper on rolls sitting on a stereo receiver, a light in a reflector on a tripod, and a speaker a few feet away.

Another clue was Ron's promise that we would glimpse at the future and past, and that all we needed to know was on-off, 1 and 0, hole-no hole.

And stranger yet was the machine's need for the light to make the player piano produce sound. And when the light was on, did the player piano ever sound like the real thing, or as Ron might suggest, his invention is the real thing.

Ron is a music teacher and a player piano repairer. Over the years, he had an idea (among many I suspect). First, he heard it couldn't be done, and he showed it could. All it took was an array of photo-transistors, a source of heat (a 15 watt infrared bulb), a device to digitize the signal (a MIDI- Musical Instrument Digital Interface), and a receiver to push the signal to an amplifier (a local Becker loudspeaker). Block the light path and the music stopped.

Several times, Ron stopped the music to explain what was happening. One soon learned that punched holes on the left meant bass and holes on the right meant treble. Long lines meant continued notes.

We also learned that we were watching a type of computer. Computers work on a simple system on on-off switches; on gives a signal, off produces nothing. Computers are a vast array of on-off switches, early ones with vacuum tubes and modern ones with transistor boards. In like fashion, light passing through a punched hole is on and a signal reaches the photo-transistor which passes that signal to the MIDI to the receiver to the loudspeaker. Quite simple! (Of course, we pretended to be slow learners so that Ron had to take time to explain each step.)

Ron's invention, which he calls the Optiola, has roots back to the 1805 Jacquard loom and the 1770 pin wheels. Ron brought an example of a foot long pin wheel, the kind which makes sounds when the raised metal points strike a comb tooth.

Ron hoped that his 18 pound invention, if marketed successfully, could keep the three existing paper roll companies to stay in business. He mentioned the Dearsboro Museum (south of Utica) that displays the old types of music makers.

And of course, we had a chance to listen to nearly a dozen songs, in different keys, with special effects, and in different speeds (slowing it down kept a clear sound, no drawn out sound). We wish Ron luck and success in his marketing of this portable music maker.

Before the meeting, Don made several short announcements. The calendars are not in yet but should be soon. The GLHG will be represented at Rainbow Lodge's 75th anniversary on October 18th and help is needed. (By the time, you get the newsletter, this event will have happened; a report next month.) Thank you notes have been received for our donation to the Town Park and the Library Expansion. Side-by-side comparisons of Janet Halstead's original pictures and duplications were shown. Notice of the new Iroquois exhibit in the NYS Museum in Albany was given. A "welcome back" was extended to Harriet Rasmussen after a few months absence.

Ray Bennett showed two pictures. One was of his father dancing at the old Happy Days Ranch between Greenville and Freehold. The other showed a wedding group with Ray, as justice of the peace, posing beside the couple he had just married.

Lastly, a reproduction of Ron Palmer's business card is made. Ron also gives music lessons.

Sincerely,

Don Teator

P.S. Next meeting, November 9th, is a share session. Bring whatever you've been working or wish to share.

Piano Tuning



RON PALMER

"Inventor"

of the

"OPTIOLA"

CALLIOPE ROLL PLAYER

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