

Stravinsky and the Pianola

A Relationship Reconsidered¹

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Stravinsky wrote only one work specifically for the pianola, the *Étude pour Pianola* of 1917, yet the composer's relationship with this instrument lasted for fifteen years, from 1915 to 1930. From 1921 to 1930, between concert tours and time spent at his home in Nice, he lived in the Pleyel factory in Paris, during which time he was under contract to transcribe all his works for pianola. Given the composer's history with this instrument, the pianola is invariably mentioned by Stravinsky biographers. Two, Stephen Walsh² and Richard Taruskin,³ discuss the pianola in greater depth than others, but neither is comprehensive on the subject. Only Rex Lawson, an expert pianolist and informed scholar, has written specifically about Stravinsky and the pianola.⁴

Lawson nonetheless admits that his article was written before he was able to review the documents relating to it in the Stravinsky *Nachlaß* housed at the Paul Sacher Stiftung.⁵ The current study, arising from a review of those documents

1. My sincere thanks go to Dr. Ulrich Mosch, from the Paul Sacher Stiftung, and to the editorial staff of the *Revue de musicologie* for their extraordinary assistance in the preparation of this article for publication.
2. Steven Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring: Russia and France (1882-1934)* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).
3. Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through "Mavra."* 2 vols. (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).
4. Rex Lawson, "Stravinsky and the Pianola," in J. Pasler (ed.), *Confronting Stravinsky* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986). Reprinted as "Stravinsky and the Pianola (Part I)," *The Pianola Journal*, vol. 1 (1987), pp. 15-26, and "Stravinsky and the Pianola (Part II)," *The Pianola Journal*, vol. 2 (1989), pp. 3-16.
5. "Undoubtedly many of the questions I had to leave unanswered will find their solution amongst the Stravinsky Nachlass at the Paul Sacher-Stiftung in Basel. I hope to visit there

(which Taruskin and Walsh did consult) provides a new view of Stravinsky's relationship with the pianola. Before presenting that view, I summarize the accepted history of Stravinsky's relationship with the pianola on the basis of Lawson's and Walsh's work as well as of Stravinsky's own writings.

The Accepted Story of Stravinsky and the Pianola

Stravinsky was introduced to the pianola in August 1914, when he and Edwin Evans visited Aeolian Hall.⁶ The composer's exposure to the instrument led him to consider it as a solo instrument, and the *Étude pour Pianola* of 1917 was the result.⁷ The composer mentions in his autobiography that a trip to Madrid inspired this work, although he seems to forget that it was originally scored for pianola and a number of other instruments rather than for pianola alone.⁸ Stravinsky would claim, incorrectly, that his *Étude* was the first original work for pianola.⁹ In fact it became subsumed by Evans' larger plans for a series of original pianola works by a number of different composers.¹⁰ It was only after the *Étude* was composed that Stravinsky learned about "the bizarre British law of mechanical copyright, which allowed (at a fixed royalty) unprotected arrangement for such instruments of any music that had appeared in print."¹¹ Stravinsky had begun an intermediate version of *Les Noces* in the fall of 1917;¹² he would abandon this version of the work¹³ within two years due to "la grande difficulté pour le chef d'orchestre de synchroniser les parties exécutées par les musiciens et chanteurs avec celles des instruments mécaniques."¹⁴ Around the time that Stravinsky abandoned this

shortly and when all has been digested, it can form a postscript to this article in a future issue of the Pianola Journal." R. Lawson (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

6. R. Lawson (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 290.

7. *Idem.*

8. Igor Stravinsky, *Chronique de ma vie* (Paris: Denoël, 2000), p. 88. For the English translation of this passage, see Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962), p. 69.

9. Letter from Stravinsky to Ansermet dated June 6, 1919. See Claude Tappolet (ed.), *Correspondance Ernest Ansermet-Igor Stravinsky (1914-1967)*, vol. I (Genève: Georg, 1990), pp. 110-11.

10. S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-83.

11. S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

12. *Idem.*

13. A letter from Otto Kling makes it clear—at least to his understanding—that Stravinsky intended to score the intermediate version of *Les Noces* for four pianolas. See Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 155.

14. I. Stravinsky (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 129. For the English translation of this passage, see I. Stravinsky (1962), *op. cit.*, pp. 104-05: "the great difficulty for the conductor of synchronizing the parts executed by instrumentalists and singers with those rendered by the mechanical players."

version of *Les Noces*,¹⁵ he received a letter from Ansermet during his visit to the Aeolian Company in London with a description of how the *Étude pour Pianola* sounded.¹⁶ Ansermet criticizes aspects of the pianola's performance, but he was able to correct the roll.¹⁷

Stravinsky was attracted to the pianola because of the instrument's ability to eliminate performers' "arbitrary interpretations". He signed contracts with both Pleyel and Aeolian to arrange works for the pianola, because such arrangements would allow him to create "un document durable pouvant servir à ceux des exécutants qui tiennent à connaître mes intentions et à les suivre plutôt qu'à s'égarer dans des interprétations arbitraires de mon texte musical."¹⁸ The composer signed a new contract with Aeolian in 1928 to produce, for the "Duo-Art" pianola, Audiographic rolls that contained annotations and pictures which listeners could study together with the corresponding music.¹⁹ Only the six rolls that made up *L'Oiseau de feu* were released in this series. They bear this inscription: "These six rolls embody an Autobiographical Sketch of the Composer's Life to the year 1910, with a Literary and Musical Analysis of *The Fire-Bird*, and a Complete Performance of it, recorded by the Composer himself." In fact, Stravinsky merely "interpreted" these rolls,²⁰ just as he did the piano rolls for Pleyel, which, although explicitly labeled "adapté et joué par l'auteur," were subjected to a variety of transcriptional processes.²¹ Stravinsky stopped thinking about the pianola in 1930, when the British Aeolian Company was sold in a bid to keep the American Aeolian Company in business.²²

Stravinsky's Introduction to the Pianola

Lawson originally dated Stravinsky's introduction to the pianola to August 1914, but he has recently revealed an earlier introduction that took place in Berlin on December 8, 1912. Schoenberg had invited Stravinsky to a performance of

15. S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

16. C. Tappolet (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 115-17. Although the composer had written the work in 1917, he had not yet heard it in 1919; it was premiered only in 1921.

17. Rex Lawson, "Étude pour Pianola by Igor Stravinsky," *The Pianola Journal*, 5 (1993), p. 5.

18. I. Stravinsky (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 125. For the English translation of this passage, see I. Stravinsky (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 101: "these transcriptions [...] enabled me to create a lasting document which should be of service to those executants who would rather know and follow my intentions than stray into irresponsible interpretations of my musical text."

