



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll



Alpert, Pauline

See [video](#) of this Hall-Of-Fame Member

(Born, December 27th, 1900, New York, New York; died, April 11th, 1988, Bronx, New York.) Pauline Alpert was a vaudeville, concert, radio, and TV star, a recording artist, and the creator of over 500 piano rolls for Duo-Art.

In radio's golden age, Alpert frequently performed for Paul Whiteman, Rudy Valle and Fred Allen. She even had her own show on WOR in New York. She appeared in Katz's Pajamas, a Fifi D'Orsay Pauline Alpert musical. Robert Armbruster, another AMICA Hall of Famer and head of Duo Art's recording department once said that Alpert played so fast that he had to ask her to slow down so people would believe it was a hand played roll.

A Tribute to Pauline Alpert

PAULINE ALPERT ROOFF
1900-1988

Pauline Alpert Remembered

The Rag Times, May 1988
The Whirlwind Pianist by Galen Wilkes

Contributed by Dorothy Bromage

Pauline Alpert, known as *The Whirlwind Pianist*, died on April 6, 1988 in the Bronx, New York. She was 87 and one of the last of the great pianists of the novelty era and also one of the many outstanding female pianists. As with any of the survivors of the ragtime/novelty era I could find, I tried to get to know her and most of the information which appears here is directly from her. She had a charming personality and was always very grateful for her fans. The times I talked to her she always was gregarious and full of energy.

Pauline Alpert was born in New York on December 27, 1900. Both of her parents were very talented. Her childhood was virtually spent in poverty, roaming all over wherever her father, Samuel Alpert, could find work painting portraits. He was a Russian immigrant and an excellent painter. After a while they finally settled in Rochester. When Pauline was nine years old he painted her portrait and it hung over her piano at her home in the Bronx. He died in 1919. Pauline's mother was from New York, possibly born in Maryland, and was Hungarian. She was a very good pianist and singer. She gave Pauline her first piano lessons at the age of seven for about two years. She died in 1931. When Pauline was eleven the family's finances were so bad she was forced to go out and earn money by teaching piano lessons for twentyfive cents. Her sister Ethel played violin and still lives today in Florida.



Apart from a private scholarship Pauline won a four year scholarship to the Eastman School of Music in Rochester where she received her classical training. During lunch hours she'd enter

tain her friends on the piano. She had a knack for popular music which she played in her own arrangements. Because of the popularity of this she decided to go into popular music.

Many contemporary ragtime and old popular music enthusiasts will probably know Pauline best as a piano roll artist. She turned out many rolls, her own arrangements, of medleys from Broadway shows and her own novelty piano solos, of which she composed around 25. Her most well known was *Dream of a Doll* (1934) which became her theme song. She recalled that her career really didn't get going until the late 30's, around 1938.

She played several years in vaudeville, was featured at the Roxy and Paramount theatres, and on practically every radio station in New York City. It was at one of her theatre engagements that Zez Confrey happened to hear Pauline interpolate his *Kitten on the Keys* into her performance, unbeknownst to her. He was so impressed he wrote her a letter to say how much he enjoyed it. *Kitten and Dizzy Fingers* remained two of her favorite pieces.

She was an outstanding pianist, in fact she even won great acclaim from George Gershwin. She had a firm touch, and played very cleanly and precisely with great confidence. Her technique was truly awe inspiring. She stood only 5'2 1/2" but possessed the power of a Tom Turpin.

A few years ago while doing research I discovered that Pauline made two sound pictures in 1927 for Vitaphone. They were solo appearances of her just playing the piano. Among the selections she played were *Kitten on the Keys* and *Nola*. Not only was Pauline captured on film but many other famous musicians and vaudevillians

including Percy Wenrich and Dolly Connolly! What incredible "living" documents these must be! I am in the process of trying to hunt them down.

In 1940 she married Dr. Sidney Roofff who was also a fine musician. He played violin in a doctors' orchestra. Pauline continued with her career, having no children. Dr. Roofff died around 1968.

