



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll

Leo Podolsky

by Emmett M. Ford

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The story of Leo Podolsky's life is a story of a **travels** pianist, instructor, piano roll artist, lecturer, **recitalis** and author.

He was born May 25, 1894 in Odessa, Russia. Music: talent was evident at the age of eight. He was attracted **to** the music of a hurdy-gurdy in the street of Odessa **an** rushing home, successfully picked out its melody on **the** piano. He had piano instruction with several teachers - seventeen in all - but found the satisfactory onf George Lalewicz at the Cracow Conservatory. Later he enrolled in the Royal Academy in Vienna, winning scholarship ~ difficult for a foreigner ~ and also winning **the** Liszt and the Anton Rubinstein prizes. His Berlin debut was in 1912.

Graduating from the Academy he had a contract for a international concert tour, but it was cancelled by the beginning of World War I. He was inducted for military service and often wearing "tails" over his army uniforr. gave concerts throughout Russia and Siberia- a tour oh,000 miles.

Stranded in Yokohama by the Russian Revolution and without funds and friends, he organized a successful concert series resulting in an invitation to teach and perform in Japanese royal circles. There were 426 appearances in the Far East tour and he also appeared with symphony orchestras in Java and Japan, China, the Philippines, Federate Malay States, Dutch East Indies, British India, Burma and Ceylon.

Mr. Podolsky returned to Europe and was on the faculty of the New Conservatory of Music in Berlin and gave concerts in Germany, France, Holland, Belgium and pain.



His U.S. debut in 1924 was in Chicago and he gave three recitals within eight weeks. Other recitals were in New Y

For 18 years he was the supervisor of the piano department at Saint Marys College, Notre Dame in Indiana. In 1926 Mr. Podolsky joined the faculty of the Sherwood music School in Chicago and is now on his 56th consecutive season. He has been the guest artist at State Teachers Conventions of Arizona, Arkansas, Michigan, O

As an American citizen, he has represented the U.S.A. as a faculty member at the famous Mozarteum in Salzburg, taking with him groups of teachers and students. Several German students and their professors have attended his classes.

Mr. Podolsky has had many students who have won prizes and are occupying important professional positions in the U.S.A. and some foreign countries. He has given hundreds of master classes throughout the U.S.A. and in 1956 began a series of piano workshops with his associates, June Davison and Ardella Schaub.

He has edited much piano literature and books on instruction methods and is the editor of an authentic edition of the works of Mozart.

THE PODOLSKY ROLL PROJECT

by Robert W. Taylor



Robert Taylor and Dr. Leo Podolsky

It all started when I was chairman of the 1983 convention which was hosted by the Chicago Chapter. That's when I first met honorary member Leo Podolsky. He was enthusiastic, cooperative, and charming. He spoke at our banquet. Then he played. His selection was the Rachmaninoff Prelude in B Minor, Op. 32 No. 10. He was a tremendous success and immediately established a warm rapport with the AMICA audience. After the convention, Leo and I exchanged notes. That is when he suggested that he make some more Ampico rolls. I was overwhelmed.

Where does a person start to make a new reproducing piano roll, one that is truly hand played and worthy of the name "reproducing"? The problems didn't bother Leo. He was ready and wanted to record a program while the music was still "in his fingers". He had prepared a program divided into two parts. The first part was all waltzes while the second part was a more complex collection reflecting on "the serious side of life". There was enough music to make a ten roll set or two jumbo Ampico rolls.

The Chicago Chapter agreed to fund the project with \$1,500. This money, which was raised by selling concert tickets at the 1983 convention, was to be the "seed" money. If possible, the money would be returned to the chapter for other projects benefiting AMICAns.

I was able to make a deal with Playrite Music rolls to use their recording piano. This proved to be a blind alley since the cost of sending Leo to Turlock, California for the recording session was more than our budget could support. Everything stopped. We just couldn't do it.

Leo moved to Burbank to strengthen his relationship with the music school at USC. At that point, Dorothy Bromage became the catalyst that made everything work. She knew of our prior efforts and took over by taking Leo to meet with Wayne Stahnke. Wayne had built a new electronic reproducing and recording piano for J. B. Nethercut. That piano was a Steinway concert grand. In his lab, Stahnke had another instrument, a Yamaha that was fitted with the Stahnke reproducing/recording system. It was on this Yamaha that Leo Podolsky made history (June 1984) by recording the first true hand played reproducing piano rolls since original factory production ceased.

