

Tuesday morning 6 July 1993

Another guitar has been brought here to be 19-ized. Bit it must wait its turn--other affairs ahead of it that can't be put off. One of these charcoal-dark-gray affairs.

News story just the other day, repeated, about Los Angeles shutting down most libraries and firing lots of people and shortening hours. This means people kept from reading books and in many cases no longer able to visit any open library. So that makes the outlook for a book quite pessimistic.

- If you want to look at the cheerful side, it means the electronic media will have to take over some of the job of communicating documents and also of storing info.

To check up on the One vs. Three Mercators for instance, I had to spend 40 minutes and \$1.50 just riding busses to get to the downtown library and back. In Los Angeles it would have been more minutes and more money. If I live to be 80, the situation will be almost impossible. Absolutely nothing like what it was when I was 18 or 22.

So you ALREADY have my bulletins etc. on disk or some kind of computer-related storage, ready for the new distribution means and capable of being added to and updated, whereas a book would be further and further behind the times before it got printed and put in the stores or libraries or some kind of repositories.

It was far more important to do what I did yesterday: copy the 78 records (three of them onto a cassette) so that I have a sample of Novachord timbres that I can copy AND compare with the timbres on the keyboards here, now that NOBODY has any of the tubes type 6W7G or whatever that the Novachord had 144 of. I mean that any ex still existing Novachord would have to be rebuilt to use 6AU6 or some such thing that still is made in small quantities, and that won't be the case very long. Some other possible tube will always be available for certain special uses, but at an impossible price.

The only Novachord sounds for comparison will be IF somebody has sampled them into some Sampler already--and that is quite doubtful.

Nearly ten years between the time I had the Novachord records and when I could play them to copy them. Didn't matter to me personally because I had heard more than I needed to of Novachord timbre 40 years ago and 35 years ago. But to anybody of the new generations, there will be no such chance to hear one directly.

Ironical that the far far older harpsichord sounds can be heard live by most people now. Conn and Artisan and Allen organs that used triode tubes will be heard far far longer since those tubes are still being made and there is more need for them on a limited basis. Again, conceivably any of a hundred kinds of transistor triodes could be substituted by a major rebuilding job of those organs, much much easier than trying to duplicate a Novachord with IC chips. It would never sound the same!

There is no way whatsoever that I can describe the Novachord effect. I can't show anyone what's bad about it, what was good about it, how it fit in the overall history of electronic music, without reproducing the sounds. Already, within my lifetime, the info has disappeared except for a very very few records that can't be played on average equipment today. These are shellac records just anxious to get broken.

What was interesting about Novachords? Six different vibrato mechanisms: i.e. C C#, D D#, E F, F# G, G# A, A# B---each set of two pitches was going at a slightly DIFFERENT vibrato rate from the other five pairs. *** What was bad about it? Several things, chief of which was a nagging whining of which there is almost none in the keyboards here. If these had been today's higher-fidelity records, the whining would be intolerable. An ensemble of 20 hungry sick Siamese Cats!

The Hammond Factory was in Chicago. NOW and only now do I realize where the nasty timbres of the Motorola Scalatron came from! Hearing too many Novachords. Young

Wenzdi 14 July 1993 (I guess it's the French Bastille Day)

B. McLaren Corvallis OR 97333

Greetings ==

Overslept--no energy this morning but otherwise normal. Acknowledging immediately that your power cord and sample disk arrived. I believe I wrote about buying a surge-protector outlet strip and keeping v certain other things as well as the Atari plugged into it. Much less power-surge in this part of San Diego than the dreadful situation in Glendale, where voltage rose high and burnt light bulbs out every week or two. Still enough that caution is necessary.

Oddly enough: I have had to proceed in the opposite direction from a Book -- splitting-apart rather than combining issues of the Bulletins--xeroxing articles from the Bulletins SEPARATELY to make my info handouts SHORTER so as not to overwhelm certain types of visitors.

In many cases, sending someone 3-page excerpts so it will go under 1 oz. postage with the accompanying letter or just a little Memo slip. Sure, I deplore the present generations' short attention span, due to TV and radio commercials, but either I cater to it or I will be very lonely and forsaken.

The 30-year-old tape and the 26-year-old score of IN LIMBO will have to be promoted today piecemeal. So I call it a suite of ten pieces which will have ten titles. And only two or three copies of each made at a time. This has been done last month. So there won't be hundreds of sheets of paper and more than two pa tapes here of it at any time.

The other day I went through the entire music filing cabinet (a legal-size two drawer affair that David Hill presented to me since he couldn't afford to take it and some other stuff to Florida when he left Orange) trying to find the extra 17-tone pieces that were only first-drafts later to be done in ink and copied for Excursion into the Enharmonic. I did not find them. If I have lost them, I can transcribe them again from certain tapes.

Not this month! But I have met more people who are interested in 17. I wrote one page of comments to go with the 1939 Novachord article, and will probably do a second page. There is one Casio portable that will do almost everything the Novachord could, at a fraction of the cost and in a very tiny space and light weight.

Amazing how the Hammond Organ Co. succeeded so wealthily for so long, then vanished out of the picture. A lesson to be learned from that. During the 1940s I met people who were connected with it or had been, and also many assorted enemies of theirs, so I have a balanced picture of that period in musical instrument history.

Interesting question: What did Yamana sv have that Hammond didn't have, toward the end of the Hammond success?