Pauline played many cruises, toured all over the United States, Canada, and South America, played a six month tour of the West Coast and the White House three times. Besides her piano rolls she recorded for the prestigious Victor label, and even for Muzak. In fact, she was doing so much work that she recorded the Muzak material under the pseudonym of Peggy Anderson, using the same initials. She told me that she would occasionally go into a lobby and hear herself playing! "It's nice to know I'm still around."

Among her radio work she split a half hour show with the celebrated harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler during the 40's and 50's. In recent years she made appearances for AMICA, the Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors Association, where she still mesmerized audiences at the keyboard. Her death calls to mind the fact that she was one of the few left from that era and that we are simply running out of survivors from that cherished past.

She was a member of ASCAP and her music was published by Mills and Southern Music. Her music has not been reprinted to my knowledge but I have seen her folios so they are possible to find. Some of her performances have been reissued on Folkways. Chopsticks is on Ragtime Piano Interpretations and Doll Dance is on Ragtime Piano Novelties of the Twenties.

PAULINE ALPERT HIGHLIGHTS NEW JERSEY MEETING

October 1, 1978 marked a very important first in the history of the New Jersey Chapter of AMICA. Pauline Alpert, the woman who sounds like two pianos, was the guest of honor at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dearborn. Not only was this a great honor for New Jersey, but for the whole eastern AMICA region as never before has a recording artist attended an east coast meeting.

The afternoon began normally with our usual business meeting. This was followed by Ms. Alpert who held us all spellbound with her amazing talent on the keyboard. She played a variety of the music that made her famous; from Rain on the Roof to several Gershwin favorites. When we finally allowed her to take a break from the piano, she was bombarded with questions about her career and those of other period artists with whom she was familiar. She also autographed several of her Duo-Art rolls and 78 r.p.m. records which several members had brought with them. Pauline was certainly an inspiration to be around. Not only is she still extremely gifted, but her marvelous sense of humor endeared her to everyone. We hated to see the afternoon end.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Bob Rosencrans and the officers of the New Jersey chapter accompanied Pauline to dinner at a beautiful restaurant overlooking the Delaware River near Trenton. Ms. Alpert kept us entertained throughout dinner with numerous stories of her own experiences in the 30's and 40's, not only about her years of association with the Aeolian Corporation, but also of performances she gave for Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman just to mention two!



The following are excerpts from a recent letter written by Ethel J. Lorber, sister of Pauline Alpert.

... One day after George Gershwin's death, Pauline was entertaining on a cruise ship, and Mrs. Gershwin (his mother) came over to admire her playing and asked Pauline to please come visit her in New York City. When the time came and Pauline arrived, she discovered another brother, Arthur Gershwin, who wanted to take lessons from Pauline. This went on for a while, but I am not sure of the length of time.

Also, of interest to AMICAns, when Pauline made her piano rolls for Duo-Art, they had to block out some of the notes, because they said the public would never believe it was one person playing. Arthur Levine, the great Classical pianist, met her at a party and said, "My dear Pauline, I wish I could play the way you do!"

Also, once when performing for President Truman at the White House, he invited her upstairs and played for her on his old upright piano from Missouri. She said he was very charming.

...Pauline was married in 1940 to Dr. Sidney B. Roof. Dr. Roof passed away 21 years ago. They did not have any children."

RECOLLECTIONS OF PAULINE

By Robert M. Taylor

We met first at the Dayton Convention in 1978. I had heard in detail about Pauline Alpert from Molly Yeckley who was to go to the airport and pick her up. ...if she actually would come AMICAns were gathered in a reception area of some sort and all of a sudden Pauline Alpert was with us.

I have forgotten who it was that had some of her rolls, but I believe it was Brian Meeder. One was put on the Duo-Art: it began playing and she shook her head and said "faster"; the tempo was increased, she said "faster" again and was not content until the roll was going about tempo 110. Of course, as we saw Pauline's physical disabilities, we thought that this was just a poor old woman with delusions of what she could do - then she sat down at the piano and we all became believers. I didn't have much time to spend in a small group with Pauline due to other responsibilities at Dayton, but somehow we got to know each other and the telephone calls began.