The Nethercut Steinway has been donated to USC. Wayne Stahnke built another reproducing/recording system for Mr. Nethercut. This later instrument being a Bosendorfer Imperial Grand which can be played in duet fashion with the Wurlitzer pipe organ at San Sylmer. Bosendorfer now offers this system to the public in its Imperial Grand, without the pipe organ.

The Stahnke piano was really never meant to make the paper rolls. Another talented roll enthusiast came into play in this aspect of this project. Enter Robbie Rhodes, once more, thanks to Dorothy Bromage for putting this all together. Robbie knew basically how the Stahnke recording piano worked. From this knowledge, he would be able to design a computer program that would extract from the recorded electronic data, all the necessary elements to make a paper roll. Many measurements taken by the Stahnke piano could not be directly used in the Ampico. It therefore became necessary to somewhat condense the recorded data without losing the essence of the recording.

I had been talking to Richard Tonnesen about using his perforating equipment to produce the finished rolls. I was impressed with his work in converting Red Welte rolls to Licensee format. His computer controlled perforator had also impressed me when I had seen it at the second Dallas convention. The Tonnesen perforator seemed to be ideally suited to a "Speciality" project such as ours.

The calculations for roll length, tempo and other factors seemed endless. The program was designed to fully compensate for the build up on the take-up spool. We planned, we wrote letters, we phoned each other, but progress was very slow. It was already February of 1985 and the data had not been successfully converted. The Detroit Convention (1985) was our target for publicly introducing the new Podolsky rolls.

Our ads to the bulletin had already been sent in, but we were already very behind schedule.

Just in time for the Detroit convention, Robbie used a data print out to hand cut a roll of short length. He quickly sent that prototype master to Richard Tonnesen who was able to produce copies for our convention demonstration. The coding did not do justice to "A" pianos, but the preview was to be on Jim Weisenbome's Ampico B at the convention, so we went with it.

Following the convention, we had accumulated orders for 83 sets of the rolls. This was far short of our projected breakeven point of 125 sets, but close enough to continue. Certainly we could sell more rolls once they were a reality. But, the reality eluded us.

In September 1985 we felt the lack of progress compelled a letter of apology. It was mailed even though that expense was not in the budget. Shortly after that letter went out, I found out that the entire computer program had been eaten by a hungry old machine, (the disk drive crashed). We were devastated. We were holding \$5000.00 in deposit money and our entire project went back to the first square. The explanation of our dilemma was mailed December 11, 1985 to our patrons, another unbudgeted expense and the true low point of our spirits.

Wayne Stahnke tried to cheer me up. He said in the computer business, many times it takes a complete disaster, such as ours, to produce the best program. I didn't know it then, but he was right. Robbie decided to do the whole program over again on an Apple Macintosh. Richard Tonnesen was converting his perforator to be controlled by the Macintosh. Robbie and Richard exchanged a lot of information. Then one morning it happened. Richard Tonnesen called me and said "we just made history, I just perforated the first roll using Robbie's data on the Macintosh".

We weren't home free yet. The gremlins were still at work. The first batch of "edit" rolls sent to us for editing contained some error which I still do not understand. Richard discovered the error and quickly sent me error free rolls.

Here in Chicago we were ready to go to work. We had been collecting data from pianos. My trusted side-kick, Rob Deland, an electrical engineer, had set up test gear to measure the effects of vacuum changes on volume output as measured in decibels. We also found out just how much the soft pedal changes the decibels. We also studied Dr. Hickman's article in the Oct. 1929 issue of "Journal of the Acoustical Society of America." With data I collected from many pianos, I was able to construct a table that would give the proper valve settings in both Ampico A" and "B" pianos to give a desired decibel output. We were now ready to start the awesome task of editing the rolls and adding the necessary compatible AB coding.

With the music in hand that Dr. Podolsky used, two talented AMICAnS poured over the "edit" rolls looking for errors. The recording piano was so sensitive, that many extra notes showed up on the "edit" rolls. Rob Deland and Steve Husarik spent hours searching for these unwanted inputs and removed them. Using the computer print out of the decibel reading of each note, the "edit" rolls were marked. Every note on every roll was marked with the correct decibel reading. Rob and Janet Deland, Joe and Elsa Pecarek, Bob and Gloria Taylor did all the decibel notations (**some** 47,000). Here we found out that many of the unwanted notes were actually recorded at zero decibels!