19. R. Lawson (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 294.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 301.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

Pierrot Lunaire at the Choralion Saal,²³ where numerous mechanical instruments were on display. This visit, Lawson adds, “clearly caused Stravinsky to think of using roll-operated instruments for his own music, because within a few days he had received a telegram from Diaghilev, reassuring him that pianola arrangements were not necessary for the rehearsals of *Le Sacre du printemps*.”²⁴

Lawson’s revision, correct about Stravinsky’s introduction to the pianola, clarifies the meaning of the Diaghilev telegram, but documentary evidence still suggests that Stravinsky did not begin a relationship with the instrument at this early stage. Lawson suggests as much in his interpretation of Stravinsky’s telegram to Diaghilev. It is easy to infer the composer’s enthusiasm, but it is impossible to know precisely what plans he had for the pianola in the rehearsal of his new ballet. Before discovering Stravinsky’s 1912 encounter with the pianola, Lawson suggested that it was Stravinsky’s 1914 trip to London that led to the composition of the *Étude pour Pianola*:

Stravinsky’s 1914 visit to Aeolian Hall led him to consider the Pianola, with its facilities for speed, spacing, and spectacularly sized chords, as a solo instrument. He mentioned this in conversation to Edwin Evans, the British music critic, and in 1917, Evans enlarged on the idea and wrote to a number of European composers asking for Pianola compositions. Thus, the *Étude for Pianola*, although conceived as a unique entity, was in fact issued as part of a series.²⁵

In fact, documents suggest that the catalyst for Stravinsky’s active involvement with the pianola was Evans’ proposal that the composer record his work on this instrument.²⁶

Stravinsky’s First Encounters with the Pianola

This proposal came in the letter Evans sent to Stravinsky in November 1915, in which he relayed an offer from the Orchestrelle Company.²⁷

Une autre affaire: l’Orchestrelle Co. de Londres désire faire exécuter votre *Sacre* pour pianola! Peut[-]être aussi *Pétrouchka*. [...] La Société des droits

23. The Choralion Company was the German subsidiary of the Aeolian Company.
24. This information is found on the Stravinsky tab of Lawson’s eponymous personal website (<http://www.rexlawson.com>).
25. R. Lawson (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 290.
26. Edwin Evans is perhaps best known for his 1933 book on Stravinsky’s first two ballets (Edwin Evans, *Stravinsky: The Fire-Bird and Petrushka* [London: Oxford University Press, 1933]), about which more will be said below.
27. Soon to become the Aeolian Company.

d'auteur dit que c'est l'auteur seul qui peut disposer du droit de reproduction mécanique. Si vous consentez [sic], le chiffre de ce droit est fixé par les conventions—mais vous avez le droit de ne pas consentir. Un de mes amis, qui aime tant votre musique qu'il a fabriqué lui-même, pour son usage exclusivement personnel, des clichés [sic] de plusieurs de vos œuvres, y compris la “Danse infernale” de *l'Oiseau* et la “Marche chinoise” du *Rossignol*, vous supplie de ne pas mettre d'obstacle à ce projet que lui permettra de se rassasier [sic] de *Sacre* quand il voudra. D'ailleurs votre musique se prête fort bien à ces moyens d'exécution mécanique—j'ai eu plusieurs occasions de le constater avec mon ami. Je vous recommande de donner une réponse favorable à l'Orchestrille Co.²⁸

Walsh speculates that during their visit to Aeolian Hall the previous year, Stravinsky and Evans “may have heard a pre-publication performance of a set of rolls of his [Stravinsky's] Four Studies.”²⁹ This speculation is undermined, however, by the language used by Evans to convince Stravinsky to accept this business proposition: Evans mentions how well Stravinsky's music sounds in general, and not these new works in particular, when performed on the pianola. This generalization would have been unnecessary had the composer already heard the piano rolls of his *Quatre Études* in London the previous year.

While Evans' letter seems to have led to Stravinsky's interest in the pianola as a viable instrument, Stravinsky's actions were nevertheless deliberate. Months after receiving Evans' letter, Stravinsky requested 25,000 Swiss francs for performance rights to the *Trois pièces faciles*, and was quick to add: “D'autre part je dois m'expliquer que dans les droits qu'il m'achète[,] l'exploitation [sic] de reproduction mécanique n'est pas comprise. Pour cela on va s'entendre séparément.”³⁰ It is the term “reproduction mécanique” that suggests Stravinsky had then begun

28. Paul Sacher Stiftung (henceforth PSS), microfilm 94.1, p. 0001346. “One other thing. The Orchestrelle Company in London wishes to perform your *Sacre* on the pianola! Perhaps also *Pétrouchka* [...] Copyright law says that only the author can grant the right of mechanical reproduction. If you authorize this, the amount of this right is fixed by conventions, but you have the right not to authorize. One of my friends who loves your music very much and who made, for his own personal use, passages from some of your works, including the ‘Danse infernale’ from *L'Oiseau de feu* and the ‘Marche chinoise’ from *Le Rossignol*, begs you not to place any roadblocks in the way of this project, which will allow him to [illegible verb] *Le Sacre* when it arrives. Your music lends itself well to this type of mechanical performance—I've had several opportunities to verify this with my friend. I recommend that you give the Orchestrelle Company a positive response.”

29. S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

30. Letter from Stravinsky to Ansermet dated February 14, 1916 reproduced in C. Tappolet (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 42. The English translation of this passage appears in Robert Craft (ed.), *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*, vol. 1 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 130 (here slightly emended): “Furthermore I must explain that the rights that he buys from me do not include those of mechanical reproduction. For this we will make a separate agreement.”

to consider the idea of arranging works for the pianola. By October 1916, he had apparently decided this idea was worth exploring and thus hired the Swiss lawyer Philippe Dunant to research copyright laws; he was especially concerned about those relating to this new mechanical instrument as well as to issues of royalties between the West and pre- and post-Revolutionary Russia. His fears allayed by Dunant, Stravinsky began negotiations with the Orchestrelle Company regarding the rolls for these two ballets.³¹ These negotiations failed in the short-term,³² but all the participants—Stravinsky and Dunant, the Orchestrelle Company, and Evans—remained in place for more fruitful negotiations regarding an original composition for pianola, an idea once again suggested to Stravinsky in a letter from Evans.

The History of the *Étude pour Pianola*

After having lost touch with the composer, Evans wrote to Stravinsky on September 22, 1917, with an offer to compose an original piece for pianola.

J'ai eu un entretien fort intéressant avec le directeur du pianola. Je lui ai fait comprendre que ce n'est pas tout de faire des arrangements de morceaux de piano ou d'orchestre et qu'il devrait inviter les compositeurs modernes à créer un vrai style pianolistique indépendamment des procédés de pianiste. Comme Casella se trouve en ce moment ici, j'ai obtenu l'autorisation de lui faire une proposition, mais ce n'est que le commencement. Réfléchissez un peu sur les facilités spéciales [*sic*] de cet instrument, et si cela vous tente de développer cette idée, je me charge du reste. Une autre proposition que j'ai fait [*sic*] à ce monsieur, c'est que dans l'avenir il invite les compositeurs eux-mêmes à faire l'adaptation de leurs œuvres pour le pianola. Cela évitera de forts mauvais effets.³³

During the month of August, Stravinsky had been using Gerald Tyrwhitt (Lord Berners) as an intermediary to contact the Orchestrelle Company. In a letter

31. Stravinsky only worked with Dunant from October 1916 to November 1917. See PSS, micr. 94.1, pp. 000182-000204.
32. Negotiations were resumed before the end of the year, and *The Rite* was released as a series of four Aeolian rolls in 1921.
33. Letter from Evans to Stravinsky dated September 22, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001354. For an English translation of this letter, see Robert Craft (ed.), *Stravinsky Selected Correspondence*, vol. 2 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 117: "I had an interesting discussion with the director of the pianola. I explained to him that the issue is not to make pianola arrangements of existing piano or orchestral scores, but rather to invite modern composers to create an independent, pianolistic style [...] Since Casella is here now, I obtained permission to have him compose something [...] Reflect on the possibilities of this instrument a bit, and if you are interested, I will take charge of the rest. I also proposed to the [director] that he invite composers to make pianola adaptations of their works [...]."

