Finding Aid of the Piano Rolls Collection 1010

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USC Libraries Music Library
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2011
Title: Piano Rolls Collection  
Collection number: 1010 
Contributing Institution: USC Libraries Music Library 
Language of Material: English 
Physical Description: 1.0 Linear feet1 banker's box containing three piano roll boxes 
Date: 1979, 1982 
Abstract: Piano rolls are spools of perforated paper (or thin film) programmed with music and designed to be played on a mechanically-operated piano, more commonly called a player piano. Player pianos as popular entertainment reached their heyday in the 1920s, although both player pianos and piano rolls can be found today-- and at least one company, QRS Music, continues to manufacture music rolls. The two music rolls in this small collection were both manufactured by Play-Rite Music Rolls, Inc. in the late 1970s and early 1980s, although the songs themselves date back to the 1930s. 
creator: Play-Rite Music Rolls Company. 
Conditions Governing Access 
COLLECTION STORED OFF-SITE. Advance notice required for access. Consult finding aid for additional information. 
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Researchers are reminded of the copyright restrictions imposed by publishers on reusing published works in whole or in part. It is the responsibility of researchers to acquire permission from publishers when reusing such materials. The copyright to unpublished materials belongs to the heirs of the writers. Permission to publish, quote, or reproduce must be secured from the repository and the copyright holder. 
Date Note 
The dates on the piano rolls refer to copyright dates from Play-Rite Music Rolls, Inc. rather than the original recording dates of the music. 
Related Archival Materials 
Other materials in USC's Special Collections related to the Piano Rolls Collection include: 
Ampico collection of piano rolls (0028) 
Simonton (Richard) Collection of Welte system-recorded piano rolls (0176) 
Other Repositories: 
UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive: Berkman Collection of Spanish, Greek, Polish, Czech, Italian, Hungarian, and German piano rolls, 1910-1930 
UCLA Performing Arts Special Collections: Ampico Player Piano Rolls Collection 
Scope and Content 
The collection consists of two music rolls of ten songs each, plus two plastic end pieces for a music roll. One of the music rolls is called "Gene Autry Special" and the ten songs are those presumably sung by Autry, including his signature tune "Back in the Saddle Again," but also "Lara's Theme" from Dr. Zhivago. 
The other music roll is titled "Vampy Tunes" and consists of one-steps, foxtrots, ragtime songs, waltzes, and two-steps such as "Cotton Pickers' Picnic Day" and "When the Kaiser Does the Goose Step to a Good Old American Rag." 
Acquisition 
This collection was a gift to USC's Music Library from the Autry Archives in 2010. 
Historical Note 
A player piano is a mechanically operated piano, especially a pedal-operated or motor-driven piano using pneumatic suction to move the keys in correspondence to the perforations on a turning piano roll. [American Heritage Dictionary]. The earliest known player pianos date back to the 1500s when piano builder Samuel Bidermann of Augsburg, Germany equipped three spinets (small, upright pianos) with pinned barrels similar to those in music boxes during his lifetime from 1540 to 1622. However, it wasn't until the end of the 19th century that interest in self-playing pianos was revived. In the early 1900s, standardization of the paper rolls created an industry for the manufacture of player pianos. By the early 1920s, the player piano had reached its peak and at one point more than half of all pianos being made in America contained a player unit. However, advances in radio technology as well as electrical recording systems such as amplification for 78 rpm records, contributed to the decline of the player piano's popularity. When the stock market crashed in 1929, only a few player piano companies were able to continue, many through consolidation of smaller companies. In the 1950s and 1960s, a number of collectors began to rescue player pianos and piano rolls and to form societies dedicated to preserving all forms of mechanical music. By the 1960s, production of player pianos had been revived as well.
as the rebuilding of original instruments which continues today.

A piano roll itself consists of a continuous sheet of paper rolled onto a spool, though modern rolls are often made of thin plastic or polyester film. The music to be played is programmed onto the paper by means of perforations. The spool fits into the player piano spool box, and the instrument’s reading mechanism, the tracker bar, reads these as the roll undwinds. After a roll is played, it is necessary for it to be rewound before it can be played again. As of 2011, QRS Music claims to be the only manufacturer of music rolls in the world today with over 5,000 master recordings and over 45,000 music rolls.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Piano Rolls Collection, Music Library, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Autry, Gene, 1907-1998 -- Archives
Player piano rolls
Popular music--United States--Archival resources

Roll 1
Gene Autry Special 1979
Scope and Content
Music roll by Play-Rite Music Rolls, Inc. Songs include:
1. Back in the Saddle Again.
2. That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine.
4. Mexicali Rose.
7. Tumbling Tumbleweeds.
8. Somewhere My Love (Lara's Theme from Dr. Zhivago)
9. Here Comes Santa Claus.

Roll 2
Vampy Tunes 1982
Scope and Content
Music roll by Play-Rite Music Rolls, Inc. Songs include:
1. I'm All Alone Tonight, One-Step.
3. Nena Waltz.
4. General Pershing, March Two-Step.
5. When the Kaiser Does the Goose Step to a Good Old American Rag, Rag.
6. Water Nymph, One-Step.
7. Texas Never Seemed So Far Away, Rag.
8. Clarinet Blues.
10. The Aero Travelers, Waltz.

Plastic End Caps
Scope and Content
Two black plastic end caps for a piano roll, housed in a piano roll box.