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Media discourses and marketing strategies in the advertising of the pianola

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Abstract

As a phenomenon of great social relevance between 1900 and 1930, the graphic advertising of the pianola must be considered as one of the first great mass media platforms linked to musical activity and, therefore, the analysis of its discourse offers valuable information about the social construction of the musical world during the first decades of the twentieth century. This article shows the results of an analysis of 200 historical advertisements through which it is possible to trace the origins of some of the current advertising rhetoric and also some of our current ideas about musical activity. In this way, the advertisements studied show some interesting links to the mindset and aesthetic and social conventions of the time but also show us to what degree these discourses are, to a large extent, still valid today.

Keywords: pianola, media, advertisements, reception, music consumption

I. The social relevance of the pianola phenomenon: a brief contextual introduction on

The pianola¹ was a social, economic and cultural phenomenon that between 1900 and 1930 represented the first great focus of mass diffusion of a musical product. At the very beginning of the century, the pianola rapidly expanded into a global market, with a major impact in the United States and a significant part of Europe. This article deals with two important technologies associated with the pianola phenomenon: the player piano and the reproducing piano. “Player piano” is technically the most appropriate term one can use when referring to the pianola: a piano that contained an interior mechanism designed to make it play in a semi-autonomous manner. Its mechanism was based on a pneumatic system that operated the piano action via a roll of paper with perforations representing the musical code. As each perforation allowed the movement of air into the mechanism, the change in air pressure within the instrument resulted in the hammers being activated automatically. By means of a series of controls found in front of the keyboard, the player piano permitted the user to intervene in such fundamental parameters as the tempo and intensity of the reproduction of the piece. The reproducing piano, on the other hand, was not intended to work this way and was designed to reproduce recordings by the great pianists of the era using the same format (rolls of perforated paper). This difference proved to be decisive in establishing the different marketing strategies associated with the advertising of the instrument. Although it is often difficult to obtain completely reliable data on the pianola industry, the following information gives an idea of the size of the phenomenon: in 1914, the United States manufactured 244,000 pianos and 80,000 pianolas. This figure grew dramatically, and in the space of only two years pianolas represented more than half of annual piano sales (Gaddis, 2009; Ospina Romero, 2019). In 1920, 70% of the 364,000

pianos sold were pianolas (Ord-Hume, 2004). Despite the fact that sales progressively decreased throughout the nineteen-twenties, 1923 saw the manufacture of 170,500 pianolas, 12,600 upright reproducing pianos and 5,300 reproducing grand pianos (Muns, 2005). Two and a half million pianolas were sold in the United States between 1900 and 1930, whilst it is believed that over a million were sold in the same period in the United Kingdom (Hamer, 1984). The average annual volume of sales worldwide between 1900 and 1930 hovers around the two hundred thousand mark for pianolas and the five million mark for rolls. During this period, the pianola industry generated a mean annual profit of one hundred million dollars (Dolan, 2009). This brief statistical aside confirms the tremendous relevance of the pianola phenomenon, one that went far beyond both the musical and the economic sphere, which depicts it quantitatively.

II. The advertising discourses in the pianola phenomena

Both in the United States and Europe, dissemination of the pianola focused around two main channels: the press — with publicity in the form of adverts, and also gained through articles and concert reviews — and advertising posters. The discourse of the latter tended to take a different slant that often had little to do with that found in the daily press. It is worth bearing in mind that the pianola phenomenon came into being soon after the emergence of a generation of graphic artists that took the concept of the advertising poster to a new level. Despite the fact that the advertising poster was first used many centuries ago, it is in 19th century France where one can begin to find evidence of a style that would eventually evolve towards the model of graphic advertising that can be seen today. The best techniques in lithographic printing as applied by Jules Chéret (1836-1933) are, without a doubt, a key aspect in the