Buzz made a 14" scale model of a Megalyra Contrabass and sent it to me last week. Ideal to put for a few days in a store show-window or to carry around in a promoter's or salesman's sample-case or to keep on the mantle or use as a prop for a lecture or sudden unscheduled interview.

Total surprise! No idea I would get this out of the blue. Took me a whole today to remember what it should be called as scale model

So a time passed without tuning pianos and yesterday suddenly out of the blue: D. Jacobs who is involved in putting on plays and events here, needed his piano tuned in a hurry and I got a lesson in Perfectionism or Quality Control: no the piano wasn't brand-new out of the store but might as well have been, very clean inside no rust on the strings, no hammers crooked nor worn, no cracked keys, no loose tuning-pins--all very tight so that it wore out my right arm. no dust inside the piano, which is very hard to believe because this was just an ordinary house, no demon housekeepers or anything. Probably the factory probably in Korea where this was made would have tiger-tyrant inspectors and ferocious standards to stick to. After all the crummy mushy fuzzy pianos I have met during the last 53 years of tuning where every hammer-blow sends a cloud of dust into my nose and the dampers don't.

So here was the right place to go to tell somebody about my IN LIMBO composition of 30 years ago--if anybody knows about possible users of the composition in San Diego this would be the place.

Estimate--a thousand or more piano tunings since 1940--250 000 tuning pins turned, 5 000 000 hammer-blows, a million ruined major and minor thirds and sixths, a constant steady decline in number of tunings per year from oodles to very few. charges however have kept up with inflation.

All during the 53 years, as much or more time spent traveling to and from any piano-tuning as was spent DOING it. Which made it a losing proposition all this time. The previous tuner of that piano left San Diego 1 1/2 years ago and it is extremely difficult to find a tuner these days, I was told.

Hence electronic keyboards with factory-preset pitches.

While we are about it: one of the Mirage piano samples represents a piano which probably went at least six or eight months after being tuned before the sample was taken. That may have been deliberate, for "realism". The Roland piano effect # 2 has a small chorus effect to detune the two oscillators, and the Roland pitches seem to be staggered--i.e. the octaves are slightly out, so that there may be two divider-chains.

Average age of tuners has always been high, so must be the limit now. Even in 1940, I knew better than to lay in a stock of piano repair parts. They are almost all highly specialized, not even being useful for organs or harpsichords. I couldn't have afforded the investment in parts anyhow.

I have not seen this personally, but I read somewhere that one piano maker put heptagonal nuts on parts of the action so that only specialized repair shops could turn them with their special heptagon wrenches!

One good outcome of the electronic keyboards proliferating is that a lot of trade secrets and early 19th-century practices which lasted as long as the Piano was the Only Game in town, have abated. Most electronic keyboards follow pipe-organ, rather than piano, patterns. Then all the different countries now making electronic keyboards that did not make so many pianos in the old days, bring subtle differences in design.

When I was a boy, typewriter keyboards were just about frozen in design. Computer keyboard differs considerably and are evolving.

Yours

Maybe the library will have historical pictures of that Corvallis and that part of Oregon was like, so you can get the background. All I know is that it was, until about 1927, the southern terminus of a thing called O & C, the Oregon and California Electric Railroad.

31 July 1993 (Sat)

B. McLaren Corvallis OR 97333

The big box is out of Jail! Found out yesterday it did really make a difference.

While in Glendale, I built a heavy speaker box because John Reuschel found me a 15" Lansing the tre-type speaker. So it was brought here to San Diego with me but ended up stored in the Glasier's big garage behind a toner two of stuff and locked in there for eight years until they decided to move into the smaller house down the street recently and had to get rid of a lot of stuff and clean out both the house they moved from and the smaller house they moved to. Finally the box got here before they took off for North Carolina (expected back in a couple of days). The Megalyra instruments are much louder now, played through it. New castorz to replace those that broke in transit.

Eric Marin came again from Venice about the videos of instrument builders and was very impressed. I suppose during September several people will be on video or 8mm film.

Moral: if you are playing instruments anywhere, have at least one bass-reflex speaker-box.

The box I built 35 years ago was too flimsy and went to pieces in the first of the Forced Moves. People have to move often in California. So I can't trust proposals for "permanent" archives and exhibits.

Moral #2: A chain is as strong as its weakest link. In a playback or synthesizer or sampler set-up, the speaker box is the weakest link. Nobody wants to cart a big one around, therefore all the bass notes that everything else in the system has been upgraded to handle, will not get through the speaker-box.

Made new copies of the 30-year-old IN LIMBO tape and maybe that can be promoted--I finally met a couple of people in theatricals who understood what this suite of ten pieces is for.

I guess I already mentioned that the Theremin is fixed. Piled behind boxes in the garage for several months because of the storms earlier this year.

The power cord worked on the Atari, and now I have to find out who carries the adaptors for such things as printer-cables. Meanwhile the monitor works and the keyboard works and the mouse works. Another fellow who is about to get a computer, unfortunately decided to move to Los Angeles, so I won't have his advice.

You gave me the name of an Atari place and evidently it is still there, quite a distance from here, so I have to wait till I can be taken there. Meanwhile, grinding out copy cassettes and sending them.

Received the new bundle of xeroxes. Brink is gaining experience involving the "new Information Highway"--fiber optics and all, so will be very favorably placed to take advantage of this situation.

Yours