Pauline was always right there by her telephone. She answered in a voice that seemed to carry all the way to Philadelphia without the aid of a telephone. The television was always blaring in the background. She was always good for a nice long chat, but we all learned fairly quickly that getting Pauline to answer a letter was impossible. Bill Eicher even sent writing paper and stamps (which Molly and Lee Yeckley and I presented to Pauline and then took a photo for Bill to prove that we had actually presented them to her).

There was a great love of chocolate candy and fudge sauce that we discovered fairly soon. A large box of Godiva chocolates would be devoured in short time. Jim Weisenborne sent Pauline a jar of fudge sauce for ice cream and Pauline confided to me that it was so good that she just ate it without ice cream.

Because of business and family connections, I go to New York City a number of times a year. It was only a little over 2 hours from my home in Philadelphia to Pauline's on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. Pauline and her late husband, Dr. Roof moved to this apartment in the late 1930's and Pauline continued to live here until the neighborhood became so dangerous and her health so delicate that a move was necessary in the mid-1980's.

A number of trips were made to visit with Pauline. She would never permit any of us to come to her apartment; we would pick her up in front of her apartment house at an appointed time. A drive around the city, a lunch or early dinner at a nice restaurant were always appreciated, and we were always regaled with stories.

The Yeckleys and I somehow managed to get Pauline up to the Rainbow Room on the 65th floor of the NBC Building at Rockefeller Center. It was still just as she remembered it when she played there in the 1940's, and she was thrilled to be there she told us. Of course, it brought back a flood of memories and she told us that "I used to be so pretty and look at me now". She told us that she came upon some old photos and tore them all up because they made her so sad.

On another occasion, Bobby Clark (then AMICA's membership secretary) was visiting me. We went to New York City to see Pauline. We had a lovely brunch on a Sunday at Windows on the World on the 110th Floor of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. As we drove north up Sixth Avenue, Bobby pulled out the cassette tape recorder that we had purchased for Pauline; Bobby had recorded a number of Pauline's 78 records and he began to play the recorder softly, then a little louder. All of a sudden, Pauline shouted "that's me" and Bobby handed her the tape recorder and told her that this was a present to her

from us. That was one of the few times that I ever saw Pauline overwhelmed.

Those of you that had Pauline autograph rolls she made, treasure them as I do the 10 or so that she personalized to me over the years. She always looked at the title to see what the roll was and I remember when I handed her a copy of "Pompanola" she looked at it rather

quizzically and said the title in her best Bronx accent and then said "that's a dumb title, I don't ever remember playing that" ...but she autographed it in any case.

Never being one to dispute the word of a woman as to her age and much less our own expert in such matters (Emmett Ford), there is at least a difference of opinion as to when Pauline was born. In one place her date of birth is listed as 1900 and elsewhere we read 1912 with great authority. No matter, she was a one of a kind, and we were all enriched by knowing her in person. We still have the pleasure of her magnificent Duo-Art performances.



Photo from the Collection of Robert J. Rosencrans Photo Credit: Stan Favret

l: r. - Henry Lange, Ursula's grand-daughter, Jeanette, Ursula Hollingshead, Flora Mora, Pauline Alpert, and Ruth B. Smith.
Bill and Jo Eicher in back.

KITTEN ON THE KEYS

By Jane Alexander

*From June 1936 issue of Popular Songs
Contributed by Guy Berthiaume, Montreal, Canada*

(Many AMICAns were enthralled by the playing of Pauline Alpert at several of our conventions, she was a Duo-Ar recording artist in her earlier years, as well as a composer of popular tunes.) Ed.



PAULINE ALPERT IS STILL AFRAID IT CAN'T BE REAL.

Pauline Alpert is honored and successful. Yet, she still feels the awful push of necessity. She still cannot realize that there is time to relax, and take 'a deep breath. She has not quite shaken off the

scare of a whole pack of wolves at the door!

Not that she ever gave in to fear! She didn't. But, as the roaring of a great steam engine lingers a while after the train is out of sight, so the howling of the wolves haunts this fascinating girl.

Pauline Alpert, *The Whirlwind Pianist*

She is the celebrated jazz pianist, who recently played by invitation, her own interpretations of "Here Lies Love," "Swanee," "Some One," and "Watch Over Me:" for the President of the United States.