development of a type of advertising with certain defining characteristics. Chéret's style and technique — in 1889 he designed the posters for the inauguration of the Moulin Rouge — was the starting point for an aesthetic explosion that rapidly expanded to other continents, peaking with the Art Nouveau movement (Barnicoat, 1973). In Chéret's hands, the female form takes on a tremendous erotic charge and the image of the woman — stylised and beautiful — is used as an advertising device. This has often been considered to be a clear indicator of the birth of the modern advertising poster. The poster began to be seen as an optimal new language to convey messages and ideas in a simple and direct form with persuasive techniques that permit many possible communicative and consequently also ideological nuances. The poster allowed links to be forged with the consumer as a result of specific stimuli that were subject to the social and aesthetic conventions of the times. Many of the posters of this period tend to express the so-called "spirit of the turn of the century" by means of symbolic and allegorical representations. In most of the posters, the idea of modernity — so characteristic of the times — operates implicitly on two different axes: one the one hand, the interaction between the user and the instrument and, on the other hand, the possibility of enjoying the automatic reproduction of music. Two axes — interpretation and passive listening — that we can relate directly to the two major existing types of pianola: the player piano and the reproducing piano. Of course, these two concepts do not have to be understood as a dichotomy, because both were in some way present on all models. Even so, the discourse of the advertisements for each type of instrument conceals various sub-plots with meanings that might be interesting to analyse. It is important to bear in mind that at a time in history when mass communication was taking its first tentative steps, this process of meaning was entirely linked to the medium and format used to communicate the message. As such, as Marshall McLuhan would point

out half a century later, the platform used to convey a discourse has a tremendous influence on how a given message is perceived. Approaching the advertising of the pianola from this perspective allows us to identify certain hidden intentions in this commercial discourse at the same time as helping us to better understand the thought process of society during that period, which was the target of said discourse. The marketing strategies of the major players share certain traits, both in terms of graphics and slogans, that often communicate above and beyond what is immediately visible at first glance. To reach this level of interpretation, which from an anthropological and ethno-musical perspective we shall place on the so-called “dense description” plane, a simple critical interpretation is not enough. We must resort to a quantitative analysis that allows us to demonstrate these connotations through the recurrence of presented cases.

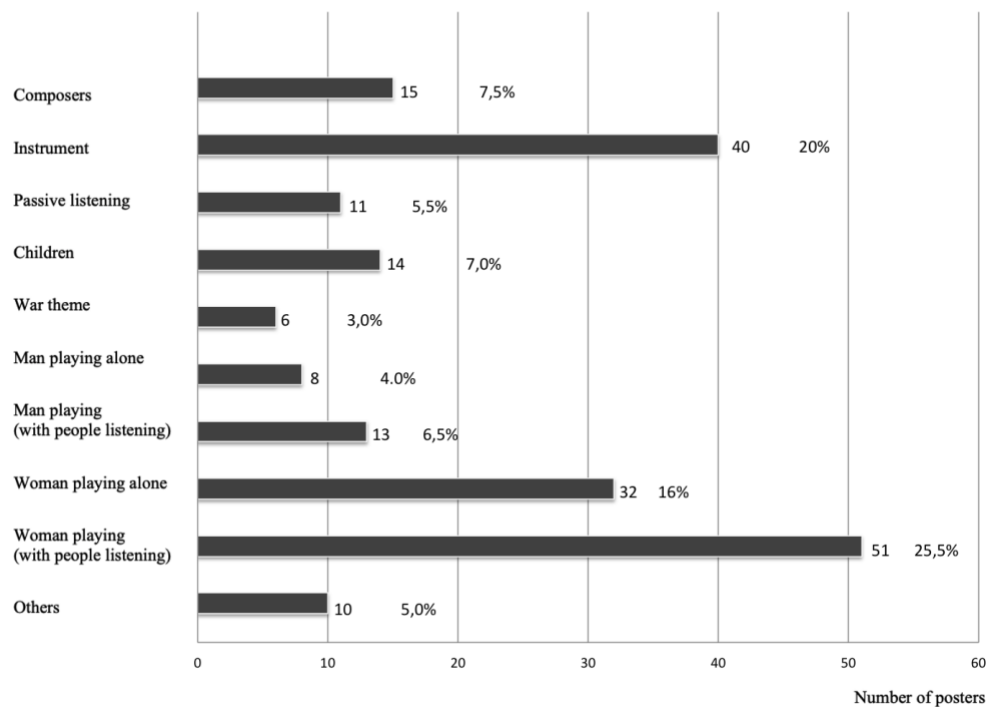
III. Analytical synthesis of the most common recurring themes in ads studied

In order to conduct the aforementioned analysis, we worked on a selection of two hundred ads that led us to clearly isolate the following clichés and situations:²

- (1) Woman playing with people listening to her
- (2) Woman playing alone
- (3) Man playing with people listening to him
- (4) Man playing alone
- (5) War theme
- (6) Children
- (7) Passive listening
- (8) Instrument
- (9) Composers
- (10) Others

Once these situations were established, a graph was generated that allowed us to see their prevalence. As can be seen in Example 1, some of these themes are particularly recurring:

Table 1 – Recurring situations in the pianola advertising



We can observe that the three most represented situations are:

- a) *Woman playing with listeners* where the woman almost always appears in a middle-class domestic setting. This situation appears in fifty-one of the two hundred studied advertisements, representing 25.5% of the total.
- b) 20.2% of the advertisements belong to the *Instrument* category where the instrument is the main focus. Forty of the posters feature this situation as an advertisement image.
- c) The representation of the *Woman playing alone* appears in thirty-two of the advertisements; 16% of the total.

