

## UNDERSTANDING THE ARTECHO

by David L. Saul

Note: The Artecho system was also called the Apollo and the Celco.

The Artecho system enjoyed a comparatively short lifespan in the reproducing piano market. It faded into obscurity in the mid-1920's, barely a decade after its introduction. Artecho's business interests were originally controlled by the Melville Clark Piano Company of DeKalb, Illinois, although the Artecho mechanism itself was built by the Amphion Company — the same firm which for many years produced Ampico mechanisms as an American Piano Company subsidiary. The Melville Clark firm offered the Artecho in its line of Apollo pianos. The same system was also offered as the Celco, and with that designation was installed in Emerson, Lindeman, and A.B. Chase pianos.

In September, 1919, the Apollo Piano Company, a firm jointly owned by the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company and by the Amphion Piano Player Company, acquired the Melville Clark Piano Company. Wurlitzer, using the Apollo name instead of Artecho, then installed the Amphion-produced mechanism in its own line of pianos. The Wurlitzer Apollo Reproducing Piano was marketed for several years, but never achieved widespread popularity.

Rolls were produced by the QRS Company (which, incidentally, was formerly owned by Melville Clark). In 1921 a fairly elaborate catalogue of QRS Artecho rolls was published. Many Artecho rolls were adapted from Welte-Mignon performances under terms of a special agreement with that firm, and Ampico recordings were the basis of some of the later issues.

Legal Note: By an agreement dated January 30, 1920, Welte agreed "upon demand of Wurlitzer to furnish to Wurlitzer one proper master record of each music roll in its piano catalogue (except the rolls recorded by 36 selected pianists excluded from the agreement), for use by Wurlitzer as masters in making music rolls herefrom, and Wurlitzer shall pay Welte for each such master roll the sum of \$10. Wurlitzer agrees that it will not use marginal perforations which would permit the rolls manufactured by it to be used on other instruments made by Welte, the Auto Pneumatic Action Co. [Welte Licensee], or Amphion [Ampico]." The agreement further stated that Wurlitzer "expressly promises and agrees that it will not use the name 'Welte' or 'Welte Mignon' in any manner, on any mechanisms, or on any music rolls, except that the music rolls and labels on the boxes of music rolls made from Welte masters may bear a legend as follows: 'Played by (name of artist) for M. Welte & Sons, Inc. or M. Welte & Söhne' (as the case may be) — always followed by the word 'Licensed.'" A somewhat similar agreement was made in 1921 with Q.R.S.

In the instances in which Artecho rolls were made from Ampico, Welte, or Q.R.S. masters the expression coding had to be revised, of course, to match the technical features of the Artecho system. Some of the Artecho rolls made from Q.R.S. masters are simply ordinary Q.R.S. rolls (intended for the foot-pumped home player piano) with expression perforations added.

Rolls of the Artecho type were issued with a specially styled Apollo label after Wurlitzer began using the system. On occasion the Apollo labels were even glued over already-present Artecho labels! "Apollo" was a popular name, and other rolls using it appeared from time to time. Those of a reproducing nature and

associated with the Artecho system have the word Apollo in white letters against a dark blue background at the top of the label.

Drawers are utilized in all grand piano installations of the Artecho family. A distinctive feature for identification purposes is the so-called Modulator Lever found in the drawer (or in the upright's spoolbox) whose operating positions are labelled NORMAL and SOFT. Many examples have elegantly crafted and artistically detailed drawer hardware. The silver-like lustre of metalwork in such installations highlights the appearance of wood panels handsomely finished to match the piano in which the drawer is installed.

Some caution must be exercised in identifying pianos bearing the Apollo name as that particular designation was used in connection with many types of instruments over the years, ranging in variety from ordinary foot-pumped players to expression pianos of the Recordo and Welte families. Some late Wurlitzer-built pianos bear the Apollo name but have other mechanisms. Apollo pianos with Welte (Licensee) actions are known. As noted, the Apollo nomenclature is confusing in regard to rolls and the pianos themselves. Check carefully any Apollo offered to be sure you are obtaining what you are seeking.

In its technology the Artecho bears a striking resemblance to the Ampico, a situation which is not surprising in view of the fact that both systems were manufactured by the same firm. Pneumatic stacks, detachable valve blocks, and many other components are virtually identical in the two systems and many parts are fully interchangeable. The Artecho expression system, however, is quite different in design from its contemporary Ampico counterpart. In spite of mechanical differences, the mechanism responds to expression coding patterned closely after the Ampico scheme.

Artecho, like Ampico, employs a combination of intensity steps and crescendo operation, and the explanation found under the Ampico section of this book is applicable with only minor changes. The intensity step scheme is virtually identical to Ampico's except for locations of corresponding types of expression ports on the respective tracker bars. The reason for this is explained by a May 3, 1921, agreement between Amphion and Wurlitzer: "The arrangement of the holes in the tracker bar and the holes in the music roll to be used by the said second party (Wurlitzer) for cooperating with said devices to give expression in playing shall be differently arranged from the standard of such holes as now used by said first party (Amphion) and the American Piano Company for its Ampico action and shall be incapable of operating with the rolls made to said (Ampico) standards."

Artecho's method of crescendo operation is unique, however. The Artecho system uses a single-speed crescendo device which operates rather quickly. When slower crescendo operation is called for, the unit can be activated by a series of short impulses to produce the effect of a more gradual crescendo. The piano keyboard is divided into two sections with separate expression units independently controlling the bass and treble dynamics.

An interesting feature of the Artecho system is the so-called pianissimo device. Providing an extra intensity step below "normal" for extremely soft playing, this feature was later adopted in principle for use in the Model B Ampico.