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Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

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COVER: Max Weber, *Russian Ballet* (detail), 1916, oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum, bequest of Edith and Milton Lowenthal, 1992.11.29



The Seventy-first Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,947th Concert

Robert Berkman, pianolist

Presented in in honor of
Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, 1909–1929:
When Art Danced with Music

May 15, 2013
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
East Building Mezzanine

Admission free

Program

“Ballets Russes mécaniques”

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)
Danse Russe, from *Pétrouchka*
Recorded by Paul Doguereau

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
Reflets dans l'eau, from *Images I* (Reflections in the Water)
Recorded by Silvio Scioni

Darius Milhaud (1892–1974)
Le Boeuf sur le toit (The Ox on the Roof)
Transcribed for pianola by the composer

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)
Valses nobles et sentimentales (Noble and Sentimental Waltzes)
Modéré—très franc (Moderately—very sincerely)
Assez lent—avec une expression intense (Rather slowly—
with an intense expression)
Modéré
Assez animé (Rather lively)
Presque lent—dans un sentiment intime (Almost slowly—
in an intimate mood)
Assez vif (Rather fast)
Moins vif (Less fast)
Epilogue: Lent (Epilogue: slowly)
Recorded by the composer

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)
Mouvements perpétuels (Perpetual Movements)
Assez modéré (Rather moderately)
Très modéré (Very moderately)
Alerte (Sprightly)
Recorded by Lev Pouishnoff

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)
Traumerei, op. 9, no. 4 (Reverie)
Recorded by Howard Brockway

Erik Satie (1866–1925)
Parade
Roll 1
Choral
Prélude du Rideau rouge (Prelude of Little Red Riding Hood)
Entrée des managers (Entry of the managers)
Prestidigitateur chinois (The Chinese Conjuror)
Petite fille américaine (Little American Girl)
Rag-time du Paquebot (Paquebot's Ragtime)
Roll 2
Acrobates (Acrobats)
Suprême effort des managers (A Supreme Effort on the Part of the Managers)
Finale
Suite au “Prélude du Rideau rouge”
(Suite on “Prelude of Little Red Riding Hood”)
Recorded by Robert Berkman
World Premiere Pianola Performance

This concert is sponsored in part by the Billy Rose Foundation.

The Musician

ROBERT BERKMAN

Illuminating a forgotten but delightful aspect of music making, Robert Berkman is a uniquely qualified master of the pianola, revealing the expressive capabilities of that all-but-forgotten instrument while showcasing its remarkably varied repertoire. The title of the program he brings today—Ballets Russes mécaniques—refers not only to the exhibition *Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, 1909–1929: When Art Danced with Music*, but also to the fact that Berkman played an important role in developing an installation that proved to be a highlight of the Gallery’s 2006 exhibition *Dada*. Designed to present a computerized robotic performance of George Antheil’s *Ballet mécaniques* on the East Building Atrium, the installation required sixteen digital player pianos, which were loaned by QRS Music Technologies, Inc., of Buffalo, New York, where Berkman was then chief operating officer. During the course of his thirty-plus-year career at QRS, the world’s last piano roll manufacturer, he produced numerous reissues of historic roll recordings and maintained a constant flow of new recordings.

Selecting from his large collection of piano rolls, some reproducing performances by famous pianists of the early twentieth century, Berkman presents programs that entertain and enlighten with souvenirs from the concert halls, dance halls, and private homes of that era. His particular interest in the neglected area of rolls from places other than the United States and Western Europe prompted him to establish the largest institutionally-held collection of such rolls at the University of California Los Angeles Ethnomusicology Archive, where he has taught and performed as a visiting scholar. Recent projects have preserved rolls from the Arab world and Lithuania. Berkman plays on an eighty-eight-note Aeolian pianola from about 1912 that has been restored and is maintained by Jon Perry of Perry Piano Restoration, Marion Center, Pennsylvania.

Program Notes

The instrument used in today’s concert is a “push-up” pianola, a device that operates from piano rolls and turns any piano into a player piano. The operator of a pianola, or pianolist, is expected to impart his or her own interpretation to the rolls by using the instrument’s foot and hand controls. Dynamics and accents are created by subtle and well-timed variations in pressure on the foot pumps; the sustain pedal, bass/treble balance, and tempo are controlled by levers. Unlike the later “reproducing” pianos, which allowed for only minimal adjustments to the dynamics and tempo changes embedded in the rolls, the pianola allows for considerable spontaneity on the part of the performer.