Following these three main groups are the images of the composer, of the child and of the man playing to an audience, these last three with far lower percentages of the total than the first three. Then follow passive listening (in other words, the theme of the reproducing piano), the man playing alone and war themes, these being at the bottom of the list of the two hundred advertisements. The other situations have been grouped into a category we have called “Others” that only represents 5% of the total, thereby denoting a significant concentration of certain situational topics. It is worth mentioning that two of the three most prevalent categories employ the female form as an advertising device. In fact, if we add together the categories (a) *Woman playing with listeners* and (c) *Woman playing alone* we find that in 41.5% of cases a woman is the main protagonist. The pianola phenomenon is very much linked to middle-class domestic entertainment so it is not surprising to find the female gender exercising her role as a housewife dedicated to watching over the welfare of her family. Examples 1 a, 1b and 1c show these three main categories: woman playing to an audience, exhibited instrument and woman playing alone:



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 1 – Examples of woman playing to an audience, exhibited instrument and woman playing alone.

Within category (a) we find two sub-groups that are of particular interest for the aspects they bring to light: on the one hand the dancing and party scenes where the woman is playing surrounded by people in a festive and often immoderate atmosphere and, on the other hand, those where despite the context being clearly potentially festive, the people shown are immobile as if they were listening to a concert. In some cases this potential festivity might represent an interesting marketing strategy, insinuating that the party is

to follow. The neat and tidy domestic middle-class context potentially suggesting that the party will follow what is being depicted in the poster is more than evident in the mind of the potential buyer.

The female form as an advertising device

In this association of ideas that forms part of the marketing strategy, pianola advertisements make use of the female form as the main vehicle to suggest — to connote — all that might take place above and beyond socially established norms. But the use of the female form transcends its mere use as a visual device as it also confirms the condition of domination by the male, a male who obtains his social entertainment through her and who, moreover, is capable of converting that social entertainment into the kind of pastime most desired by the ideal wife. It is important to take note of this relationship between male and female that is present in a very high percentage of the advertisements: when the woman is accompanied by the man he always takes on an authoritative role, leaning up against the pianola or standing behind it, gesturing his approval at the tunes being played by the woman (See Examples 2a and 2b).



(a)



(b)

Fig. 2 – Aeolian and Kranich & Bach posters showing a very common situation in this type of advertising.

This submissive relationship is therefore more than clear and responds faithfully to a series of stereotypical characteristics that show the man as being active, courageous, rational, self-reliant, with a great capacity for abstraction and creativity, and the female as being passive, feeble, sensitive and dependant (Vayreda, 2014). In fact, authors such as Susan McLary (1991), Nicholas Cook (1998) and Josep Martí (2000) have reminded us on various occasions of how some of these attributes still operate within the academic lexicon of high-brow Western music. This is the case with masculine endings (in strong tempo, conclusive) and in feminine endings (in a weak tempo, suspensive), terms still in use today in the academic tradition. These topics are also a reflection of what society understands to be the roles for each of the sexes, showing the supposed suitability of men to the public domain and of women to the private domain. Within the

private domain, the pianola ads reserve for women an environment of “controlled exhibition”, the exhibition of a woman playing the piano for her guests, an image very much of the 19th century (Ogren, 1989, pp. 88-89). The pianola enables this model of middle-class entertainment to reach new heights thanks to the ease with which music can be played that vastly exceeds the modest aspirations of a housewife. We often come across advertisements where women are portrayed stereotypically as the perfect performer who, without needing any musical background, can satisfy the wishes of her husband. Anything from a prelude by Chopin to the latest ragtime piece; the pianola's vast repertoire represents a menu where — if we may use a culinary comparison — the woman's function is to cook the musical entertainment of a middle-class family. As a counterpoint, Brian Dolan (2009, p. 18) proposes we understand male interest in the pianola in view of what he terms the “masculinity of mechanisation” via which a man can also show interest in music thanks to the link between this new artefact and mechanics and the latest technology. The fact that 45.1% of the ads starring women are exclusively player piano advertisements and that the female figure has no presence at all in those for reproducing pianos directly tells us how the industry (and society) used gender stereotypes in regard to the social use of music. As Alison Wentle notes, some of these advertisements promote player pianos as a "labor saving replacement for women's labor at the keyboard" while others "act as a device that stores and reproduces musical labor as a stockpile-able commodity” (2018, p. 1).

