

100 YEARS AGO...

Cecil H. Bullivant in 'The Drawing Room Entertainer', published in 1906, writes about the wonders of the Phonograph. In 100 years from now, today's iPod will probably be as outdated as the Phonograph is today!

Wonders of the Phonograph

A Wonderful Invention.

THE production of an instrument in which the vibrations of sound are imprinted on a moving surface of tinfoil or wax, and then by mechanical arrangements reproduced from these imprints, has not merely led to an enormous demand for the phonograph, but has resulted in awakening the minds of men of science to further possibilities opened up by this invention.

The first phonograph, invented by Thomas Alva Edison, saw the light of day in 1876, and it is to his marvellous ingenuity and skill that the reproduction of sound in this manner owes its origin. It was not long before Edison made improvements on his first instrument, and a wax substance was used upon the cylinder instead of tinfoil, by means of which permanent records were secured.

Those who have seen a phonograph in use will remember that the wax cylinder, which is carried on a drum at a rapid rate by an electric motor or a spring, has the impressions made on it by means of a gauge-shaped needle which scoops out fine particles of the soft substance, and that the extremity of the reproducing needle is in the shape of a ball, and falls into the grooves cut into the cylinder.

How to Adapt it.

Now let us see how the phonograph can be of service to the drawing-room entertainer. It is a fact that quite a large number of people make a good living out of their phonographs. Equipped with a sound machine and a selection of records representing marches of regimental bands, the music of concert orchestras, music-hall melodies, banjo, clarinet, piccolo, mandoline, and concertina solos, songs, comic and sentimental, imitations and dialogues, the entertainer, once he has made the necessary outlay of capital, has all that is required for giving a popular entertainment.

For some time, however, the phonographic performer was at

In this phonograph the stylus slides sideways in straight tracks.



Improved Cylinders

a decided disadvantage owing to the cost of records. The price of these was somewhat high, not so much on account of the actual cost of the article as of the ease with which they were damaged. Being made of a wax substance, the greatest care had to be exercised in the matters of packing and sending away, and in many cases, despite all care, the entertainer found a number of his records smashed.

Improved Cylinders.

By the courtesy of the manager of the Edison-Bell Phono Co., I have been informed that a new indestructible record has recently been put upon the market by this firm, and that it is at present the only successful one of its kind. As far as can be gathered from inspection, these are made from some very strong substance, much resembling vulcanite, and extremely durable. Being much thinner than the ordinary wax record, they are correspondingly lighter. A fall will not break them, neither do they require wrapping in wool. With long and continued wear they will naturally become somewhat dirty, but the use of a little soap and water effectually overcomes this difficulty, without dulling their impressions. They are slightly more expensive than wax, costing as they do 2s., but there is no question as to which is cheaper in the long run, the ordinary breakable record at 1s. 6d. or the indestructible at 2s.

The Best Machines.

Those who intend to have a phonograph for the purpose of professional entertainments will be prepared to make a larger outlay than the amateur who buys a machine solely for home amusement. Experience has shown me that of all machines the Edison-Bell are undoubtedly the best, both for simplicity of construction and good workmanship. These range in price from 10s. 6d. to £25, and, of course, vary considerably in the amount of work they are capable of. For the drawing-room entertainer the most useful instrument is the "Victor Concert," price £6, 6s., a cheap type which will take both small and large records. It is mounted in a handsome polished cabinet, and can be carried easily. I have no hesitation in saying that such a phonograph as this will quickly pay for itself, as the number of engagements which can be obtained by the possessor of a really reliable instrument is great.



Thomas Edison in 1878