

## The 'Optophonic Piano', Vladimir Rossiné, Russia and France. 1916



The Optophonic Piano

The Optophonic Piano was a one-off electronic optical instrument created by the Russian Futurist painter Vladimir Baranoff Rossiné (Born in 1888 at Kherson , Ukraine – Russia, died Paris, France 1944). Rossiné started working on his instrument c1916. The Optophonic Piano was used at exhibitions of his own paintings and revolutionary artistic events in the new Soviet Union, Rossiné later gave two concerts with his instrument (with his wife Pauline Boukour), at the Meyerhold and Bolchoi theatres in 1924. Rossiné was influenced by the ideas of Alexander Scriabin who connected sound and colour with music to produce a aesthetic synthesis – this current formed an important, almost mystical theme within Russian electronic music; through the photo-audio experiments of the 1930 s until the ANS Synthesiser (itself named after Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin- ANS) in the 1940s.



Painted glass disk of The Optophonic Piano



Detail of painted disk

Vladimir Rossiné left the Soviet Union in 1925, emigrated to Paris where he continued to hold exhibitions of paintings and concerts of his instrument. The Optophonic Piano generated sounds and projected revolving patterns onto a wall or ceiling by directing a bright light through a series revolving painted glass disks (painted by Rossiné), filters, mirrors and lenses. The keyboard controlled the combination of the various filters and disks. The variations in opacity of the painted disk and filters were picked up by a photo-electric cell controlling the pitch of a single oscillator. The instrument produced a continuous varying tone which, accompanied by the rotating kaleidoscopic projections was used by Vladimir Rossiné at exhibitions and public events:

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**CONCERT OPTO-PHONIQUE LUMINEUX**  
(reproduction de la musique en couleurs)

avec l'aide d'une nouvelle invention : LE PIANO LUMINEUX DU PEINTRE BARANOFF-ROSSINE

Présentation par le Professeur W. B. CHKOLVSKI et par le Directeur P. P. OSIPOV  
Accompagnement musical par l'Orchestre Symphonique National du BOLCHOI THEATRE sous la direction du maître

**W. Y. SUK**

Ballet classique : Classe du Ballet Dramatique sous la Direction de A. K. REDEGA et le concours du peintre N. C. YZNAF  
Chœur vocal : Artiste de l'Académie du Bolchoï Théâtre K. A. GERCHINSKAIA et de l'ancien théâtre Zymna - K. Y. ZVETVOV ou programme

GRIEG - WAGNER - SCHUBERT - SCRIABINE - DEBUSSY - RACHMANINOFF - METNER  
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при помощи нового изобретения — зрительного фортепиано художника В. Д. БАРАНОВА-РОССИНА.

Вступительные слова проф. В. Б. ШКЛОВСКИЙ и редактор АИЖА П. П. ОСИПОВ.

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“Imagine that every key of an organ’s keyboard immobilises in a specific position, or moves a determined element, more or less rapidly, in a group of transparent filters which a beam of white light pierces, and this will give you an idea of the instrument Baranoff-Rossiné invented. There are various kinds of luminous filters: simply coloured ones optical elements such as prisms, lenses or mirrors; filters containing graphic elements and, finally, filters with coloured shapes and defined outlines. If on the top of this, you can modify the projector’s position, the screen frame, the symmetry or asymmetry of the compositions and their movements and intensity; then, you will be able to reconstitute this optical piano that will play an infinite number of musical compositions. The key word here is interpret, because, for the time being, the aim is not to find a unique rendering of an existing musical composition for which the author did not foresee a version expressed by light. In music, as in any other artistic interpretation, one has to take into account elements such as the talent and sensitivity of the musician in order to fully understand the author’s mind-frame. The day when a composer will compose music using notes that remain to be determined in terms of music and light, the interpreter’s liberty will be curtailed, and that day, the artistic unity we were talking about will probably be closer to perfection” Extract of an original text by Baranoff Rossiné (1916) Copyright ©Dimitri Baranoff Rossine 1997 – Adherent ADAGP -



В. Д. Баранов-Россинэ (1888—1944), русский художник, изобретатель светомузыкального инструмента «оптофон». Как художник работал в манере художественной группы «Бубновый валет». В послереволюционные годы — член коллегии НЗО Наркомпроса, где сотрудничал с В. Маяковским. Светомузыкальные эксперименты проводил в период 1914—1942 гг. Живописные работы хранятся в Третьяковской галерее и других музеях мира. Наиболее полные сведения о нем представлены в кн.: Роррег F. Naissance de l'art cinétique. P., 1967; Его же. Die Kinetische Kunst, Licht und Bewegung. Köln, 1975.

Vladimir Baranoff Rossiné. Born in 1888 at Kherson , Ukraine – Russia, died Paris, France 1944

## Sources

<http://www.iencheres.com/>

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