that has apparently been lost,³⁴ Stravinsky offered “une suite d’études” in return for 50% of the sales.³⁵ The company flatly refused Stravinsky’s offer for one simple reason:

dans le commerce des rouleaux à musique [*sic*], de très grand rabais sont accordés aux acheteurs en gros. Ces rabais varient de 33 1/3% jusqu’à 70% en certains cas. Par conséquent si on donnait à l’auteur le [*sic*] 50% sur le prix de vente de chaque rouleau ce serait une grande perte pour nous sur chaque rouleau vendu, et évidemment un désavantage pour Monsieur Strawinsky et pour nous.³⁶

Despite the fact that Stravinsky had been thinking about writing *études* for the instrument, the timing of Evans’ letter was fortuitous, for on September 10 Stravinsky had finished the draft of a work that would become the *Étude pour Pianola*. This draft, however, was scored for pianola along with a number of other instruments.³⁷ While Stravinsky’s response to Evans has been lost, Evans’ letter of October 15 makes it clear that Stravinsky had mentioned a “composition déjà terminée pour pianola” and expressed sufficient interest for Evans to write: “Envoyez-moi donc votre composition,”³⁸ which Stravinsky did, on October 28.³⁹ This exchange makes it clear that, although Stravinsky would later claim that the work was composed “spécialement pour le pianola,”⁴⁰ the other instruments were likely eliminated in order to satisfy the commission implicit in Evans’ letter.

Throughout the fall of 1917, Stravinsky’s lawyer negotiated the price of the *Étude* with the Aeolian Company as well as the rights for its publication or arrangement. On the latter points, Stravinsky discovered that he would not be able to publish any work for the pianola, because other manufacturers would then

34. Walsh states that this letter is lost (S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 616); Lawson dates it to July 1917 (R. Lawson [1993], *op. cit.*, p. 5).
35. See the letter from the Orchestrelle Company to Dunant, dated August 24, 1917, which responds to Stravinsky’s letter, as did their letter to Tyrwhitt written the day before. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 000198.
36. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 000198: “in the music roll business, large discounts are given for bulk purchases. These discounts vary between 33 1/3% to 70% in certain cases. Thus, if we were to grant the composer 50% of the price for the sale of each roll, we would lose money on each roll sold, an obvious disadvantage both for Mr. Stravinsky and for us.”
37. PSS, micr. 109, pp. 0555-0574. Earlier sketches for this work include an even greater variety of instruments and less emphasis on the pianola. PSS, micr. 123, pp. 0215-0237.
38. Letter from Evans to Stravinsky dated October 15, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001357. For an English translation of this letter, see R. Craft (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 117.
39. Letter from Stravinsky to Evans dated October 28, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001361. For an English translation of this letter, see R. Craft (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 118.
40. I. Stravinsky (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 88. For the English translation of this passage, see I. Stravinsky (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 69: “which I wrote expressly for the pianola.”

have the right to produce rolls of the work for a fee of only 5%⁴¹. The Aeolian Company further refused to allow Stravinsky to arrange the *Étude*, conceding only that they, too, would not arrange the work.⁴² On Evans' advice, Stravinsky asked for the modest fee of 500 Swiss francs⁴³—considerably less that Stravinsky would have hoped for. Evans explained the Aeolian's Company's attitude with a note of optimism for the future:

je vous conseillerais d'accepter un prix modéré. Il s'agit pour eux d'un nouveau point de départ, provisoirement expérimental, et ils ne sont encore qu'à moitié convaincus. Si nous avons le succès que nous ambitionnons, vous serez à même de vous rattraper sur l'œuvre suivante.⁴⁴

Evans' optimism disappeared when the Aeolian Company agreed to this price: "Quant à votre *Étude pour Pianola*, la compagnie accepte votre prix de 500 francs suisses avec la réserve que cela ne les engage pas à payer le même prix à l'avenir, ce qui doit dépendre du succès qu'aura cette entreprise expérimentale."⁴⁵

The status of the *Étude* as Stravinsky's unique work for solo pianola is a topic scholars have not sufficiently emphasized. The implied explanation lies perhaps in the strict copyright laws the composer came to know during his negotiations with Aeolian. This, however, was but one of the difficulties that Stravinsky encountered during the negotiations. More disconcerting to him was Aeolian's determination never again to match the 500 Swiss francs fee. Stravinsky's consistent disappointment in terms of arrangements, copyright laws, and fees, effectively ended his interest in writing solo works for the pianola. Never again did he write or plan a new work for the instrument. He furthermore scrapped his then current plan to include pianolas in *Les Noces*—and not for the reason that Stravinsky gave in public.

41. Letter from Dunant to Stravinsky dated August 24, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 000198.
42. Letter from Stravinsky to Evans dated November 24, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001380. Just two years before the Aeolian Company went out of business, Stravinsky arranged the *Étude pour Pianola* for orchestra. This became "Madrid," the last of the *Quatre Études pour orchestre*.
43. See the letter from Evans to Stravinsky dated November 17, 1917 and the response dated November 24, 1917, reproduced in R. Craft (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 119.
44. Letter from Evans to Stravinsky dated October 15, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001357: "I would advise you to accept a moderate price. This is a new avenue for them, for the time being experimental, and they are still only half convinced. If we are as successful as we hope to be, you will be able at least to recoup your loss with the next composition."
45. Letter from Evans to Stravinsky dated November 17, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001375. For the English translation of this letter, see R. Craft (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 119: "As for your *Étude pour Pianola*, the company accepts your price of 500 Swiss francs with the reservation that this does not lock them into paying the same fee in the future, something that will depend on the success of this experimental business."

Stravinsky's Abandonment of the Intermediate (1919) Version of *Les Noces*

Walsh writes that Stravinsky was attracted by the mechanical character of the pianola “and by its remarkable powers of bravura: its ability, as it were, to emulate a pianist with sixteen arms and no feelings.”⁴⁶ This is undoubtedly true, but there was a more precise reason for the composer’s interest in the instrument, one specifically addressed in his autobiography: “Pour éviter dans l’avenir une déformation de mes œuvres par leurs interprètes, j’avais toujours cherché un moyen de poser des limites à une liberté redoutable, surtout répandue de nos jours et qui empêche le public de se faire une juste idée des intentions de l’auteur. Cette possibilité m’était offerte par les rouleaux du piano mécanique.”⁴⁷ Although his experience with the *Étude* ended his interest in the pianola as a solo instrument, as we have seen, he still hoped to incorporate the instrument into *Les Noces*, a work that would command a much larger fee than the *Étude*. In fact, as soon as he sold the *Étude*, in the autumn of 1917, Stravinsky began to score *Les Noces* for four pianolas, two cimbaloms, electric harmonium, and assorted percussion.⁴⁸ He ceased work on this version of the score in 1919, and he claimed in his autobiography that he did so because of the difficulty of synchronizing human and mechanical performers.⁴⁹

This explanation is not convincing: the singer Vera Janocopulos, for example, accompanied by a pianola, successfully performed “Tilimbom” from the *Trois Histoires pour enfants*, on May 23, 1923, with Stravinsky in the audience.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the 1919 version of *Les Noces* was successfully performed by Pierre Boulez, in 1981, with the same instrumentation, including pianola, that Stravinsky had rejected some sixty years earlier.⁵¹

46. R. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

47. I. Stravinsky (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 125. For the English translation of this passage, see I. Stravinsky (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 101: “In order to prevent the distortions of my compositions by future interpreters, I had always been anxious to find a means of imposing some restriction on the notorious liberty, especially widespread today, which prevents the public from obtaining a correct idea of the author’s intentions. This possibility was now afforded by the rolls of the mechanical piano.”