The daughter of a Russian portrait painter, Pauline spent her pathetic childhood wherever her father set up his easel. "I was born in New York," Pauline told me. "We lived anywhere my father could get an order to do a portrait. After wandering from one place to another, we finally settled down in Rochester."

When Pauline was eleven, the family's financial distress was desperate. The little girl went out for business. She had to have it. She got piano pupils for herself at twenty-five cents a lesson.

Somehow, Pauline managed to finish high school; also, to win a scholarship at the Eastman Conservatory, where she studied for four years. She hoped to be a concert pianist. She only played classical music.

We spoke of her mother. "My mother was a Maryland girl," Pauline said wistfully. "Her people were from Hungary. Some of them were concert singers.

"Mother is gone, too. I remember her as always being ill. She had had infantile paralysis when a child. She gave me my first music lessons." Pauline suddenly stopped talking.

A beautiful girl, is this whirlwind of a pianist. She has large blue-gray eyes, set wide apart. Her very long, black eyelashes look mascaraed, but aren't. Fluffy titian hair sets as a Quaker bonnet over her smooth brow. She is young, fresh and strong. But the atmosphere of her youth clings about her like a heavy, white fog. Perhaps, her early fight for existence was easier than is her battle now to be happy and forget.

She picked up her story again, "A girl violinist and I entered a contest at the Rochester Temple theater. I was making my own arrangements, and making them in jazz." (Pauline was actually creating a new style of syncopated music.)

"At the Temple, we met the dance team of Hackett and Delmar. They encouraged us. We went to New York as soon as possible. It was a very bad season. We only secured three or four days work out of as many months.

"One of our engagements was in Glens Falls. The hotel we were stopping in burned down. My partner lost her violin. We both lost everything we had, even our clothes!"

Pauline grew up on work and worry. Grief was her constant companion. The blue flame of her musical genius rose out of childhood hardships and heartaches.

She sighed, and continued: "Then we had to go home. I got work as secretary in the Ryan Vanilla concern."

Suddenly, this wonderfully brave girl smiled, showing two rows of perfect white teeth.

"I smelled so of vanilla, I could hardly go out! The first thing I did when I reached home was to bathe. But that didn't help. The smell got into my clothes; Gee, it was embarrassing!"

It was "Nola," the first popular song she ever played in public. that, because it was so well liked, made Pauline decide to work in the popular branch of music.

Her success would taste sweeter, she says, were her gifted parents here to share it.

Pauline is a singularly engaging young person because she combines the manners of a sheltered home-girl with the thinking of a smart young business woman. She is a good listener, as well as conversationalist. She would like to sing, but declares she has no voice.

Every "fan" is a "friend" to Pauline.

"I answer every fan letter, and I have kept every one that I have received;" she told me with unaffected pleasure.

Pauline is not married, but no girl on Broadway is a finer catch. What George Gershwin is among bachelor composers, Pauline Alpert is among the women.

Music is never far from this musical girl's thoughts. It crowns all other subjects, as though all else might be fables and only music real.

She loves to dance and sing. She drives a car expertly. After only three weeks at the wheel, she drove to California. Blue is her favorite color.

"Oh, I think every girl should marry!" she nodded her lovely head. "I hope when I fall in love it will be with someone who loves music. Oh, I'd have to marry a man who loved music! It is my life. It is more than bread to me. It helps me to forget! It brings me happiness."

The AMICA, V13, No 7, 1976

PERFORATED PROFILES - PAULINE ALPERT

BY PETER MINTUN

If one word had to be chosen to describe the disposition of talented pianist Pauline Alpert (recently an Honorary member of AMICA) it would be "spunky,"

Miss Alpert, an effervescent lady who now lives a twenty minute subway ride from her native Manhattan Island, did not have to be discovered and asked to audition for the Duo-Art. "I had no contact with the Duo-Art people, though I had heard about them and found out where they were. I walked in and presented

Comedian Fred Allen, when introducing Pauline Alpert over his radio program presented her as "The Young Lady Who Sounds Like Two Pianos." Photo: Mrs. Pauline Alpert Roofff.

myself to the man (who was Frank Milne), sat down and played for him and he was flabbergasted!" They didn't need a talent scout to find Miss Alpert. "First of all, I had a lot of nerve - you know, 'spunk', in those days, and I was about the only pianist they had who played too many fancy things. They said people (their roll buyers) would not believe I was doing all that. 'They will think we are editing more notes in!' I was always a little bit overarranged, so I used to try to simplify some of the rolls I made. It's wonderful to hear that my rolls are listened to after so many years."