The objectivization of music

With regard to the second most represented situation (one in which the instrument itself is the publicity device) we must distinguish between those advertisements where the

instrument is portrayed as if in a catalogue and those where the instrument is placed in a context of passive listening; in other words, as a reproducer of music. The latter case clearly refers to the realm of the reproducing piano and is in a category of its own. Analysing the differences between advertisements for the player piano and the reproducing piano is also interesting if we take into account the relationships that can be deduced between commercial discourse, use and function. Paying attention to the dates that figure on the majority of the ads studied, one can appreciate a diachrony where performance loses ground in favour of passive listening. As of the nineteen-twenties one can see an increase in advertisements — especially in Europe — where instead of drawing one's attention to technique and the interaction of the instrument, we are being asked to focus on the music itself. We find many advertisements where we are shown the instrument playing by itself with the listener or listeners enjoying the music being played automatically. The slogans we can see in Examples 3a and 3b are quite eloquent. In the first instance, a suggestive "Lean back and listen" accompanies the image of a woman calmly listening to automatically reproduced music. In the second instance, the reproducing piano is presented as the new fashion for middle-class parties to the detriment of traditional dancing. Both ads employ a marketing model and strategy that is quite common, based on the combined interaction of three elements: an image, a slogan and an explanatory text that links the former two elements, seeking to maximise their connotational potential. The first instance seems to reach the very heights of the individualised passive listening model that for a century deployed the Romantic stance (Cook, 2001): that of the concert hall with its individualised audience that closes its eyes, each in their own seat, in a posture of voluntary isolation. In Example 3a the woman seems to be in a state of direct communion with an alternate reality, in touch with the spiritual world of music, the music of the great composers,

those timeless geniuses and authors of equally timeless creations, all of which are now within her grasp!



Lean Back and Listen

THIS very evening, in the quiet of your own home, you may summon for your delight such artists as Beryl Rubinstein, Herma Mentl, Harold Bauer, Yolande Mero, Doris Madden, Gabrilowitch and Godowsky. Lean back and listen. They will play your favorite compositions. Science and art have struck hands to make your dreams come true. They have created

THE ARTRIO ANGELUS REPRODUCING PIANO

In itself a superb example of craftsmanship, the electrically operated Artrio brings to every home the true pleasure of hearing music as the artist himself first played it.

Th. Artrio is also a beautifully constructed and beautifully toned grand piano that you may play yourself. There are no projections to interfere with playing found in other reproducing grands.

We are makers of the Angelus Piano, The Angelus Player Action, The Artrio Angelus (electrically operated) and Angelus Artrio-style Rolls. Send for our interesting catalog number 34.

THE WILCOX & WHITE CO.
MERIDEN, CONN.



*He: "Well, time to go!"
She: "I thought I was fed up in week-end parties, but now houses made this one different—the lingering memory I take away is the Duo-Art Piano."*

The DUO-ART
Reproducing Piano

A BEAUTIFUL GRAND—a Steinway, a Weber, or a Steck—which will reproduce for you the playing of Paderewski, Hofmann—all the greatest artists of the world! This is the Piano of Today. Everywhere, this great, new piano, is replacing other types. In royal palaces abroad—Buckingham Palace, the Palace of the Queen of the Belgians, the Queen of Spain, in the Vatican—and in homes of culture all over the world, the Duo-Art is now installed.

Music of the salon or the concert stage—music of the dance and the musical comedy, songs, ballads—everything in music played by its best interpreters, is what the Duo-Art provides.

No musical instrument ever made gives so much as the Duo-Art. No instrument ever made has met such quick and impressive recognition.

Representatives in all leading cities

The AEOLIAN COMPANY

NEW YORK LONDON PARIS MADRID SYDNEY MELBOURNE

Makers of the celebrated Aeolian-Vocalion

(a)

(b)

Fig. 3 – The Wilcox & White Co. and Aeolian reproducing pianos.