48. See the discussion of Stravinsky’s August 1917 letters to the Orchestrelle Company via Gerald Tyrwhitt in S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

49. See footnote 14 above.

50. R. Craft (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 163. A letter from Robert Lyon to Stravinsky dated May 4, 1923, also reveals that Stravinsky was aware of this performance before it took place. PSS, micr. 98.1, p. 000573.

51. Lawson, an expert pianolist, took part in this concert.

Ansermet's Letter to Stravinsky of June 12, 1919

A more convincing reason for Stravinsky's abandonment of the pianola version of *Les Noces* is found in the letter he received from Ansermet in June 1919, by which time Aeolian had had possession of the score to the *Étude pour Pianola* for almost two years. The priority they gave to cutting the rolls for *Le Sacre du printemps* and *Pétrouchka* meant that the première of the *Étude* would have to wait two more years, until October 1921.⁵² Thus, although Stravinsky had sold the score to Aeolian, he had yet to hear it performed on the pianola. Anxious for feedback on how his composition sounded on the new instrument, Stravinsky must have asked Ansermet to visit the Aeolian Company while on tour in London. Ansermet, offered a private performance of the *Étude pour Pianola*, reported back to Stravinsky on June 12, 1919:

J'ai eu deux entrevues avec l'expert-pianoleur, qui m'a joué plusieurs fois votre rouleau, dont j'avais le manuscrit en mains. Je l'ai malheureusement entendu sur un mauvais piano. Au commencement, l'expert faisait du "rubato". Et en général, j'ai remarqué que le pianola n'a pas cette puissance mécanique que je croyais; votre remarque sur son incapacité d'"accent" que vous soulignez au cymbalum, est très juste. On sent dans l'exécution l'intervention de l'exécutant; il faut donc un exécutant intelligent et sûr. J'ai signalé à l'expert la nécessité d'une exécution plus rythmique et plus rigoureuse; il y est arrivé, et j'ai constaté alors que la chose était bien réussie; je n'ai noté qu'une légère faiblesse de quelques basses, qui ne sont pas doubles d'octave. Mais peut-être est-ce voulu. D'autre part, il y a un élément de l'instrument qu'il faut bien étudier c'est ce qu'ils appellent je crois le "thematic", mécanisme qui à chaque instant fait frapper plus fort un élément de l'ensemble musical.

Il paraît que dans l'ancien pianola on pouvait à volonté user ou ne pas user du "thematic". Actuellement, pour des raisons mécaniques et sans doute économiques, le "thematic" est fixé une fois pour toutes. Il faut donc que sur votre manuscrit vous indiquiez par un signe ce que vous entendez faire ressortir.

Maintenant voici quelques indications:

1. Le rouleau de pianola ne peut excéder une longueur de 100 pieds. Votre rouleau a 30 pieds; il est donc dans les petits. Mais l'exécution est moins bonne dans les tout grands rouleaux parce qu'un certain flottement se produit dans la bande.
2. La longueur du rouleau ne dépend pas, uniquement, de la durée du morceau, mais aussi du nombre de notes qu'il comporte. Le fabricant ne pourrait pas absolument conclure la longueur d'un rouleau, quand on lui indiquerait le nombre de mesures d'un morceau et ses valeurs métronomiques, parce que

52. See the letter from Evans to Stravinsky dated December 24, 1917. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001391.

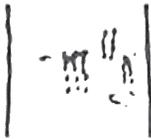
la longueur utilisée pour une certaine valeur musicale dépend de la nature musicale de cette valeur: c'est-à-dire par exemple qu'une valeur musicale réalisée en *tremolo* prend plus de place que la même valeur réalisée en *tenue*. Mais l'ouvrier peut indiquer la longueur du rouleau, si on lui donne à la fois, le nombre de mesures, le métronome, et une indication sur le contenu des mesures (valeurs larges ou valeurs divisées). Pour vous donner une idée: *L'Ouv. de 1812* fait un rouleau, mais un des plus grands.

3. Le changement du rouleau dépend (comme durée) de la longueur du rouleau; car plus il est long, plus il faut de temps pour le rouler; mais en moyenne il faut $\frac{1}{2}$ minute. On ne prévoit pas la possibilité d'un changement dans ce domaine (changement mécanique ou plus rapide). Mais on peut utiliser 2 pianolas, dont l'un commence sitôt l'autre terminé.

4. Votre rouleau est très loin d'exagérer le nombre de notes simultanées qui peuvent être imprimées. Les trous sont très petits et assez distants les uns des autres, la bande assez large et résistante, pour que les mouvements d'accords les plus formidables puissent être inscrits sans danger; par exemple d'immenses glissandos croisés sont possibles.



5. Dans les endroits les plus fournis, votre bande a cette apparence:



à peu près; de tous petits trous, espacés, sont un grand espace. Seulement, au point de croisement des voix, les notes communes ne sont pas renforcées; elles ont la sonorité d'une note, pas de deux, comme ce serait le cas dans une exécution orchestrale.

6. Le *tremolo* sur une note n'est pas tout à fait aussi parfait que celui que peut réaliser une pianiste.⁵³

53. C. Tappolet (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 115-17. For the English translation of this passage, see I. Stravinsky and R. Craft, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-65 (here slightly emended): "I have had two meetings with the expert '*pianoleur*.' He played your piano roll for me several times while I followed with the manuscript score. Unfortunately I heard the piece on a very bad instrument, and, to make matters worse, the expert made *rubati*. In general, I noticed that the pianola lacks the mechanical strength that I had expected. And your observation concerning the inability of the cimbalom to accent is correct (and applies as well to the pianola). One feels the intervention of the performer, hence the necessity of an intelligent intermediary. I indicated that a much more rhythmic and vigorous performance was required, and to some extent the expert succeeded in achieving one. I also observed a weakness in all basses not doubled in the octave, but perhaps you intended

The timing of Ansermet's letter, arriving only weeks before Stravinsky abandoned this version of *Les Noces*,⁵⁴ and its content—critical of the performance capabilities of the new instrument—suggest that Stravinsky's decision was a response to this letter. Taruskin agrees, writing that the letter calls into question the feasibility of the project.⁵⁵ Walsh, on the other hand, focusing on the single phrase "la chose était bien réussie," finds the tone of this letter "generally encouraging."⁵⁶ Walsh's interpretation is problematical.

