

# 2nd Global Piano Roll Meeting

Prelude #4

Online

11 September 2021



Program

Media partner



Schweizer Musikzeitung  
Revue Musicale Suisse • Rivista Musicale Svizzera

**Saturday, 11 September 2021**

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Zoom-Link after [free registration](#)

18:00 (Bern, CEST) [17:00 (London, GMT), 09:00 (San Francisco, PST), 02:00 (Sydney, AEDT)]

[Check for your own timezone](#)

18:00     **Welcome**

18:05     **Jörg Holzmann (Bern/Leipzig)**

**Women recording, manufacturing and advertising piano rolls from Leipzig**

The piano roll and its value for interpretational and other musicological research has already been illuminated in the course of various projects. Nevertheless, some aspects still require closer inspection.

One desideratum is the exploration of the role that women held in this context. Despite the numerical dominance of male performers, it is undeniable that female pianists, some of them with a considerable number of recordings, were also included in the catalogues of leading manufacturers. Famous names are in line with those of interpreters about whom almost nothing seems to be known. Fragmentary biographies should therefore be supplemented and made accessible. In addition, the nature of the repertoire that women have recorded for the production of piano rolls will be discussed and conclusions to the profound change of what was considered suitable music for women around the turn of the century shall be drawn. An important source for the reception of musical publications are of course contemporary reviews in the (specialist) press. "Man and machine" as a frequently used catchphrase will equally be expanded and limited to "woman and machine", with a special focus on the changing perception of women and their work in a technical, even industrial environment before, during and after World War One. The effects of this paradigm shift on the relationship between woman, instrument and the musical canon are to be understood and, using ego documents such as letters and published articles, the view of the musicians themselves on these developments will be traced. Further attention should be paid to the fields of advertising, organization and production, in which women were involved at any time. At the *Aeolian Company*, for example, women have been actively engaged in the setting and punching of music rolls, an activity that cannot be accomplished without knowledge of the subject matter. Most of *Hupfeld's* promotions feature the silhouette of a woman at a player piano, not to mention female word creations such as *Pianola* or *Phonola*.

Due to local accessibility and the need for more research concerning this enterprise the above-mentioned investigations will be focused on the Leipzig-based company *Ludwig Hupfeld AG*.

**18:45 Joshua Rapier (Stanford)**

**An Inside Perspective on Player Pianos: A Conversation with Pneumatic Technician Joshua Rapier**

Although pneumatic player piano companies have been out of business for almost a century, the instruments survive. It has become the responsibility of an increasingly small number of dedicated technicians around the world to restore these instruments and bring them back to life. This process has been one of trial and error as original manufacturing knowledge and specifications are difficult to recover and reproduce in the present day. Joshua Rapier has dedicated his professional life to pneumatic player pianos, having worked with them since he was a boy. He has restored, rebuilt, and serviced hundreds of player pianos of the major manufacturers and has acquired an intimate understanding of the mechanisms and technical details of the various systems. He is also a keen student of the history of the industry and is fascinated by the varied arts applied to these ingenious inventions. Rapier will discuss his perspective on pneumatic rebuilding and share some insights into the nuances behind the complex mechanisms he works with day to day. This more informal presentation will allow for questions from the audience.

**19:30 Artis Wodehouse (New York)**

**The James P. Johnson Piano Roll Project – A Preliminary Report**

James Price Johnson (1894–1955) is one of the seminal African-American jazz artists of the 20th century. A virtuoso pianist, Johnson mastered ragtime, and is understood to have created what is called stride piano. A performer and arranger of music by others, Johnson was also a notable composer, beginning with ragtime, but one who went forward to song-writing, Broadway show collaborations, and writing large concert scores as a fusion artist, combining forms and procedures of classical music with his deep knowledge of and practice in popular music.

Beginning in his formative years – roughly 1917 through 1927 – Johnson’s extraordinary pianistic skills found a place in the exploding player piano industry. In this medium, Johnson was often able to express his evolving pianistic and compositional innovations, both in his own original material and in arrangements of tunes by others. His fifty-seven rolls, along with his phonograph recordings and notated scores form the basis for our appreciation of the greatness of this artist.

Wodehouse’s presentation will focus on four of Johnson’s seminal piano roll performances. They will be pianolized by Wodehouse as part of the presentation. Each will be accompanied by salient commentary regarding the roll technology as it impacted Johnson’s style and form, and a musical analysis of Johnson’s stylistic innovations. The musical analysis will include supplemental use of Johnson’s contemporaneous 78-rpm recordings.

**20:30 End of the Meeting**