Some authors have suggested that the progressive rise in popularity of the reproducing piano led to a decrease in the activity of pianola players. This might also suggest that the pianola market was reflecting an increased objectivization of music: those people who previously purchased an instrument in order to perform music were now purchasing music that the instrument was able to play automatically (Taylor, 2007). The main reason for this objectivization of musical activity was the fixation with sound reproduction and, as such, above and beyond the pianola, we must contextualise it

within a much broader scope that encompasses the four great sound reproducing devices of the times: the phonograph, the pianola, the gramophone and the radio.

The other major strategy employed was that of using the composer as a commercial device. Depending on the manufacturer or the type of technology on offer, these characters were either pianists and composers of the time (a strategy much employed by Welte; see Examples 4a and 4b) or else dead composers from the European musical tradition, with Handel being the oldest representative (see Examples 4c and 4d).

THE MASTER'S FINGERS ON YOUR PIANO






THE genius of Paderewski, de Pachmann, Casella and Gieseking lives forever through the magic of the Welte-Mignon Licensee Reproducing Action. Only Welte-Mignon Licensee possesses the secret of perfect reproduction.

Through Welte-Mignon Licensee the playing of the world's greatest pianists is brought to your home, flawless, magnificent, its glory undimmed.

You can have Welte-Mignon Licensee in 115 different pianos. The famous Welte-Mignon Licensee Reproducing Action can be installed in your own grand piano.

There are Welte-Mignon Licensee dealers everywhere. Send for a copy of our beautiful booklet containing portraits of the great artists.

THE AUTO PNEUMATIC ACTION CO.
W. C. Haines, President
433 West 51st Street, New York, N. Y.

The superiority of any reproducing piano is assured if it contains the

Welte-Mignon
LICENSEE
reproducing action

(a)



Paderewski

THE return of Paderewski to the concert stage of America recalls the days when his name electrified the musical world and his mastery won him immortal fame. How much of his wizardry and genius has been sacrificed at the altar of patriotism can only be judged by the critic who will again hear him. Whatever this result, Paderewski's art of ten years will live as long as his name through the fourteen recordings, played in his heyday, and faithfully reproduced by the

Art-De-Luxe
WELTE MIGNON
(Licensee)
AUTO PNEUMATIC ACTION CO., 51st St. and 12th Ave., New York

Obtainable in over 50 leading makes of Upright and Grand Pianos

(b)


























QUELQUES-UNES DES CÉLÉBRITÉS MUSICALES CONTEMPORAINES QUI ONT VANTÉ LA VALEUR ARTISTIQUE SANS ÉGALE DU

"PIANOLA"-PIANO
ET DU
"PIANOLA" ÉLECTRIQUE
DUO-ART



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Demandez notre LIVRE D'OR contenant les témoignages d'Admiration des Grands Maîtres de l'Art.

THE AEOLIAN CO
SOCIÉTÉ ANON. FRANÇAISE AU CAPITAL DE 5 000 000 DE FRANCS
PARIS
et chez tous nos Agents de France

(c)







Are these great men but names to you?

These men gave to the world much of its finest music.

There is not one human thought or emotion which you cannot find expressed in their works. They wrote for the music lovers of future generations—for you.

Their names are household words but how familiar are you with the music that made these names famous?

Do you know Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," Chopin's Nocturnes, Handel's "Messiah," Wagner's "Lohengrin" or Haydn's "Creation"?

Yet you can play these and every other important musical work on

The Pianola Piano
With the Metrostyle and Themodist

You can enjoy your music with The Pianola Piano as you can play every work of all the ballads of a great piano for you to meet the master of the past with perfect technique and every important masterpiece of your own time. Remembering the greatest masters of the present as well.

Remember there is only one Pianola—no other instrument can use the term. Call and play the genuine Pianola at Aeolian Hall, or write for Catalogue 4.

THE ORCHESTRELLE CO.
AEOLIAN HALL
135-6-7 NEW BOND STREET, LONDON, W.
And at PARIS, BRUXELLES, NEW YORK, MELBOURNE, SYDNEY, ETC.

(d)

Fig. 4 – Pianists and composers.