First, Walsh notes that "there is no mention of problems of coordination."⁵⁷ But there would have been no such problems, as the *Étude* was written for a single pianola. Walsh appears to have confused the *Étude* with the 1919 version of *Les Noces*, which included four pianolas. Second, as for performers in *Les Noces*, it may be that Stravinsky took heed of Diaghilev's complaint regarding the limited

this. One characteristic of the instrument that must be studied carefully is what I believe they call the 'thématique,' a device to bring out one element or line more strongly than the other. In the earliest pianolas the use of this *thématique* was optional; but for mechanical reasons and, no doubt, economic ones as well, the *thématique* is now integral. You must indicate by a sign in your manuscript exactly which element should predominate. Here are some additional points:

1. The piano roll cannot exceed a hundred feet in length. Your roll, at 30 feet, is among the smaller ones. The quality is less good in the longer rolls because of the quavering in the band.

2. The length of the roll does not depend only on the duration of the piece but also on the number of notes which it comprises. Because of musical factors, the manufacturer cannot determine the length of the roll from the number of measures and their metronomic quotient. Thus, a time value in *tremolo* takes more space than the same value in *tenuto*. The manufacturer is able to tell the approximate length of the roll if he also knows the number of measures, and the metronome value, and if he has some indication of the content of the measures (long notes or subdivided ones). To give you an idea, the *1812 Overture* makes one roll, but one of the longest.

3. The time that it takes to rewind the roll depends on the length of the roll but this cannot be done in less than thirty seconds. The possibility of a faster, mechanical change is not foreseen at present, but two pianolas can be used, the second beginning when the first ends.

4. Your roll is far from exaggerating the number of notes that can be performed simultaneously. The perforations are very small and quite separate from one another, the roll rather large and strong so that the most formidable chords can be incised without risk. Glissandos crossing each other are possible. [drawing].

5. [Missing in Craft's edition: 'In the most densely perforated places, your roll looks more or less like this: [drawing]. Between all the little separated holes there is a lot of space.'] However, when the voices cross, notes common to both are not reinforced: they have the sound of only one note and not two, as would be the case in an orchestral performance.

6. The tremolo on one note is not as perfect as it is when played by a pianist; but your piece contains only one example of this."

54. Craft states that Stravinsky put aside the pianola scoring of *Les Noces* in June 1919 (R. Craft and I. Stravinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 225), while Walsh says that it was abandoned by early August, 1919 (S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 304).

55. R. Taruskin, *op. cit.*, p. 1501.

56. S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, pp. 621-22.

57. S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 622.

number of performers required for the pianola version and rescored the work as a result.

[M]ais ce brave Stravinsky sous prétexte de simplifier ma tâche, laisse inoccupés les musiciens que j'ai, et ne m'en demande que quatre, mais quatre dont il faut chercher l'un à Honolulu, l'autre à Budapest, les autres Dieu sait où.⁵⁸

The elimination of the harmonium and two cimbaloms certainly made performances of the work less cumbersome. Yet neither of these instruments is mentioned in Stravinsky's explanation for rescoring the work. Further, the pianola scoring would have required seven performers, while the final version required a quartet of singers, percussionists, and pianists. No matter the version Diaghilev was given, the majority of the players in his orchestra would be idle. Third, one might wish to argue that the poor instrument used for his audition of the *Étude pour Pianola* affected Ansermet's judgment, although judgment he did nonetheless offer. Finally, Lawson's one comment regarding Ansermet's letter is misleadingly brief: "during June 1919 Ernest Ansermet was able to listen to [the finished roll] and correct it in London."⁵⁹ Many of the problems Ansermet cites had no solution (as we shall see): he could not simply have corrected the roll in London.

Igor Stravinsky's *Étude pour Pianola* (1917) and Soulima Stravinsky's *Madrid* (1951)

In the letter we have cited, Ansermet's criticisms of the pianola are simply devastating on a number of fronts, including the relative strength of the instrument, its inability to accent individual notes, and the necessity to indicate which half of the keyboard should be emphasized more than the other. A comparison of recordings of the *Étude* and of the arrangement for two pianos by Soulima Stravinsky reveals the differences between what Ansermet heard and what he perhaps expected to hear.⁶⁰ Soulima's arrangement is masterful in that it manages to include almost all the notes of the original score. This is quite a feat, as it

58. See the letter from Ansermet to Stravinsky dated July 18, 1919 in C. Tappolet (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 135. For the English translation of this passage, see S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 299. "[The pianola scoring] leaves idle the musicians I've got, and asks me for only four, one of whom, however, I have to get from Honolulu, another from Budapest, and the others from God knows where."

59. R. Lawson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

60. For this comparison, I use Rex Lawson's performance of the *Étude pour Pianola* on *Igor Stravinsky Pianola Works* (Ocean, NJ: Music Masters Classics 01612-67138-2, 1994) and Bernard Ringissen and André Gorog's performance of *Madrid* (in Soulima Stravinsky's arrangement) on *L'œuvre pour piano: version intégrale des partitions originales et des transcriptions pour piano à 2 mains, à 4 mains, et pour 2 pianos* (Paris: Adès 7074-7077, 1977).

required the reduction of a six-stave score to four. Soulima's arrangement implicitly recognizes the technical superiority of the pianola in a number of ways: here, octave doublings are eliminated (mm. 23, 65-66, 69, 108), chords are lightened by the elimination of one or more notes (mm. 93, 97), and the sixteenth-note triplets of the original are changed to sixteenth notes (mm. 45-46, 91).⁶¹ Other passages reproduce every note of the original, yet employ various tricks to reproduce the crystalline counterpoint of the original (mm. 66, 70, 87). Two passages near the climax of the work are substantially different: the duplet versus triplet octaves in the original are written as simple duplets (m. 107), and the concluding flourish is rewritten in terms of both harmony and rhythm (m. 112). Example 1 compares a passage that contains ascending second inversion triads, all the notes of which are found in Soulima's arrangement, but spread among three of the four hands.⁶² The descending line beginning at the upbeat to the last bar, doubled in the *Étude*, is not doubled in the arrangement. Example 2 shows Soulima's rewritten final flourish, which lacks 32nd notes.

EXAMPLE 1A •
Stravinsky, *Madrid*
arranged by Soulima
Stravinsky (1951),
mm. 64-66

61. Measure numbers refer to those of *Madrid* rather than the *Étude* (there is a difference between the two scores, as Soulima rebars his father's original score in the course of his arrangement).
62. A similar kind of modification is found in the final flourish of Soulima's arrangement.

EXAMPLE 1B •
Stravinsky, *Étude*
for Pianola (1917),
mm. 65-67

EXAMPLE 2A •
Stravinsky, *Madrid*
arranged by Soulima
Stravinsky (1951),
mm. 111-12

Musical score for piano, measures 121-122. The score is written for two staves. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line starting with a *p* dynamic. The left hand (bass clef) has a *sub. ff* dynamic marking and a triplet of eighth notes. A slur covers the first two staves.

EXAMPLE 2B •
Stravinsky, *Étude
for Pianola* (1917),
mm. 121-22

Musical score for piano, measures 121-122. The score is written for three staves. The top staff (treble clef) has a complex melodic line. The middle staff (treble clef) has a simpler melodic line. The bottom staff (bass clef) has a bass line with two *Ped.* markings. The time signature is 3/4.