Asked what she knew of the recording process used by Duo-Art, Miss Alpert replied that she "...really never became too interested in the very technical part of it. I played it, and then it was played back for me and sometimes if they thought it was over-arranged they would have me reduce it a bit. They used to say that people would not believe that it was actually hand-played!" She is one of the many recording artists who believed in the faithfulness of the DuoArt's reproduction. "I thought it was a very good reproduction of my work. I used to love to make rolls. I wish that I had owned a Duo-Art; I have a lot of my piano rolls but I have no place to play them." Miss Alpert's personal piano is a beautiful Steinway that is showcased in her sunken living room. Fortunately, fans of Miss Alpert's music have recently offered tape recordings of her rolls as well as her phonograph records.

Pauline Alpert came as a late Christmas present to her parents. She was born in New York City on the 27th of December. When she was about two years old the Alpert family moved to Rochester, New York, where Miss Alpert attended public schools. She showed such talent at an early age that she took piano lessons. This led to a four year scholarship at the famous Eastman School of Music. Although her training had been in the classics, Pauline Alpert developed a great love for the popular styles that were sweeping the country. "I remember the first popular song I ever played was Irving Berlin's 'All Alone.' Even at the age of eleven, I was putting in the little frills and things. I always had that knack." Anyone who has listened to ballads played by her, like "Tonight You Belong To Me" on her 1927 Victor recording knows exactly what she means by "that knack."

Miss Alpert was very friendly with the Gershwin family. She first met Mrs. Gershwin on a cruise and later she taught jazz piano to George Gershwin's younger brother, Arthur. "George Gershwin had heard me play and



thought I was one of the best." Her favorite composers included Gershwin, Vincent Youmans and Richard Rodgers. In fact, of all her piano arrangements, she favors her versions of Youmans' "Tea for Two" and Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm", which she featured regularly in concert and on radio. She has performed for Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman at the White House, and at the National Press Club.

Miss Alpert's professional career began from the point where she won first prize in the Eastman School amateur contest. While playing at the Paramount Theatre in New York, she was engaged for national tour by the famous Fanchon & Marco theatrical presentations. This took her as far west as San Francisco and Los Angeles, and included performances in San Jose and San Diego, California. In 1927 she made several piano solo recordings for the Victor Talking Machine Company on their popular label. Later she recorded albums for Sonora and Pilot Tone.



The famous New York Paramount Theatre, where Pauline Alpert was discovered by the Fanchon & Marco theatrical people during the mid-1920's. Photo: Willinger.

During the early part of the Depression, Pauline Alpert made her film debut, as many entertainers did, by appearing in a couple of movie "shorts." Miss Alpert performed with Fifi Dorsay, the musical comedy star, in a film called "The Cat's Pajamas", filmed in Brooklyn for Warner Brothers' Vitaphone Varieties ("Miniature Masterpieces of the Talking Singing Screen"), Her other ten-minute film was made with well-known orchestra leader David Mendoza.

In 1934 Miss Alpert commenced a radio career that lasted twenty years. She was heard on NBC, CBS and WOR (Mutual Broadcasting). Her theme song and also

her favorite of her own compositions was "Dream of a Doll", which was published as a piano solo.

Frank Milne was the man who gave Pauline Alpert her first recording engagement with Duo-Art. "Frank was a very nice fellow. I knew him very well. He moved to East Rochester where their main plant was and that's where the recordings went on. I worked for him on 57th

Street in New York, where they had their recordings done then." She said she had heard Milne play the piano, but that his musical editing and perforating was the talent in which he excelled.