As a kind of sanctuary of the most venerated spirits, these advertisements allow us to understand the canon of prestige at the time within the social sphere of the middle class and how the commercial strategies related to this prestige were articulated. A case in point is that of Welte, as the German manufacturer only dealt in recordings for the reproducing piano and its marketing strategy was based on the reputation of the pianists that perforated the master copies of its rolls. This business scenario permitted a relationship of endorsement between manufacturer and artist that would only gain in strength as the 20th century progressed.³ These contracts represented mutual promotion with an unprecedented media reach for the artist that therefore made them very hard to resist. Saint-Saëns, Busoni, Fauré, Paderewski, Lhévinne, Hofmann, Ganz, Horowitz, de Pachmann and Casella are some of the pianists that most often feature in these ads, and in some cases their image is accompanied by some favourable comment about the recording system (see Example 4b). The fact that they worked exclusively with recorded rolls meant that Welte's advertisements had some characteristic elements to them: when a pair of hands is shown playing, for example, they are always depicted in a hazy fashion; a device used to denote that their rolls are destined for automatic reproduction (see Example 4a). The formula of the diffuse image — that other companies used in order to revive the great composers of the past as phantasmagorical apparitions — had for Welte a double publicity meaning as it hybridises the human element (the rolls are strict interpretations) with the automatised sound reproduction (the capturing of a real performance on a medium that reproduces sound with unprecedented fidelity).⁴ In the case of Aeolian, on the other hand, their strategy took on a dual character as the American manufacturer sold many more rolls for the player piano than it did for the reproducing piano. Nevertheless, the device of the composer and his testimonial is very much present in most of their advertisements.

Having an enormous catalogue of compositions from all epochs at their disposal resulted in Aeolian working as much with the device of the pianist in vogue (Moszkowski, Humperdinck, Sauer, Carreño, or Busoni and Paderewski, who had also been recorded by Welte), as with other historical composers (see Examples 4c and 4d). In other instances, the recurring presence of Beethoven in ads by various different companies seems to confirm the iconic media status that the composer from Bonn enjoyed at the beginning of the 20th century. In the pianola advertisements, the Beethoven cult — fuel for countless academic papers of varying aesthetic and ideological slants — comes to us by means of representations that are highly infused with symbolic components.

The allegory of Beethoven's ghost

There are numerous advertisements that feature a phantasmagorical Beethoven; semi-transparent, a spirit from beyond the grave that appears next to the instrument to communicate a forceful message to us. This is a message that the text of the Apollo Piano Company (see Example 5a) synthesises to perfection with the question “were it possible today to listen to Beethoven himself playing his sonatas, what would we not do to hear the Master's own interpretation?”. Over and above the iconic value of Beethoven's image, the intention of the question is none other than to raise awareness of the tremendous advantages of the novel device, namely the preservation of personal performances by the great composers of the time. As such, the image of Beethoven is a pretext for advertising the value of the artefact, juxtaposing what we will never be able to have (Beethoven's personal performances) with what the reproducing piano will permit us to have (to at the very least enjoy interpretations of his work by contemporary

pianists and composers). In another apparition of Beethoven's ghost (in this case for the Farrand Company, see Example 5b) the composer is shown leaning on the instrument, listening anxiously as if preparing to deliver a verdict on the performance of the pianola player. It is doubtless the great composer's verdict that represents maximum aesthetic authority. This is an idea inherited from the 19th century — let us not forget that Brahms spoke of the “footsteps of a giant” behind him (Cook, 2001, p. 36)⁵ — and one that can be confirmed from a new perspective at the start of the 20th century, the same as that being offered by the pianola advertisement. In addition to the figure of Beethoven, there are many other protagonists that reinforce the character of the media icon via the pianola poster. Companies such as Ampico — that seemed to be particularly fond of this sort of thing — habitually showed the faces of contemporary composers of the likes of Rachmaninov, Stravinsky, Ornstein or Godowsky (see Examples 5c and 5d) accompanied by the usual sorts of comments regarding the excellence of the product.

can capture all the magic of the best performers (everything that is absent from the score) and reproduce it with exactitude. The unrepeatable magic of a sound that happens only once can now be captured and domesticated. In the advertisement for the player piano that same discourse alluding to the great masters often comes into conflict with another classic argument put forward by the industry: that of “perfection without practise” (Ogren, 1989, p. 88), which tells us that practice is no longer necessary for a good performance. This sort of discourse is often found in these advertisements that have opted to employ the figure of a child — and to a lesser degree the elderly — as a publicity device together with a slogan alluding to increased ease of performance. In some cases such as in the Ampico poster (see Example 5c) we see hybrid strategies that, as they introduce a pedagogical slant, insinuate that the best way to learn to play the piano is by using rolls containing works perforated by great composers and pianists.