Musical score for piano, measures 121-122. The score is written for three staves. The top staff (treble clef) has a complex melodic line with a *ff subito* dynamic marking. The middle staff (treble clef) has a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff (bass clef) has a bass line with a triplet of eighth notes. The time signature is 3/4.

Despite these changes, only the rhythmic simplifications and the new final flourish are obvious. Otherwise, because of the rapid tempo, Soulima's arrangement seems faithful. On the other hand, the human pianists (Ringeissen and Gorog), perhaps with the help of judicious editing, do approach the pianola's precision: they maintain metronomic precision, are note-perfect, and strictly follow the given performance indications.⁶³ Lawson writes that the *Étude* "makes a virtue of the chunky musical texture the player piano can sometimes produce."⁶⁴ Yet this chunky texture is generally not felt in the human performance. It is the pianola's inability to accent individual notes and to highlight individual lines that accounts for the "chunky" quality, to which Stravinsky alludes in his autobiography: "un instrument qui, d'une part, possède des possibilités illimitées en fait de précision, de vélocité et de polyphonie, et, d'autre part, présente constamment de sérieux obstacles à l'établissement des rapports dynamiques."⁶⁵ Finally, it must be said that, mechanically precise though the pianola can be, its rhythmic precision is far from perfect—something felt not in rapid passages, but in slower ones. The most obvious example in Lawson's performance of the *Étude* appears at m. 11, when the fanfare is momentarily reduced to a single voice playing simple eighth-notes. These are unfortunately far from metronomic; initially, they seem closer to swung eighths. It is the intangible qualities of human performance that define its musicality and make it clearly preferable to performance on the pianola.

Stravinsky and Performance Interpretation

Ansermet's most serious criticism of the pianola regards performance interpretation. Stravinsky was attracted to the pianola precisely because it avoids "interpretation", yet Ansermet's letter reveals that a pianolist did have the ability to produce rubato and to make their performance more or less rhythmically rigorous. Thus, Ansermet's comment—"on sent dans l'exécution l'intervention de l'exécutant"—must have been especially troubling to the composer. Of Stravinsky's desire to avoid interpretation, Pierre Boulez has written that the composer "a porté toute son attention sur un codage précis qui fait que l'interprète restitue le message aussi exactement qu'il lui a été transmis au départ."⁶⁶ Before receiving Ansermet's

63. It must be noted that Soulima adds expressive markings not found in the original (*marcato* in m. 1, *espressivo* in m. 22, *scherzando* in m. 33, etc.).

64. R. Lawson (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 290.

65. See I. Stravinsky (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 125. For the English translation of this passage, see I. Stravinsky (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 101. "[The pianola] had, on the one hand, unlimited possibilities of precision, velocity, and polyphony, but which, on the other hand, constantly presented serious difficulties in establishing dynamic relationships."

66. Pierre Boulez, "Temps, notation et code" [1960], in *Points de repère I: Imaginer* (Paris: Bourgois, 1995), p. 371. "This importance was so great to Stravinsky that he concentrated all his

letter, Stravinsky thought the pianola by its very nature would solve this problem. He rather discovered, to paraphrase Gordon Iles, an Aeolian employee, that the piano roll is not so akin to a photograph as it is to a portrait of a particular artist's performance.⁶⁷ Stravinsky may not have wanted performers to interpret his scores, but he surely preferred a rhythmic and rigorous performance to one that was note-perfect but otherwise anemic. This is suggested by Serge Grioriev's description of Stravinsky's piano playing during the rehearsals for *L'Oiseau de feu*: "He was particularly exacting about the rhythms", Grigoriev recalled, "and used to hammer them out with considerable violence, humming loudly and scarcely caring whether he struck the right note."⁶⁸

Stravinsky the Pragmatic Businessman

Various factors played a role in Stravinsky's decision to eliminate the mechanical instruments from the final version of *Les Noces*. As noted above, Walsh and Lawson remove Ansermet's letter from the equation, and thus overlook the remarkable coincidence of the arrival of Ansermet's letter and the abandonment of the pianola version of *Les Noces*, as well as the fact that, after 1919, although he continued to praise it in print, Stravinsky never composed another note specifically for the pianola, remaining content simply to make arrangements of his works for the instrument. Indeed, this change from compositional interest in the pianola to the exploitation of its lucrative financial potential is borne out by the history of those very arrangements.

The realization that the pianola did not in fact eliminate interpretation gave Stravinsky an opportunity, for if the pianola offered a portrait of a particular artist's performance, then he himself could be that artist and deliver the most authoritative performance possible—one that would satisfy him as both composer and performer. Indeed, Stravinsky's piano roll arrangements released by the Pleyel Company in the 1920s are all marked "Les œuvres de Igor Strawinsky enregistrées par l'auteur". In fact this is not true. As Lawson has written, there were many types of roll preparation used for this series, most of them mechanical and hand-perforated.⁶⁹ It would have been an arduous and time-consuming process to record, edit, and proof piano rolls that reflected the author's unadulterated

attention on a coding so precise that it obliged the performer to reproduce the composer's message as exactly as it was originally communicated to him." See *Orientalisms* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 87.

67. Denis Hall, "Duo-Art Rolls: a description of their production and an assessment of their performance," *The Pianola Journal*, 10 (1998), p. 49.
68. Serge Grigoriev, *The Diaghilev Ballet, 1909-1929* (London: Constable, 1953), p. 32.
69. R. Lawson (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 300.

intentions. An artist who composed “every day, regularly, like a man with banking hours,”⁷⁰ with an increasingly busy touring schedule, would have found it impossible to allocate the time for such a large project. Thus, despite the fact that he was paid to produce piano rolls that would enable him to reach one of his most fervently held goals, Stravinsky cut corners. His pragmatic approach can also be seen in his negotiations with the Aeolian Company in 1924.

Stravinsky was represented at these negotiations by Robert Lyon of the Pleyel Company, with whom the composer was then under contract. The Aeolian Company originally wanted Stravinsky annually to produce for the pianola as many rolls as for the Duo-Art Aeolian pipe organ,⁷¹ but Stravinsky, not wishing to record on the organ, took exception to this arrangement and insisted on more precise language:

Vous pensez que la phrase: “La répartition des 4 rouleaux entre Duo-Art & orgue sera faite par mutuel consentement” puisse me donner satisfaction [...] Pas du tout, cher ami, car pour moi il ne s’agit pas de répartir mais de ne pas pouvoir m’engager à enregistrer pour l’orgue qui est un instrument que je ne connais absolument pas [...] je répète—le mot “répartition” suppose au moins un enregistrement—et c’est bien ça que je veux éviter (c. à. d. l’obligation d’enregistrer [, ne serait ce que pour un]).⁷²

In the end, Aeolian produced two rolls for the Duo-Art pipe organ, the “Berceuse” and “Finale” from *L’Oiseau de feu* and the “Chorale” from the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*. One year after these negotiations were completed, Stravinsky referred to these rolls as “mon enregistrement.”⁷³

When he began to make piano rolls for the Duo-Art reproducing piano, in 1924, Stravinsky did record from the keyboard. Lawson notes, however, that it is certain that Stravinsky recorded from the keyboard only the first movement of the *Concerto pour piano et instruments à vent* and the *Sonate pour piano*.⁷⁴ The Duo-Art

70. I. Stravinsky and R. Craft, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

71. See the letter from G. W. Reed (Aeolian Company) to Robert Lyon (Pleyel) dated September 26, 1924. PSS, micr. 84.1, p. 000591.