The heyday of the player piano coincided almost exactly with that of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes (1909–1929), widely regarded as one of the most remarkable artistic endeavors of the twentieth century. Many of the composers commissioned by Diaghilev to write for his ballets are represented on piano rolls, because player pianos and pianolas were very much in vogue at the time. Either the composers themselves or other competent pianists recorded the scores on pianos that were specially designed to cut rolls. Among the companies that manufactured and sold piano rolls between 1909 and 1929 were the Aeolian Company in New York City; the American Piano Company (Ampico) in East Rochester, New York; Pleyel et Cie in Paris; and M. Welte and Sons in Frieberg, Germany, and New York City.

Two years before he was catapulted to world fame by *The Rite of Spring*, his composition for the Ballets Russes’ 1913 season, Igor Stravinsky received his first commission from Serge Diaghilev. The impresario, looking for good roles for dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, asked the composer to write music for a ballet based on the story of a rag doll named Pétrouchka that comes to life. The Danse Russe from *Pétrouchka* on today’s program is a 1926 Ampico roll created by pianist Paul Doguereau (1908–2000), a friend of Ravel and an active participant in Boston’s musical life throughout the second and third quarters of the twentieth century.

Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, written in 1894, proved a spectacular vehicle for Nijinsky when the Ballets Russes produced the eponymous ballet in 1912. Several roll recordings of the *Prélude* were produced, but they are not satisfactory for public performance, so Debussy is represented in today's concert by his *Reflets dans l'eau* (1905) in a Welte recording by Silvio Scioni (1882–1973). Fortunately for the pianist, it is a rendition that readily lends itself to interpretation.

One of the group of French modernist composers known as Les Six, Darius Milhaud recorded selections from his 1924 Ballets Russes work *Le Train bleu* in 1927 for Welte. The only Milhaud roll currently available, however, is his own transcription of his surrealist ballet *Le Boeuf sur le toit* (The Ox on the Roof). It was issued by Pleyel following the successful premiere of the work in 1920 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The influence of exuberant Brazilian popular music and the use of polytonality are evident. The ballet gave its name to a celebrated bar and cabaret that opened in Paris in 1921 and was frequented by Jean Cocteau and his circle.

Maurice Ravel composed *Daphnis et Chloé* for Diaghilev's 1912 season. Its success led to a second commission, which was subsequently canceled. This affair brought about the permanent estrangement of composer and impresario, but Ravel proceeded to publish the work, *La Valse*, for piano solo and as a tone poem for orchestra. Neither *Daphnis et Chloé* nor *La Valse* appears to have ever been issued on rolls, but Ravel himself recorded his early suite *Valses nobles et sentimentales* in 1911 for Welte.

Another member of Les Six, Francis Poulenc had already come to the attention of both Stravinsky and Diaghilev with his *Rapsodie nègre* (1917) when his *Mouvements perpétuels* became a hit in Europe in 1919. It was to become his only work issued on rolls, in a Welte recording by the formidable Russian pianist Lev Pouishnoff (1891–1958). Poulenc's subsequent Ballets Russes score for *Les Biches* (1924) was warmly received by the critics but went unrecorded by the roll makers.

Richard Strauss reportedly never received payment for composing the music for *Josephs-Legende* for the 1914 Ballets Russes season. The rarity of the roll version, recorded by Welte workhorse Hans Haass (1897–1955), suggests that that version was also a financial disappointment for the composer. Since the holders of those rare copies of *Josephs-Legende* are reluctant to lend them, Strauss is represented on today's program by his *Traumerei* (1908), which offers a welcome moment of repose. The pianist who made this roll recording was Howard Brockway (1870–1951), a fine musician, an Ampico artist, and a champion of the player piano.

An iconoclastic Ballets Russes production, Eric Satie's *Parade* (1917) is based on a one-act scenario by Jean Cocteau, and features cubist sets and costumes by Pablo Picasso. Its absence from the piano roll repertoire is remedied by a version created by Robert Berkman for performance in today's concert. It includes two sections from the orchestrated version that were long missing from the piano four hands version. Due to its length, the work has been divided into two rolls. There will be a short pause between Roll 1 and Roll 2.

Program notes by Robert Berkman