



Piano-roll expert J. Lawrence Cook, 72, in the position he knows best: at the console turning sheet music into piano rolls. Photo by Tom Maguire. Newsday

Player pianos stage comeback in living rooms

It probably has little or nothing to do with the divorce rate, juvenile delinquency or other even more significant social phenomena. But a long-gone living-room scene may be making a comeback.

According to some collectors of trivia, the expression "the family that plays together, stays together," dates back to the Golden Age of player pianos, just after World War I.

Then there were friendly gatherings around the player piano in the living-room, with everyone watching the keys automatically clatter out a rickety-tick version of "The Man of the Flying Trapeze" and singing the lyrics printed on the perforated paper roll. Well, folks, the same thing is happening today, but with Burt Bacharach favorites, top-10 heavy rock hits and offerings from "Hair," to name a few.

Player pianos appear to be enjoying a popularity exceeded only in the boom years around 1919, when more of the instruments were manufactured than ordinary pianos, say industry officials. That year, 53 per cent of the total output of pianos consisted of players, which gave forth complete arrangements of popular hit tunes of the day when you fitted a roll of the perforated paper into brackets that turned when you pumped foot pedals.

Perhaps the resurgence of the instrument's popularity was explained by a market researcher for one of the player piano companies. "Improved radios and phonographs," he said, "with their passive and isolated listening habits, destroyed the incentive for self-expression and the personal touch that is so rewarding in a player piano." He added that "maybe it's the cold electronic age that's creating a yen for participation in people."

The revitalized interest in player pianos has caused a demand for the production of player rolls. There are few experts who are familiar with the craft of adapting music to the master roll, from which production copies are made.

One of these artists is J. Lawrence Cook. For the past 52 years, Cook has been one of the country's leading piano-roll masters. Now 72, Cook spends

each day in a tiny room on west 57th Street in Manhattan, working at a unique device he helped perfect almost a half-century ago.

The handmade master-roll cutter, an upright piano with a double keyboard, is attached to an octopus-like labyrinth of pneumatic tubes. Cook takes modern hits, show tunes and other musical scores and plays them in piano-roll style on the master console. The machine simultaneously perforates a master roll in a coded series of punched slots.

The production rolls, identical to the master, are what go into the player piano. Player pianos function on the principal of a bellows pumping air through the perforated rolls, which in turn activate the piano mechanism.

Cook talks with pride about his ability to play in the style of Fats Waller (also known for his piano-roll arrangements), Jelly Roll Morton and other greats of another era. "It's a lost art from the past," explained Cook recently, as he transcribed a popular Broadway show tune onto his machine. "I find it just as exciting today for instance, to cut songs like 'By The Time I Get to Phoenix' and 'Harper Valley PTA,' as I did many years ago on something like, say, 'Alexander's Ragtime Band.' Remember that one?"

There are available dozens of new catalogs, many of them printed in an early 20th century style, listing the hundreds of newly produced piano rolls. Every conceivable type of music is represented, including rock, jazz, religious and ethnic. One of Cook's specialties is piano rolls in the styles of Liberace and Roger Williams.

There are also to be had a spate of books giving the history and technical details of player pianos as well as many recordings of piano-roll music for those who can't yet afford to buy a new model. There are many clubs too, made up to collectors of vintage player pianos. These issue newsletters and swap buying and selling information.

One company official estimates there are thousands of antique instruments still hiding in attics and barns, "just waiting for someone to snap them up." He said they often bring anywhere from 1,000 dollars up, if in restorable condition. The new player pianos generally are equipped with foot pedals for manual operation and electric drive "if you want to dance while you listen." And all models, naturally are usable as conventional pianos.

The Los Angeles Times
Washington Post News Service

THE WEEK

Tales From the Crypt

Brought to the screen by today's most successful producers of horror films, Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky, the Amicus Production is presented by Cinerama Releasing. In each of the chilling tales, Richardson portrays the crypt-keeper who provides the characters with terrifying glimpses of what is in store for them . . . or have the events already happened? Throughout their journey behind the vault of horror, they learn that "death lives." It is a Metromedia Producers Corp. presentation.

Tales From The Crypt was adapted from the startling horror stories "Tales From the Crypt" and "The Vault of Horror" originally published by William M. Gaines, publisher of the world famous Mad Magazine. The screenplay was written by Milton Subotsky. For Subotsky and Rosenberg, this tale of horror and suspense represents their 27th production. Their list of previous successes include "The House That Dripped Blood," "The Skull," and "Dr. Terror's House of Horrors."

One of Europe's foremost creators of horror films, Freddie Francis has directed **Tales From the Crypt**, and Charles Fries, Metromedia's executive Vice President in charge of production was executive producer for the film.

Filmed in England, **Tales From the Crypt** used some of London's most eerie old mansions for location shots. In addition, the famed Highgate Cemetery was used for the first sequences, but only after much red tape was untangled. Because Karl Marx is buried there, the London officials were naturally apprehensive about the invasion of camera crews and the curious visitors. But the cemetery had the perfect look about it, and Director Freddie Francis finally prevailed upon the directors to approve the request.

Tales From the Crypt is the seventh film on which Freddie Francis has worked with Subotsky and Rosenberg, and the fifth he has done with Peter Cushing . . . a reunion of the most successful teams in horror films today.

GEORGE C. SCOTT
"THE HOSPITAL"
GP United Artists

Co-Hit **Banana's**

with Woody Allen



The most Magical one of all!
WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS
Bedknobs and Broomsticks

TECHNICOLOR® G



"BRAVO, BRANDO'S"
GODFATHER
—New York Times

DAKWAY CINEMA

JAMES COBURN
JENNIFER O'NEILL
THE CAREY TREATMENT

PANAVISION® PG
METROCOLOR



Plus Marlowe

heilig
344-9311

Mayflower

PARAMOUNT PICTURES IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE RETURN OF



Seal of DeWitt's
The Ten Commandments

INTACT! UNCUT!