72. See the letter from Stravinsky to Lyon dated October 14. PSS, micr. 98.1, p. 000640. “You think that the words ‘The distribution of the 4 rolls between the Duo-Art [pianola] & organ will be done by mutual consent’ can satisfy me. Not at all, my dear friend, since for me it is not a question of distribution but one of not having to record for the organ, since this is an instrument I do not know at all [...] I repeat—the word ‘distribution’ implies the existence of a recording—and this is exactly what I wish to avoid (that is to say, the obligation to record [for the organ]).” The last sentence added within square brackets is handwritten.

73. See the letter from Stravinsky to Lyon dated October 15, 1925 in which the composer asks if the Aeolian Company had received his recording of his concerto and his recording of the “Berceuse” and “Finale” from *L’Oiseau de feu* for Duo-Art organ. PSS, micr. 98.1, p. 000686.

74. See R. Lawson (1986), *op. cit.*, pp. 293-94.

represented a technological advancement over the pianolas Stravinsky knew, as it captured the performer's tempo fluctuations and thus eliminated the need for a tempo controller. Further, the Duo-Art could better reproduce dynamics, and accents, although this improvement required sacrificing the top and bottom four keys. The projected series of Audiographic rolls for this instrument represented another breakthrough; the rolls themselves could contain written commentary and drawings. As they were partly intended for music education in the home, they could allow one not only to hear a work, but also to read about it at the same time. Only the six rolls that make up *L'Oiseau de feu* were ultimately finished in this series, although, when the Aeolian Company suddenly went out of business, in 1930, the rolls for *Pétrouchka* were nearly ready for release.

The Audiographic rolls are important for the written commentaries they include. Aside from some early serial works that identify rows in the published scores and the composer's detailed serial analysis in the program notes for his *Cantata*, Stravinsky was notoriously tight-lipped about the technical aspects of his own compositions, yet these rolls give us lengthy essays on both *L'Oiseau de feu* and *Pétrouchka*—essays that are rather technical. The composer identifies the leitmotifs of *L'Oiseau de feu*, discusses the ballet's leitharmonic construction, and analyzes passages to the degree of pointing out non-harmonic tones. He also identifies the “popular” themes in *Pétrouchka*, provides a functional analysis of one of the crowd's motifs (i and IV), and provides this analysis of the opening of the second tableau:

Après la stridente mesure de commencement, qui va de pair avec le coup de pied qui pousse le malheureux Pétrouchka, très mal traité, dans sa cellule, beaucoup d'instruments de l'orchestre commencent à se lamenter sur son sort. Pour en finir le piano se met en rage et jette des cascades d'arpèges sur des accords de Fa dièze majeur avec le Do majeur, en passant par le Sol majeur.⁷⁵

The heading of the rolls for *L'Oiseau de feu* includes the following statement of authenticity: “These six rolls embody an Autobiographical Sketch of the Composer's Life to the year 1910, with a Literary and Musical Analysis of *The Fire-Bird*, and a Complete Performance of it, recorded by the Composer himself”.

75. PSS, micr. 119.1, p. 001624. “After the strident opening measure, which corresponds to the kick that propels the unfortunate and poorly-treated Pétrouchka into his cell, many of the orchestral instruments begin to lament his fate. To end this section, the piano becomes enraged and sends forth cascades of arpeggios on F-sharp Major and C Major chords, passing by G Major as well.” For a study of the annotations found on the Audiographic rolls for *The Firebird* and their implications for the analysis of this work, see Mark McFarland, “Leit-Harmony, or Stravinsky's Musical Characterization in *The Firebird*,” *The International Journal of Musicology*, 3 (1994), pp. 203-233.

Because Stravinsky merely “interpreted” the performance of *L’Oiseau de feu*, according to Lawson, we know that the last part of this certificate of authenticity is misleading, if not outright false.⁷⁶ The autobiography and analysis are also unlike anything else Stravinsky ever wrote: an investigation into the identity of their author is therefore in order.

Edwin Evans as Stravinsky’s Ghost-Writer

As we have seen, Edwin Evans was responsible for beginning Stravinsky’s working relationship with the pianola and for effectively commissioning him for the *Étude*. The relationship between these two men was far more extensive than these isolated events suggest. Stravinsky found it useful to have Evans as a main contact in England, and Evans’ close contact with Stravinsky allowed him access to scores essential for his reviews and pre-concert lectures. Before signing the contract for the first two sets of Audiographic rolls, Stravinsky received a letter from the Aeolian Company requesting that he both prepare the rolls and write the notes in collaboration with Evans.⁷⁷

It is impossible to know why the Aeolian Company would, in a letter to a master negotiator, use a term as imprecise as “collaborate”. For several reasons, it seems likely that Stravinsky simply asked Evans to write the annotations for him. First, Evans’ book, *Stravinsky: The Fire-Bird and Petrushka*, bears an uncanny resemblance to the Audiographic piano roll annotations. While not a word-for-word duplication of the rolls, the book’s organization along with the choice and ordering of its musical examples makes it obvious that Evans depended for his study upon the annotations from the piano rolls. Had the rolls for *Pétrouchka* been released, he might not have been able to publish his book, but it seems clear he did not want his writings on that ballet to go to waste. Second, given Stravinsky’s litigious propensities, he would, had he not asked Evans for those essays, have sued Evans for plagiarism. It was thus Evans, we suppose, who wrote the material for which Stravinsky would take credit. When the Aeolian Company went out of business, Stravinsky allowed Evans to publish the material as his own.

A letter from 1929 provides further evidence for Evans’ role as ghost-writer. *The Musical Courier* was planning to celebrate the composer’s fiftieth birthday in a special edition with essays on what music was like fifty years earlier, what it was like currently (1930), and what it would be like fifty years in the future. The

76. R. Lawson (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 298.

77. See the letter from Aeolian Company to Stravinsky dated July 15, 1927. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001415.

journal hoped Stravinsky would write the last-mentioned essay; Evans conveyed their request:

Cela vous amuserait-il de raconter ce que vous pensez la musique sera [sic] d'ici cinquante ans? Sinon, comme c'est surtout de votre signature qu'il s'agit, je peux vous fabriquer la copie dont il s'agit, en me basant sur les tuyaux que vous pourrez me communiquer dans votre réponse. Dans ce cas je vous enverrais [sic] l'article, sitôt écrit, pour que vous le signiez.⁷⁸

Apparently, had Stravinsky agreed to this request, the routine of Evans writing and Stravinsky signing seems to have been one that was well-rehearsed.

