

Classical music compilations

The classical music MIDI file compilations on this page have been assembled from reproducing piano roll recordings made by Dr Peter Phillips.¹ For more information, see <https://petersmidi.com/history.html> A reproducing piano roll contains note, pedal and expression information, and is recorded by a live artist playing on a specially designed recording piano. These rolls are therefore an accurate recording of the artist, unlike standard player piano rolls which are usually mechanically produced.

The first reproducing piano roll recordings were made in Leipzig in 1905, by the German company M. Welte und Söhne. At the time, disc and cylinder recording technology was in its infancy, and many important pianists of the times recorded only on reproducing piano roll. Welte recordings are highly regarded for their musical and historical value.

By 1914, in America, the Aeolian Company and the American Piano Corporation had begun marketing their brand of reproducing pianos (the Duo-Art and the Ampico respectively) and piano rolls to suit. These two companies made recordings of some of the most remembered pianists of the 20th Century, as well as recordings of historical artists.

The groups

The MIDI files are grouped as below. The works in each group are listed in the relevant catalogues in order of Title, Composer and Pianist, with information about composer and pianists in their respective catalogues.

- Baroque-Classical – 200 files, playing time 21 hours
- Romantic 19th Century – 200 files, playing time 17 hours
- Early 20th Century Classical – 200 files, playing time 14 hours
- Light Classical – 200 files, playing time 12:45 hours
- Operatic Selections – 100 files, playing time 11:45 hours
- CEUS Project Selections – 171 files, playing time 13:15 hours (see <https://petersmidi.com/ceus1.html> for background to this project)

The MIDI files

The file name structure for classical music files is Title (Composer) Pianist, except where noted in the catalogues. Each MIDI file is typically derived from a single piano roll, which means sonatas and big works are made up of several MIDI files. All files are MIDI type 0.

File names also identify the brand of roll with one or two letters at the end of the file name:

Ampico: A, AA and AB

Welte: GW, LW and RW

Duo-Art: DA

The MIDI files have full-range dynamics, and in a typical domestic or small salon environment, a playback volume of 80 to 85 is recommended, assuming full volume is 100. Listening in another room can also be musically satisfying.

Each file contains metadata that gives the title of the work, the composer, pianist, roll number and issue date. This data can be read by some MIDI file players (VanBasco, Cakewalk).

¹ Phillips completed his PhD about piano rolls at Sydney University in 2017. His thesis is available from the University library. He is the owner of this website.