
Subject: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [kustombassist](#) on Sun, 07 Nov 2010 07:52:57 GMT

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This piano was recently brought to my attention. see photo here:

http://www.oaktreeent.com/web_photos/keyboards/Electra-String_Electric_Piano_Collage.jpg

It was evidently built in Chanute, Kansas. I am familiar with the Kustom 88 which uses electronically generated tones, but this has strings! It looks more like the Baldwin electric string pianos... I have seen "Kustom 88" pianos labeled Baldwin 88, so I suspect they might have worked together to produce these too.

Does anybody out there know about this instrument and Kustom's relationship with Baldwin in general?

Also, I recently discovered that the bridges used on Kustom basses are identical to the bridges Ovation used in the late 60's for their "Typhoon Bass". So if anybody is missing this bridge from their rare Kustom, I guess they can steal one from an equally rare Typhoon! Its not included in these photos, but they even used the exact same bridge cover!

Check out a photo here:

<http://www.ovationgallery.com/pagebassty3.htm>

So, I'm curious if anyone knows the story about this situation too! Was the hardware for the Kustom guitar and bass line built in-house or sourced from elsewhere? Did Kustom sell off their parts to Ovation at the end of the bass production?

One thing to note is that Ovation made this model bass starting in 1968 and continued into the early 70s. The later models still used the same bridge-base, but they had slightly different saddle-pieces.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on these and any other partnerships Kustom might have had with other instrument manufacturers in the 60's.

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [stevem](#) on Sun, 07 Nov 2010 19:38:25 GMT

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In regards to your question dealing with Baldwins relation and Kustom, Bladwin purchased Kustom electronics in the 70s.

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other

companies...

Posted by [pleat](#) on Mon, 08 Nov 2010 00:33:12 GMT

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Very interesting piano. It appears that it has the original silver stripe cloth that was used on the original kasino speaker cabinets, and the signal out washer looks like something that would have been found on a kustom product. I don't have any knowledge of the piano, so I'm just guessing that it was built sometime after Baldwin bought kustom. Green LED on the control panel may put in the late 70's early 80's. It looks really heavy so I wonder what use was it intended for. Home use?

The bridge assembly was something that was purchased, just like the tuners, bigsby, and hanger tailpieces. The pickups were Rowe DeArmond, and they may have been making bridges as well. I did some searching today and couldn't find anything, but if Ovation used the same bridge, then it would stand to reason that both Kustom and Ovation were buying parts from outside vendors.

pleat

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [chicagobill](#) on Mon, 08 Nov 2010 22:50:14 GMT

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Very cool piano. I've never seen one before, but it reminds me of the Helpinstill piano from the mid '70s. Real piano workings electrified for stage use. A pre-cursor to the Yamaha CP-70 baby grand stage pianos.

I'd assume that it could be a Baldwin product, or something that was manufactured by former Kustom people, having nothing to do with Baldwin. I know that former Kustom engineer, Bob Brinkman was involved with the design and manufacture of the original versions of the Legend amp line, that was made in Chanute.

At the time there were a large number of people in the area with lots of experience in music electronics assembly.

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [kustombassist](#) on Tue, 09 Nov 2010 07:39:29 GMT

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Good, insightful thoughts and information. Thanks!

Knowing that Baldwin owned Kustom in the 70s convinces me. From what I know about the two company's product designs and aesthetics, I assumed this must have been a joint venture between the two. The mid-late 60s was definitely a time when the size of the music business attracted alot of new players into the market and alot of corporate buyouts and mergers happened...

In the case of this piano, It is an electric spinet. If it was built in the early 70s (which seems likely), then it would predate both the Yamaha CP70 (1976) and the Helpinstill pianos whose Roadmaster portable came out around (1979) or even the earlier Melodigrand conversions that he labeled "Melodipro". Its hard to tell from the photos what kind of pickup system they used for this one, but for those who may be interested, The Yamaha CP70 used Piezo elements in the individual string bridges, where The Helpinstills used long thin magnetic pickups running under several strings. The idea of an electric string piano was not a new idea in the 60's however. The early designs actually go back to late 20s and early 30s in Germany where the Siemens Neo-Bechstein used individual magnetic pickups.