On at least two occasions, the Aeolian Company also ghostwrote for Stravinsky. An unknown Aeolian employee wrote both the introduction to the six Audiographic rolls for *L'Oiseau de feu*⁷⁹ and the press release⁸⁰ that describes the time-consuming process required to produce piano rolls of the highest quality. Stravinsky may have used this process to record the first movement of the *Concerto pour piano et instruments à vent* and the *Sonate pour piano*, but for no other works.⁸¹

After I have recorded a music roll, I may take it immediately and listen to what I have just played, work over it to make whatever changes I may desire, interpolate new themes and harmonies, add notes that I could not play originally—in short, get entirely new pianistic colorings and effects that leave the ordinary piano far behind and approach the scope of the orchestra.⁸²

The latter case of ghost writing is especially obvious: a subsequent letter tells us that the original was written in English and translated into French so that the composer could read it before giving his approval.⁸³

78. See the letter from Evans to Stravinsky dated December 10, 1929. PSS, micr. 94.1, p. 001427: "Would you be interested in describing what you think music will be like some fifty years from now? If not, since it is primarily your signature that is at issue, I could prepare the text that is needed, using as a basis whatever clues you might send along in your reply. In that case, I would send you the article as soon as it was written, so that you could sign it."

79. PSS, micr. 84.1, p. 000623.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 001285.

81. See footnote 73 above for more information regarding Stravinsky's role in the recording of the Duo-Art piano rolls.

82. PSS, micr. 84.1, p. 001285.

83. See the letter from Lyon to Stravinsky dated March 29, 1925. PSS, micr. 84.1, p. 001284. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the notice about the wonders of the pianola, which Aeolian wrote and Stravinsky signed, is echoed in an interview with the composer published in the same year: "Chronological Progress in Musical Art", *The Étude*, vol. 44 (1926), pp. 559-60. A slightly different version of this article transcribed from materials housed at the Paul Sacher Stiftung appears in appendix C of Claudia Vincis, "*L'ordre comme règle*: Uno studio genetic, analitico et estitico sull'*Octuor pour instruments à vent* (1919-23) e sul *Concerto pour piano suivi d'orchestre d'harmonie* (1923-24)" (Universität Bern: Selbstverlag, 2005), pp. 324-28.

Conclusion

Charles Joseph has perceptively written that Stravinsky “eagerly seized whatever new technological marvel was available”, including “perforated rolls for the pianola, commercially released recordings, films, television, [and] air travel enabling transcontinental junkets from concert to concert.”⁸⁴ The composer was kindly disposed to new media, although it took a letter from Evans to interest him in the pianola. As we have shown, Stravinsky’s initial enthusiasm in the pianola as a solo instrument waned after he composed the *Étude*, and his involvement with it ended after he replaced the four pianolas in *Les Noces* with four traditional pianos. Fully aware of its limitations, he used the pianola to release piano roll arrangements of recent works. Like 19th-century piano arrangements, these piano rolls offered an ideal means to present his works to a larger audience. Although Robert Craft chastises Stravinsky for his “profligate expenditures of time and labor in transcribing his music for this dodo,”⁸⁵ he makes it clear that Stravinsky’s interest in doing so was financial, noting that Stravinsky’s 1924 Duo-Art contract was itself worth between \$2,000 and \$4,000⁸⁶ annually, at a time when the average worker’s annual wage in France was roughly \$600.⁸⁷ To a composer as financially astute as Stravinsky, such a combination of marketing and money was not to be taken lightly.

As Walsh has shown, beginning in 1914 Stravinsky had real financial problems, as he had to underwrite and support his extended family. These problems were largely eliminated when, starting in 1924, he began a career as a regular concert performer.⁸⁸ This may explain one loose end in our story. After Stravinsky received Ansermet’s letter, in June 1919, and after he resumed work on *Les Noces*, in 1921, he began to orchestrate the ballet without pianolas. Yet in November 1921, he once again signaled his intention to complete the 1919 scoring of the work using pianolas.⁸⁹ This is his last mention of the idea. Why would he change his mind about an instrument of whose weaknesses he was well aware? Would financial worry have caused him to do so? A première of *Les Noces* with pianolas might conceivably have produced a *coup de théâtre* along the lines of that

84. Charles Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 2.

85. I. Stravinsky and R. Craft, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 622.

87. S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 541.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 541.

89. R. Taruskin, *op. cit.*, p. 1501.

produced by the première of *Le Sacre*.⁹⁰ It might also have offered the composer substantial additional income, since each performance of the work would require the purchase of a set of piano rolls, for which he would earn 12.50 francs per set.⁹¹ Stravinsky's attitude toward the pianola was thus pragmatic. It is to his credit that he ultimately decided not to score the work for pianolas. Not only would there have been legal problems had he wished to publish the pianola parts—it took decades before the score to the *Étude pour Pianola* was finally published⁹²—but there would have been artistic problems as well, since, to borrow Ansermet's words, a performance that failed to be “rythmique et rigoureuse” would have been hard to swallow.

Stravinsky's desire to remove interpretation from the performance of his works initially attracted him to the pianola. He discovered, however, that interpretation was unavoidable with that instrument as well. While content in the 1920s to serve out his lucrative contracts with Pleyel and Aeolian, Stravinsky began to sign record contracts as early as 1925⁹³ and declared in 1928 that the phonograph was a far superior instrument: “J'estime donc que le phonographe est actuellement le meilleur instrument de transmission de la pensée des maîtres de la musique moderne.”⁹⁴ His desire to eliminate interpretation from performance was thus transferred from one medium to another.

90. This may explain the spectacular use of the *doubles grands pianos* Pleyel for the première of the work in 1923. For whether these instruments were used instead of four *grands pianos* for the première, see S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 634.
91. See Stravinsky's 1921 Pleyel contract. PSS, micr. 98.1, p. 000559.
92. R. Lawson (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 7-22.
93. His first contract, under negotiation beginning in the autumn of 1924 and signed during his American tour on March 14, 1925, was with Brunswick Records. See S. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 406.
94. *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, December 8, 1928. Reprinted in François Lesure (ed.), *Stravinsky: Études et témoignages* (Paris: J. C. Lattès, 1982), p. 250. “The gramophone is at present the best medium for transmitting the thought of the masters of modern music.”



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RÉSUMÉ La relation de Stravinsky avec le pianola dura de 1915 à 1930, entraînant de nombreux arrangements de ses œuvres pour ce type de piano mécanique. Curieusement, en dépit de l'intérêt du compositeur pour cet instrument et pour sa capacité à éliminer l'interprétation, il ne lui destina qu'une seule œuvre originale (l'*Étude pour Pianola* de 1917), abandonnant une version des *Noces* de 1919 qui prévoyait pas moins de quatre pianolas. Un article de Rex Lawson sur Stravinsky et le pianola demeure à ce jour l'étude la plus complète sur le sujet, mais il n'exploite pas la documentation du legs Stravinsky à la fondation Sacher. Le présent article revient sur la question à la lumière des lettres, contrats et manuscrits de ce fonds d'archives, pour aboutir à des conclusions différentes de celles de Lawson.

ABSTRACT Stravinsky's relationship with the pianola lasted from 1915 to 1930 and produced numerous arrangements of his works for this instrument. Curiously, despite the composer's interest in the pianola and its ability to eliminate interpretation, Stravinsky wrote only one original work for it (the *Étude for Pianola of 1917*), while abandoning a version of *Les Noces* from 1919 that included four pianolas. The article by Rex Lawson on Stravinsky and the pianola is currently the most comprehensive study of this topic. Lawson admits, however, that he wrote his study before consulting the documents found in the Stravinsky Nachlaß in Basel. This article revisits the subject and comes to conclusion different from Lawson's on the basis of letters, contracts, and manuscripts found at the Paul Sacher Stiftung.



