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Topic Area: The record player



Although German born inventor Emile Berliner was not the first to devise a machine for reproducing recorded music and sound it is his version of the technology that become the preminent technological expression and visual sign for the popular mass consumption of music purchased and listened to in the home in the twentieth century.

His 1890's design provided two significant advantages over the slightly earlier Edison Phonograph. The two dimensional circular records (or discs) with their music contained in a spiral groove allowed the more efficient mass "pressing" of records on a production line. Incidentally, this template also provided the opportunity for an "a side" and "b side", concepts which would later exercise the critical faculties of the popular music press for decades to come.

In addition, the revolving platter with its central locating spindle could quickly and easily be loaded with the next disc which was then set playing by a clockwork and later electric motor.

The advent of the long-playing 33rd rpm 12 inch "long player" in the late forties and the later introduction of stereo sound saw the advent of home "hifi" and Berliner's basic template remained unaltered as the new "hifi" record players refined and improved the engineering of a largely unchanged design concept. Some of these early hifi designs are sought by collectors and listeners alike and can change hands for thousands of pounds, whilst brand new high-end vinyl players can cost the same or even more.

Popular home record listening took place on the more modest and affordable domestic record player or radiogram (record player and radio combined) whilst the "jukebox" exploited the capacity for easy disc changing in an automated, multidisc design for public spaces.

Berliner also founded the preminent German classical record label Deutsche Grammophon, although German rock music was only later to have a world impact in the 60s and 70s with the advent of the uniquely German "Kosmische Musik" (more crudely referred to as *Krautrock*).

As far as its visual ubiquity is concerned, the Gramophone (or "Plattenspieler") is often, and very ably, represented by a circle, partly bisected by a line (representing the tone arm), a sign often seen wherever recorded music is present.