Now with the "edit" rolls error free, the tedious task of assigning expression codes to rolls began. This was done almost entirely by yours truly. On the easier rolls we averaged about four hours work for each one minute of music. As we got into the more complex compositions, that time doubled.

The first coding task was to give each entire piece an overview. At that time Ampico "B" amplifier position was assigned in general blocks. Color coded marking pens were used to help keep things straight. The amplifier position was shown in green. Next the crescendo effects were coded. **Here we** used yellow marker. The length of one inch of slow crescendo was defined in decibels. This was necessary since the tempos varied from 65 through 110. The desired decibel change of each crescendo was noted on the roll at the correct location. Then using the tempo relationship, we determined the length in inches of the crescendo perforation. Fast crescendo coding was added as necessary.

Now that the rolls had the general status of amplifier and crescendo defined, we could fill in all the step codes (using a look-up table derived from our research). The steps were assigned to coordinate with the already coded general status. We tried to correct the problems of the "A" pianos playing too loud when playing a "B" coded roll.

Consequently, those of you who study Ampico coding will see many unfamiliar combinations of the step coding holes.

Finally, the rolls were played on several "A" and "B" pianos to check the coding for desired response. Red markers were used to make corrections in the coding scheme. To help in the accuracy of coding, Dorothy Bromage had arranged for audio recordings to be made of the playback on the Stahnke Piano. These recordings are available in cassette tape from Dorothy. On these recordings, Leo has introduced each piece and in some cases offered his remarks about the composition. These same remarks are printed on the appropriate rolls having "story" leaders.

The first edited rolls were sent to Richard Tonnesen near the end of April 1986. Shortly afterwards he returned proof rolls for our approval. Some minor changes were necessary. The process was working. Now we had a proven system. Hours of editing and coding continued.

Texas AMICAns were the first outside of Chicago to hear the new rolls as I traveled to Dallas to confer with Bill Flynt and Richard Tonnesen. Bill hosted a meeting and his 9 foot Knabe sounded forth as we demonstrated a few edited copies for the Texas members. Later, Midwest members got a taste of these new recordings when I attended their meeting in Columbus, hosted by Vince and Sue Ricca. Podolsky sounded wonderful on the Ricca Ampicos.

Finally, with seven of the ten rolls edited, I visited the Philadelphia membership meeting (1986) and once more demonstrated the new recordings. In every case, my fellow AMICAns at these meetings were generous with their praise and support. That support played a very important part in this project.

The "edit" rolls were sent to Richard Tonnesen. These were now our masters. He has a very accurate roll reader that sees everything, and then stores what it reads in computer memory. From the stored data, Richard then produced proof copies. With all proof rolls in our possession, we made our final changes before production. This part is really neat. I marked the areas to be changed on the proof copies. Then using the Macintosh floppy disk that Richard Tonnesen had sent me (containing all the rolls in a pictorial fashion) I merely turned on the computer and scrolled the roll presentation on its screen until I found the area to be changed. Then using the "mouse" I changed the area of the roll on the Macintosh screen. When finished, I mailed the disk back to Richard and from that he produced the final rolls!!!

The beautiful part of this whole system is that there were no multiple read errors since the "edit" copies were read only once. Even though there were changes made to the proof copies, there was no need to read these proofs again. The changes were made directly in the stored data by using Macintosh on-screen editing technique.

To make our project look as good as it sounded, we decided the rolls should have authentic style printed leaders and high quality boxes and labels. The boxes were made here in Chicago (for the "A" size). The leaders were printed on a heavy buff paper stock, and the labels were printed on the peel and stick type label stock. Klavier Rolls supplied us with the "B" sized boxes. Over \$2,000.00 was spent in these combined efforts.

