

Welte Licensee e-roll and MIDI files of classical music

Introduction

This package comprises a combination of MIDI files derived from Welte Licensee and Welte-Mignon reproducing piano rolls, which are identified in the catalogues by (RW). The equivalent e-roll package comprises only Welte Licensee files, as these files are playable only on a MIDI-equipped Welte Licensee reproducing piano. Here's an explanation of this anomaly.

Brief history

Welte-Mignon rolls first appeared in late 1904, in Germany. These rolls have a unique size and were compatible only with a Welte Mignon reproducing piano. In 1913, the Welte company opened a factory in Poughkeepsie (New York) where the Mignon instrument was manufactured and roll recordings were made, in addition to those being made in Germany. By this time, piano roll dimensions had been standardised, so the Poughkeepsie factory began producing Welte Mignon instruments with a standard size spool box. Standard size rolls were produced for the instrument which was called the Original Welte Mignon. In 1916, Welte licensed the Auto Pneumatic Action Company to make standard-size reproducing pianos based on Welte patents. This instrument became known as the Welte Licensee.

In 1918, the US government's Alien Property Custodian took control of the Poughkeepsie factory, selling it to American owners who attempted to continue production of rolls and reproducing pianos. However, the Licensee instrument became the better seller, with rolls for the Licensee being made from Welte-Mignon masters by the new owners of the Welte company. In 1920, the company producing the Licensee reproducing piano established a recording studio and began producing rolls for the instrument under the De Luxe label.

The problem

The result was that the complete catalogue of rolls for the Licensee now comprised rolls derived from Mignon masters and new recordings made by De Luxe. However, Licensee rolls made from Mignon masters were often edited to the point of removing large sections of music, and making other changes that affected the authenticity of the recordings.

Managing the problem

Our collection of MIDI files includes numerous instances of a recording on both Mignon and Licensee rolls. In compiling a collection of standard MIDI file Welte Licensee classical recordings, we have decided that where available, the Mignon version should be offered rather than the inferior Licensee version. This occurs for around 80 MIDI files. This means playing times will often differ. The playing times shown are for the Licensee version, which will give an indication of the playing time of the Mignon version, which will often be longer, up to four minutes or more. In a few cases, MIDI files and e-roll files of parts of a work have been joined to give a complete recording, including *Les Preludes*, *Afternoon of a Faun* and Liszt's *Tarantella*.

Peter Phillips 2017