In the mid-1930's, Paul Whiteman featured the popular pianist and singer Romana Davies ("Romana and Her Grand Piano"), Roy Bargy and Dana Suesse. Pauline Alpert was also engaged by Whiteman to perform solo on his radio shows as well as the shows of Fred Allen and Horace Heidt.

Pictured is the very talented pianist-singer RAMONA, a colleague of the young Pauline Alpert. Photo: Fox Studios, 1935.

Today Pauline Alpert's hobby is still music. She also says she enjoys relaxing to television and card games. When asked how she felt about the current revival of high quality music of her generation, she responded in her warm, open way: "I am really delighted... I think it is just lovely."



PAULINE ALPERT DISCOGRAPHY

Victor Talking Machine Company, New York City
Studio: "Tonight You Belong To Me" #20489 "The Little White House at the End of

Honeymoon Lane 20489

"Hallelujah!" 20786

"Magnolia" 20786

"Dancing Tambourine" 21252

"The Doll Dance" 21252

"Saint Louis Blues" Unissued

"Song of India" Unissued

Sonora Album No. MS-460, Series E

DUO-ART RECORDINGS OF PAULINE ALPERT

a) Dance series:

713246 What Good Is "Good Morning"? (There's More

Good In "Good Night")

308 Just One More Kiss 326 I know That You Know 367 Ain't She Sweet? 388 I'm Learning Now 393 Side By Side 397 Sweet Marie 404 Me And My Shadow 409 Magnolia 415 Bye Bye Pretty Baby

416 That's Why I'm Homeward Bound 430 Dancing Tambourine 432 Are You Lonesome Tonight? 438 My Blue Heaven 440 Blue Baby, Why Are You Blue? 444 (Here Am I) Broken Hearted 448 Kiss And Make Up

0456 The Song Is Ended-

457 Dear, On A Night Like This" 518 Girl Of My Dreams

519 Hiding In The Corner Of Your Smile 545 Lonesome In The Moonlight* 549 Come Back, Chiquita 550 Crazy Rhythm

561 Blue Grass 562 Dream House

568 Once In A Lifetime

570 When Eliza Rolls Her Eyes 575 Roses Of Yesterday

585 Anything Your Heart Desires 590 Pompanola

616 Where The Shy Little Violets Grow 629 She's Funny That Way 631 The Wedding Of The Painted Doll

635 My Castle In Spain Is A Shack In The Lane

708 Sunny Side Up

747 Sweepin' The Clouds Away

759 When It's Springtime In The Rockies

778 The Kiss Waltz (from "Dancing Sweeties") 793 To Whom It May Concern 862 Rain On The Roof

866 Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea

indicates Ballad arrangement.

b) Ballad Series:

10413 My Angeline

453 The Perfect Song

456 There's Danger In Your Eyes, Cherie

c) Classical Series:

7244 Valse Parisienne (Roberts)

309 Musical Comedy Medley No. 2

The One Girl (Rainbow); I'm Bringing A

Red Rose (Whoopie); Makin' Whoopie (Whoopie!; Let's Do It (Paris); Feeling I'm Falling (Treasure Girl)

333 Ragamuffin

343 Fashionette

355 Kewpie

390 Musical Comedy Tid-Bits From Broadway

Nina Rosa (Nina Rosa); What Is This Thing Called Love? (Wake Up And Dream); Soon (Strike Up The Band);
What Do I Care? (Top Speed); You Do Something To Me (Fifty Million Frenchmen); Why? (Sons O'Guns)

*Broadway columnist Nick Kenney wrote "Pauline Alpert should be called First Lady of the Keyboard." Photo:
Mrs. Pauline Alpert Roof.*

"Sparkling Piano Melodies "Dream of a Doll" - "Toy Trumpet "

"Sweet Sue"

"Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" Played Miss Alpert also recorded an Records in the 1940's.

By Pauline Alpert "Where Or When" "Chopsticks" "In A Country Garden"

"Hungarian Rhapsody"(No. 2) (Liszt) album for Pilot Tone



Sparkling piano melodies
PLAYED BY *Pauline Alpert*

Sonora
ALBUM NO. MS-460
SERIES E