The pianola in times of war

Finally, there is a last group of advertisements that, despite being almost incidental due to their scarcity (a mere 3% of the total), is also of interest from an analytical point of view: the war-themed poster. With the outbreak of the First World War, and especially once the United States had entered the conflict, the pianola also became an instrument placed at the service of patriotic sentiment in times of war. In these ads, the publicists promoting the pianola began to appeal to the collective sentiment in such a way that once again music was to become very effective fuel to power feelings of nationalism. Soldiers — the apparent main protagonists in the conflict — as well as the hundreds of thousands of citizens witnessing the conflict from afar, all felt cheered on by the military melodies that the pianola could reproduce: *Sons of the Sea*, *Soldiers of the*

King, etc.⁶ Slogans, hymns and patriotic chants that show us that, even if indirectly, the business of war was also business for the music industry (see Examples 6a and 6b). Other images in this category allude to the fact that, in times of war, to have music at one's disposal with the help of this device would keep the family entertained whilst they wait for their father or husband to return home from performing their duty as defenders of the fatherland. The last image that we see in this category is one of a woman playing to the wounded (see Example 6a), once again reinforcing the prototypical social functions of both sexes.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 6 – Two examples of war-themed posters

According to Timothy D. Taylor (2007), the US Navy supplied 128 of its warships with pianolas. Other sources claim this to be 80 ships and state that the supply of pianolas to ships might actually go back to seven years prior to the conflict (Howe, 1991). In fact, in one of his expeditions to the North Pole, Robert Peary thought it indispensable to have a pianola available, stating that “it is an essential piece of kit to our teams. Men feel lonely at the North Pole, they become vulnerable and their depressions are dissipated by the marvellous music” (Taylor, 2007, p. 288). All this is further proof that permits us to reflect again on the uses and functions of musical activity, activity that modern Western societies have understood to be merely entertainment but that in reality can come to fulfil other aims that are vastly more complex. The purpose of a pianola on a warship might have been simply to entertain, but its ultimate aim, however, may well have been much more valuable than simple entertainment.

IV. Conclusions

The pianola was the first system to permit the mass dissemination of music and one of the first artefacts conceived for the commercialisation of a recorded sound medium. Its tremendous social relevance can be studied from various different perspectives but its promotion through advertisements is one that cannot be avoided. The analysis of the advertising discourse of these posters has allowed us to confirm how the instrument, in each of its variants, articulated particular functions in the areas of the reception and consumption of music of the epoch. The study of the processes through which music reconstituted itself as a commodity with mass appeal shows us the capacity of the media to generate signifiers and construct social realities. Signifiers that, on the one hand, can be of tremendous interest from a perspective of gender studies, for which the result of

this process of meaning — cryptic although operative — is evident: the pianola phenomenon, furnished with a powerful propaganda tool, contributed to the objectivization of women, something that occurred at a key moment in the modern advertising market. This objectivization of women is perfectly traceable from the posters of the beginning of the 20th century right the way through to our current discourses. Finally, and drawing on the previous argument, it seems indispensable to put forward one last argument: the advertising mechanism of the pianola, with its ability to sell a product from the point of view of new marketing strategies, not only contributed to the media objectivization of women but also to the objectivization of music itself, turning it, for the first time in recorded history, into a physical object of mass consumption. From this perspective it is important to remember the implications of technical reproducibility over general perceptions of music — something that Walter Benjamin would bring up decades later — and that implied a profound change in listening habits, in consumption and, as such, in the very conceptualisation of music itself.

Notes

1 We are using the term 'pianola' in a broad sense to refer to different kinds of player pianos and reproducing pianos. Historically, the term pianola refers to a particular model of instrument patented in 1897 by Edwin Scott Votey (1856 - 1931). After being patented, the American company Aeolian — known for its Orchestrille organs — was quick to persuade Votey to cede the rights to his new invention. 'The Pianola' was thus launched onto the market under license from Aeolian and rapidly began to make its name throughout the world. For a more extensive account of the origins of the pianola, see: Patteson, 2016; Ospina Romero 2019, or the Pianola Institute website: <http://www.pianola.org>

2 The main sources that allowed us to access these two hundred advertisements can be organised into three main groups: public and private institutions (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Biblioteca de Catalunya, The Pianola Institute and the Amsterdam Pianola Museum), specific publications (principally Ord-Hume, 2004 and Taylor, 2007), and websites such as Ebay.com and Todocoleccion.net. This is not an arbitrary selection of 200 ads, as the sample contains all the posters found in these sources in May 2015 during the preparation of my PhD thesis. These sources were consulted again in May 2019 at the time of writing this article and did not show any substantial changes. While the institutions had the same advertisements, Internet sites offered some new posters that presented exactly the same contexts found in the first selection.