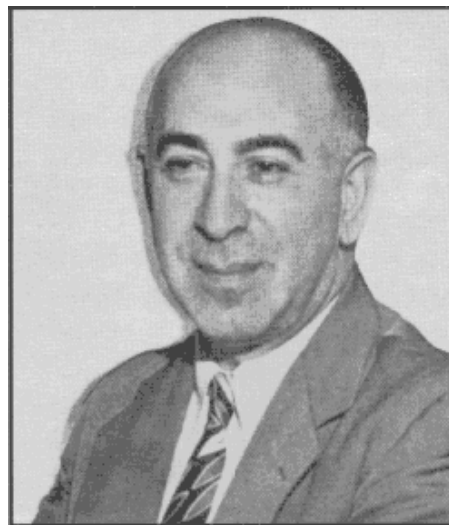
As production started, the entire Chicago Chapter pitched in with the tremendous task of assembling the finished rolls. Our roll orders were now approaching our breakeven point. That meant a lot of work. Seventy-five sets of "A" rolls and forty sets of "B" rolls were produced. The printed leaders had to be attached, the tabs glued, the labels placed on the boxes, and finally putting the rolls in the correct boxes. Packing the rolls for shipping was the last task. All this work was done at two regular chapter meetings and one training meeting to set up team leaders.

We still need to sell more sets to breakeven. Some of our projected costs were too low. We plan to produce a few more sets sometime in 1987, which will be announced in the Bulletin. Once our supplies of printed leaders and labels are exhausted, we will bring this project to a close. At this time, it looks like we will produce another twenty-five sets of "A" rolls, and ten sets of "B" rolls.

Even now we declare the entire project a success. We have accomplished our goal. We brought to the Ampico music library a supply of "real" new recordings. We have preserved the playing of Dr. Leo Podolsky. His recording span for the Ampico is now sixty years. He is unique in history for that accomplishment.

Our sincere thanks go out to all members who supported us in this effort. We are deeply appreciative of honorary AMICAn, Dr. Leo Podolsky, for his talent and vision to see the potential in this project; to Wayne Stahnke whose wonderful new invention was generously shared; to Robbie Rhodes who spent many hours to bridge the gap from "new" to "old" technology. Richard Tonnesen's efforts have undoubtedly produced the finest computer controlled perforator in existence. We all owe him a thank you and a "well done". Richard's wife Janet also played a large part in the actual production. Next time you see her, ask how she likes rolls that are 214 feet long! Finally, Dorothy Bromage, thank you for keeping this project alive!

LEO PODOLSKY



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Written by Richard S. Ginell

Contributed by James Dohney

Podolsky: Link is lost to czarist Russia's musical past

One of the Los Angeles area's most fascinating musical figures is gone.

Pianist and master raconteur *Leo* Podolsky, one of the last active links to the musical life of czarist Russia, died Oct. 1 at Glendale Hospital from a combination of diabetes and congestive heart failure. He was 96 years young.

According to his longtime teaching associate June Davison, Podolsky, though semi-retired, continued to teach from his Burbank home and performed occasionally until March of this year, when he was first hospitalized. In his last active days, he gave a number of performances of Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata with such guest cellists as Nathaniel Rosen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Daniel Rothmuller.

He also had recorded 12 new piano rolls for the Ampico Company, which said he was the last surviving artist from its 1926-30 roster (one that included Sergei Rachmaninoff and *Leo* Ornstein).

"We had planned to go to New York, and later we would have gone to Vienna:' said Davison. "We were leaving for the airport (in March) when he collapsed'.

With non-stop relish, the Odessa-born Podolsky could weave tales about his adventures in the Russian army during World War I, his early student trips to Krakow and Vienna, hanging on for dear life to the roof of an overcrowded Trans-Siberian train just ahead of the guns, his five subsequent years in the Orient. He loved to take his visitors slowly through his fascinating collection of memorabilia, including priceless tapestries from the Far

East, Liszt's death mask and pictures of the young Bruno Walter and Vladimir Horowitz.

Podolsky moved from Chicago to Burbank in 1983 after the death of his second wife, but he had been teaching here since 1956, making six trips a year from his Chicago base. He also kept up with current music (his favorite young pianists were Ivo Pogorelich and Andrie Gavrilov) and frequently attended

concerts.

(photo: Dr. Leo Podolsky at the Baldwin piano in his Chicago home.)



All of Podolsky's souvenirs will be donated to the USC School of Music as he had arranged, and he also requested there be no funeral service.

"Dr. Podolsky was *guest of honor at the 1983 AMICA Convention* in Chicago. He not only gave a short and witty talk at the banquet, but *performed several interesting numbers on the piano. He then distributed copies of his autobiography to all in atten*

dance. Subsequently he went to California, and while there cut ten new Ampico rolls, in collaboration with Bob Taylor of the Chicago Chapter."

Jim Dohney