To the member who wondered what these were used for, my understanding is that Baldwin's electric string pianos began in the mid 60s to try to get into the market that Wurlitzer and Rhodes had - first as teaching tools in the "piano labs" that popped up everywhere around that time. But then eventually models like this were marketed in different cabinets for both home and performance use too. Interestingly, Baldwin eventually bought Wurlitzer and nowadays both are owned by Gibson!

But in my opinion, none of those company's made a bass as cool as the Kustom! I just did some quick web-searching and and it doesn't seem like the Baldwin/Burns or Wurlitzer lines used similar bridges. That they were ordered from outside firms was my guess too, considering the pickups and tuners. However, I do still wonder if anyone knows more. It is possible that they were special ordered from somewhere else... Rowe industries was certainly a diversified manufacturer...

So, I wasn't sure whether to bring this part of the discussion over to the "Replacement Parts" section. But, finding alternate sources for replacement parts is always helpful. Plus, I have had the thought to get some replica bridge covers made, and my discovery of another instrument line (the Ovation I mentioned) using these makes that a more viable project (rare as they are).

How long did musical equipment manufacturing in Chanute continue after the Kustom company changed hands? This could narrow down the manufacturing date... I gather this piano was not included in any 70s era Kustom catalogs?

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [LesS](#) on Tue, 09 Nov 2010 13:00:40 GMT

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One of the speakers in the Electra-String Piano has a date code of 7509, so based just on that, the production date of the piano could be as early as approx. June to September 1975, but it could be later. A typical time span from component date to Kustom amplifier production date is 60 to 90 days, but for pianos, it was probably much longer, so the production date could even be in early 1976.

(Also, the date codes of several different components should be checked and the latest date code is the one you would compare to the production date, so using just one example is not very accurate.)

-Les S.

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [charley326](#) on Sun, 29 Dec 2013 20:05:34 GMT

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this piano was invented by my father Charles Mussulman. years and years of hard work. super intelligent man. he and my mother played jazz professionally for 40+ years. he is gone, but my mother can still rock a 5 string bass like no other! i think my younger brothers still have a couple units they own. the 1st piano was sold to Royster Junior High School in Chanute, Kansas

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [charley326](#) on Sun, 29 Dec 2013 20:21:10 GMT

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my father designed the entire Electra-String piano from the ground up. floating harp, pickups, amplifier, everything. he was an electronic genius. patents are long outdated now, and digitalized sound replaced what he did that had never been done before. he also was consulted on many projects from Kustom Amplifiers, also located in Chanute, Kansas.

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [stevem](#) on Sun, 29 Dec 2013 20:30:12 GMT

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Great info!

Thank you for passing this along to us and this site.

Do you or any other of the family have any other Kustom gear?

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [charley326](#) on Sun, 29 Dec 2013 20:45:11 GMT

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sorry, but no. my mom did play a kustom bass for several years, still has kustom casino amps in her living room. think she has a peavy these days. i literally remember when Kustom started in a little dump building on south Steuben street in Chanute. we used to go get scrap naugahide pieces from their trash they used to cover their amplifiers, and make belts and wallets from it. quite sylish back then!

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [charley326](#) on Sun, 29 Dec 2013 20:58:22 GMT

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it is interesting, that when my dad got the piano patented, he received an offer from Baldwin to buy rights to the piano. but he turned it down, wanting to keep his piano in Chanute, made there, and provide jobs for local folks that had been friends and customers of the family appliance store. he was quite a guy.

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [chicagobill](#) on Mon, 30 Dec 2013 03:44:08 GMT

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Great bit of history there. You should be sure to document the history of your father as well as the company so that the story will live on.

I'm sure that your mother has a lot of great stories to tell.

Subject: Re: Electra-String Piano made in Chanute - Kustom's connection with other companies...

Posted by [stevem](#) on Thu, 09 Jan 2014 15:08:45 GMT

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In going back through some letters that were written by former Kustom designer and engineer Bob Brinkman he states that shortly after Kustom sold out to Baldwin he went down the street to this company and designed the power amp for the piano, and he recalled some 100 of them were made before the company closed its doors. According to Bob this closure was in part due to fraudulent stock sales.