3 An area of marketing that is close to patronage, endorsement implies a mutual understanding between company and public figure. The company takes on the services of an artist, a musician or an élite sports person on the agreement that he or she will endorse their products at given times that are stipulated in the contract. Nowadays this is commonly employed, especially by clothing labels, music companies and in show business. The parties tend to agree on advertising links such as advertisements, photo reportages for the graphic arts, etc.

4 In this sense it is interesting to reflect on the concept of “high fidelity”: whilst other sound reproducing devices aspire to reproduce sound as closely as possible to the original, the pianola does not need to approximate itself to any original sound as its medium, the perforated paper roll, automatically reproduces the sound of a real piano.

5 In this sense, Mark Evan Bonds sees a "clear manifestation of the composer's inability to scape Beethoven's influence" (1996, p.138) which may somehow be connected to Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" theory (cited in Bonds, 1996 p.1). Thus, the image of Brahms being surrounded by the giant steps of Beethoven, fits perfectly with this idea of the artist being affected by its relationship with their predecessors.

6 The advertisement of the manufacturer Orchestrelle (see Example 6b) shows us a list of military marches to be found on pianola rolls. As a slogan, the poster uses *It's a long way to Tipperary*, written by Jack Judge and Henry James "Harry" Williams in 1912 and which became very popular with Irish and English soldiers during the First World War.

List of figures

Figure 1

(a) Pianola piano by Aeolian Co. Spanish branch. Circa 1920. Source: Todocoleccion.net

(b) Pianola piano by Weber Co. Source: Ord-Hume, A. Automatic Pianos. A Collector's Guide to the Pianola, Barrel Piano and Aeolian Orchestrelle. Surrey: Schiffer Publishing, 2004: 389

(c) Pianola (original push up) by Aeolian Co. Source: [Ebay.com] The Review of Reviews, p. 107 (American version). Unknown date.

Figure 2

(a) Pianola piano by Aeolian Co. Spanish branch, circa 1920. Source: Todocoleccion.net

(b) Kranich & Bach player piano. Source: Ebay.com

Figure 3

(a) Artrio Angelus reproducing piano by Aeolian Co. Source: Taylor, T. D. 'The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of Mechanical Music'. Ethnomusicology, Spring 2007, vol. 15 no. 2, p. 294

(b) Duo Art reproducing piano by Wilcox & White. Source: Ord-Hume, A. Automatic Pianos. A Collector's Guide to the Pianola, Barrel Piano and Aeolian Orchestrelle. Surrey: Schiffer Publishing, 2004: 240

Figure 4

(a) Welte Mignon reproducing piano. Source: Taylor, T. D. 'The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of Mechanical Music'. Ethnomusicology, Spring 2007, vol. 15 no. 2, p. 300

(b) Paderewski on Welte Mignon system. American Branch. Source: Spanish National Library

(c) Duo Art pianola piano by Aeolian. French branch. Source: Spanish National Library

(d) Pianola piano by The Orchestrelle Co. Aeolian English branch. Source: Ebay.com

Figure 5

(a) Apollo reproducing piano by The Apollo Piano Co. Source: Taylor, T. D. 'The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of Mechanical Music'. Ethnomusicology, Spring 2007, vol. 15 no. 2, p. 299

(b) Cecilian player piano by The Farrand Co. Source: Todocoleccion.net

(c) Ampico reproducing piano. Source: Ebay.com

(d) Ampico reproducing piano. Source: Todocoleccion.net

Figure 6

(a) Pianola piano by The Orchestrelle Co. Aeolian English branch. Source: Ebay.com

(b) Pianola piano by The Orchestrelle Co. Aeolian English branch. Source: Ord-Hume, A. Automatic Pianos. A Collector's Guide to the Pianola, Barrel Piano and Aeolian Orchestrelle. Surrey: Schiffer Publishing, 2004: 399

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