

# WAR- AND PLAYER PIANOS?

The player piano and war-winning directly coincide. It would seem that the last thing Americans would want to hear during national tragedy is happy music, but throughout the First World War, player piano sales were steadily rising amid massive military drafts and the inevitable letter to the family back home. Despite the grief-stricken families and sorrowful nation, there was a certain comfort, confidence, and therapeutic value in sitting down on a piano bench and pumping through a few rolls. They were sold by the increasing millions before, during, and after the Great War, and the ensuing '20s depression which followed. Yet the Player Piano helped the war effort tremendously. Read on and you'll see what I mean.

One of the things we often find in these old roll collections today are well-worn First World War tunes like When Johnny Comes Marching Home, Long Boy, Goodby Broadway, Hello France, I'm A Yankee Doodle Dandy, and all kinds of really great songs that still pep us up today. But you aren't be able to buy these most of those WWI recuts any longer unless somebody makes a very special effort. One thing that all war songs had in common was the courage and hope their words instilled.

Keep the Home Fires Burning was one of my favorites, mainly because of the lyrics. It was a truly heartfelt poem, and one verse went like this:

Overseas there came a pleading,  
From a nation in distress.  
And we gave our loyal laddies,  
Honor made us do no less.  
For no gallant son of freedom  
To the tyrant's yoke shall bend.  
And the noble heart must answer  
To the sacred call of 'Friend.'

We had a higher purpose in those days. We had a vision of greatness that was not simply equated with our bank accounts, and how much more we are worth than other nations in the world. That is cheap. The Player Piano made the loftiest hopes and ideals common to every household that owned one. It reinforced our visions through the most powerful medium today-- live music! And those ideals were not just in the war tunes. It was integral with the spirit of the music itself.

I am rebuilding player pianos every day, and listening to the radio, too. Since I get all the music I want, I seek out the talk shows on my CC radio (I love it! It reaches stations all over the Midwest, so I am no longer limited to local stations).I tuned into a call-in show discussing "The American Dream," before the WTC tragedy. In all the comments and retorts of the host, I thought it shameful that unless the caller agreed that the American Dream was "More," had always been "More," and will never be "Less," that they were wrong about the American Dream.

Frankly, on that show, nobody even mentioned our freedom, our inalienable rights, our Constitution, our great founding fathers, or the vision of America that our grandparents had when they gave their loyal laddies. I wish that just one person had mentioned "Our lives, fortunes, and sacred honor." The talk show host controlled it all, and berated anybody who might even mention something other than wealth. But take heart. Not everybody is that shallow and weak. We have great country, and good people with good values do not call talk shows like that.

I wonder who has asked how they might satisfy the Goddess More today? If this is whom they seek to be happy, then how do they do it? If anybody comes up with the answer to that question, please write and tell me. **More** cannot be satisfied, regardless how one tries. But Americans used to be grateful for their portion at any given point in their lives. They didn't begrudge another's wealth, and while they sought greater success (which is only healthy and which we should, too), they were grateful on a daily basis. That's why they were happy. They were thankful. That isn't "More" worship. When gratefulness is foremost, growth is positive energy and necessary.

Now, some then may take me to the woodshed and say, "*How do you know they were happy? You weren't there. You don't know what they were like or how they thought.*"

Oh yes I do! You see, I have their music. So while there may have been a few very happy diehards writing happy music, there would not have been millions of copies sold for the next 4 decades if this country was full of fearful, negative, grumpy curmudgeons who did not personally identify with and buy that music, and play it-- over and over, and over and over again. Yep-- There Goes That Song Again! And lots of others just as bubbly, and happy, lively, full of pep and energy. When I was a kid, I was always whistling because good tunes would come to mind. How many good tunes come to mind of late, which just make you want to whistle them?

Well ok then, how many youngsters going in and out of stores and walking down the street do you see whistling the latest pop tunes? Give yourself \$5 for every one you hear and make it a special account, which you will use for new rolls at the end of the year. On the other hand, don't. You'll never buy one roll that way.

Why no whistling, happy kids? Simple. Tunes today seldom equate with the happiness, energy, and freedom we all have enjoyed for so long. The melodies do not stand on their own, the tune requires powerful, sensual rhythm to sell it, and the words are often suggestive or implicative in a bad way.

There's nothing to whistle. Extract the melody from your favorite modern tunes and start whistling them. Then listen to yourself. You'll sound about like a teapot! Now whistle an oldie from the teens or '20s. See the difference? One makes a statement-- one doesn't. The old one makes sense. The new one sounds stupid. No wonder the kids don't whistle anymore. *They have put themselves under the tyrant's yoke.* The majority have bent over-- willingly I might add-- to please a fat, imperious music industry which dictates who they should hear and what they will hear, and no other kinds of music are even tolerated. That's why we don't hear other kinds of music! We are force-fed now and told that we will like it. We have willingly placed ourselves

under the tyrant's yoke, so nationally in the mainstream, we really deserve what we get. (This does not speak for all forms of music, as noted; but for the main it does).

For those who love Country-Western, there is in some of these a strong melody line for whistling tunes. But too often they are not happy tunes, and almost never do they have the positive energy I speak of. Many are sad tunes with sad lyrics, and there were also several decades of our recent past when they were not "country" and were not "western" at all, but instead they were songs for lonely truckers and should have been called "Urban-Eastern." They often sang about their troubles and divorce. Not what I would classify as The American Dream.

I have a saying: "American is as American Does." If that sounds awfully "Gumpish" then that's too bad. It is so true. We are a melting pot of nations and have always realized our strength from our vast diversity of talents and the freedom to exercise them and develop them to the full. All men have been endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among these life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We have enemies in our own country, sitting right now in the Congress who do not believe this, and would take these things from us in a heartbeat. They would substitute what is ours by right, for whatever portion they would allow us to have.

Our music tells more about our spirit and where we are headed, than any historian or social seer will ever tell. So if there was ever a time to get out those old rolls and soak up and recapture the heart, the bravery, the confidence, and the resultant happiness that our forefathers had, it is now. But most people can't do that. They don't have rolls with words. Their piano (if they have one) doesn't have treadles on it, and if it did, too many of them cannot be treadled anymore. They're just either not working very well, or not working at all.

So that's where I come in! National courage begins one person at a time and spreads just like any other virus-- right through your own hometown or city just like a plague-- a really cool, strong, happy, confident plague! It's just like an immunization shot. We get some help for our weak hearts with all the positive energy just flowing like a river through these wonderful, powerful old tunes, and then we pass it on. Pretty soon everybody around us takes heart. So why not order some new recuts of some old and happy tunes you've missed, and while you're waiting, sing the words printed on an 80 year old roll that is still bubbling along? Try pumping an old player piano. It changes your mood immediately. It's like a new miracle drug-- a silver bullet for the blues. It lasts a long time and it's free. You just gotta try it!

Craig Brougher