



PIANOLA ENTERPRISES

ROBERT J. BERKMAN

Bob Berkman has been associated with the self-playing piano most of his life. In 1975 he was hired by QRS in Buffalo, the world's last piano roll manufacturer, where he produced innumerable reissues of historic roll recordings and maintained a constant flow of new recordings for over thirty years. His credits include rolls commissioned for the films *Ragtime*, *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*, and *Reds*, the last in cooperation with composer Stephen Sondheim; appearances on NPR, the BBC, and CBS Sunday Morning; and the world Pianola premiere of Prokofiev's *Peter And The Wolf*.

During a 2-year hiatus from QRS in the mid-1980s, Bob served on the staff of IMG Artists in New York City, a firm which manages the careers of world-class classical musicians. Among his charges were violinists Itzhak Perlman and Joshua Bell.

Back in Buffalo, Bob spearheaded the creation of a musical library for the emerging technology of disk-playing pianos, recording new artists as well as converting archival roll recordings to contemporary media. This work continues to engage him.

All the while, he has continued to pursue his own personal projects as a roll historian and interpreter, exploring rolls containing everything from Ragtime to Rock and Roll to the *avant garde*. He is a passionate champion of the player piano as an expressive musical instrument, and is increasingly in demand as a speaker and performer.

Bob's particular interest in the neglected area of ethnic music rolls prompted him to donate over a thousand such rolls to the Ethnomusicology Archive at UCLA and he is working with the Archive on ways to make these accessible to scholars. The first fruit of this collaboration is an international recording project for the University of Kaunas featuring Lithuanian rolls. Bob also developed text and exhibits for the Mechanical Gallery of the new Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, AZ and was engaged to perform a variety of ethnic rolls for the Museum's video archive. *Klezmerola*, Bob's CD of rare Jewish rolls from his collection and an admitted labor of love, has become something of an underground hit in Klezmer circles, where his work is regarded as "a fabulous and important accomplishment that deepens our access to historical materials."

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