

Advertisement for the Edison Phonograph (1905)

Abstract

The phonograph was a device for the recording and reproduction of sound, originally on wax cylinders (and later, by the 1930s, on vinyl discs). The American inventor Thomas Edison had already registered a patent for his phonograph in 1878, but he did not begin commercial distribution of his invention until 1887, when he founded the Edison Phonograph Company. By the end of the nineteenth century, the first European branches of his company had opened, selling phonographs and wax cylinders with various sound recordings distributed under the Edison Record label as well as blank cylinders for self-recording. When mass production of wax cylinders became possible only a few years later, this made the recordings cheaper and thus affordable for a wider range of buyers interested in this new technology. The phonograph could not only be used to play back sound recordings, but also to record your own. The latter function soon proved particularly useful in business, where phonographs were introduced as dictation devices. From the 1910s onwards, however, phonographs using wax cylinders were increasingly replaced by gramophones using stamped disc records (which were easier to mass-produce).

The wax cylinder recording you can hear here dates from 1905 and is an advertisement for the Edison phonograph. (It is similar to Edison's advertising-recording in English for American listeners, although the American ad offers drama and modern entertainment, while this German version emphasizes the enjoyment of the arts.) The ad-recording lists the different types of music and entertainment that could be enjoyed without leaving one's home thanks to the phonograph and reflects the wide range of offerings from the Edison Record label at the beginning of the twentieth century. Numerous well-known musicians, actors, and comedians began making recordings for Edison and other emerging record labels at this time.

Source

Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you. I am the Edison phonograph, the brainchild of the brilliant inventor Thomas A. Edison. Through me, you will hear the most famous artists, the most outstanding orchestras, and the most popular comedians with perfect fidelity. I play orchestral music, symphonies, and instrumental solos of every kind with consummate mastery. Through me, you can enjoy the most magnificent arias from classical operas, the most popular hits from modern operettas, and the funniest couplets. The artists themselves sing, play, and speak to you. There is no background noise to interfere with the performance. No tedious changing of sketches is necessary. Every child can operate me. I provide the highest artistic enjoyment and the finest entertainment. I am the most loyal friend in every family. I am a decoration for every home. I am a faithful companion on journeys. I entertain and educate you in all languages. I know no fatigue, and you will never tire of listening to me. I enable you to make your own recordings. In this way, I offer you the highest artistic enjoyment. I preserve the chatter of your children, the voices of your loved ones, and your own voice for later times. Believe me, if you welcome me into your home, I will soon be your dearest household companion. Ask your salesperson if I am telling the truth. They will confirm it.

Source: Reklame-Record Edison, Berlin, 1905. Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv

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