



His Master's
Voice



MUSÉE DES ONDES EMILE BERLINER

Design Montréal RCA The Sixties and Seventies



Design Montréal RCA

The Sixties and Seventies

Photos by Michael Delaney

By Michael Delaney



On April 09, the Musée des Ondes Emile Berliner officially inaugurated its latest exhibition, "Design Montréal RCA-The Sixties and Seventies". I always try to attend the Vernissage of our new exhibitions. These events are always a great opportunity to link up with friends and possibly help with any last-minute details that have to be finished before the curtain gets raised. Every year, no matter how much planning and long hours of work go into the exhibition, there is always a frenetic burst to get the exhibition ready.

André Morin explaining his designs



This year I was swamped with work and I felt that I would have to pass on the Opening for the first time in many years. As the date approached I kept flipping back and forth, I should go, no I can't go because my delivery deadline is rapidly approaching. This went on for over a week. Finally, I decided to work several real killer days to free up enough time attend and I am very glad that I did. Like all our other Openings there was a good-sized group of members, but what special about the Opening of Design Montréal RCA-The Sixties and Seventies was that the eminent industrial designer, André Morin, some of whose work was featured in the exhibition, attended and spoke at length about the struggles of a young designer working for RCA.

One event that he discussed was how he managed to get a totally new product line into stores. When he joined the Design department of RCA he looked at the product line and saw that the audio units were all large, heavy and styled in "classic" designs i.e. Spanish or Rococo.

What the RCA marketing department was looking for



He wanted to create smaller units with a modern "clean" line. When he proposed these designs to the company executive he ran up against a standard problem. The designs were unusual, and as often happens the Marketing department did not know or did want to know how to sell these new designs.

What André Morin was designing



A Forma Design



André Morin took his concerns to one of the heads of RCA and was told that the best way to get his designs accepted would be to sell it to the Marketing department. What he did was to approach Eaton's, one of RCA's major clients. He had a simple request: could he and set a small display featuring one of the new modern designed sound systems. The store agreed and a trial period was set. After the trial period was over André Morin contacted the Eaton's to ask how the sound system was received by the clientele of the store. The answer to the question was that the display was a big hit and that Eaton's would like to order 1,000 units. André Morin returned to RCA with the Purchase Order for 1,000 units of the new very modern sound system and the rest as they say "is history".

This was just one of the stories that André Morin shared with all in attendance. Needless to say, the long hours that I had to work to free up the time to attend the Vernissage were well worth it. There will be an opportunity for all to hear more from André Morin on the 11 October. Please check out the Musée's website for the dates and times of all of the conferences.

André Morin, Pierre M. Valiquette, Michel Forest and Anja Borck



A Classic Clock Radio



RCA Prototype by André Morin



Herbert Berliner

The father of the Canadian Recording Industry

Part 3

By Tim Hewlings



Introduction

It often said that the best way to judge a person's importance or impact is to talk to their co-workers and associates. The last installment of our series includes interviews and comments from key figures in the audio industry about their relationship with Herbert

Berliner.

Mr. Berliner, as everyone called him, obviously commanded a great deal of respect. He also inspired extreme loyalty in those who worked both with him, and for him. He was regarded universally as a kind and gentle man. Yet he could be ruthless in business, at one point even suing his former employers – his father and his brother.

He was a talented recording engineer and musician and probably, the world's first audiophile.

He was well educated and, as a boy, attended a highly regarded military boarding school in the USA. He went on to obtain a degree in mechanical engineering from a prestigious university in Germany. He travelled extensively in Europe. He was fluent in German, English and probably Yiddish and French.

He was an innovator and somewhat of a visionary, always exploring and using the latest technologies available. He was extremely meticulous in trying to improve the quality of recorded sound.

He also had an innate ability to find talented, future recording stars.

His private life was extremely private. He was married with two daughters, but little is known of his family life. Compo, the business he founded, was his first love and recording was his passion. He sacrificed his beautiful home to help the company survive the depression.

His employees were part of his family, and when he thought he was dying, he sold Compo to Decca to ensure its survival. In the early days of the record company, he provided employment to some of his artists so they could survive in the music business.



Bob Chislett

Who was this enigmatic man, Herbert Samuel Berliner? How he was viewed by colleagues:

Robert A. (Bob) Chislett, general manager of Compo for 35 years, said of him: "He was a very, very dedicated man. And, by that, I don't mean the business of making money - I mean the act of producing records themselves." [i]

John Bradley - Mr Berliner's longtime assistant: [ii]

John Bradley



"...I became involved in... making master recordings ... and to make additional copies of the records, you had to have them processed, and Mr. Berliner had a factory in Lachine. I went out to get information about making master recordings, to have him do the pressing. I met him and we had some sort of fun talks, as much as you had "fun talks" with Mr. Berliner, he was very straight and to the point, but,

very decent and interested in people. He was also going to get pressing work, and that mattered to him. And that's how I met him.

I wasn't originally involved very much with the Compo Company, except when I needed pressings, for the work I was doing for people. Mr. Berliner was looking for somebody to work with him, and I was given that privilege....

"A lot of people thought he was tough. I always found him extremely gentle and very understanding, and accurate to teach [sic]. He had funny things, he would put his hand out and expect the right tool to be put in his hand if he was at the lathe and playing around with a stylus or something like that. And if you didn't do it, he would look at you in such a manner as to say, "How could you do such a silly thing, you know perfectly well from the years of experience that I've had... what tool is necessary." Well, I hadn't got those years of experience. So... he was tough in that respect, but I found him an absolute gentleman. Never at any time did I have any thought that he was anything but gentle and kind. But I heard other stories from other people."

"One of the comments that my mother had made was that when he would phone the house to speak to me, he would always speak to her about how she was, and she said on one occasion that she'd never spoken to anybody who was so gentle. And this flies in the face of some of the stories that I could never accept, about the fact that he could be quite tough.

"... and people told me, who shook hands with him, that his handshake was so gentle... I don't think it was lacking in manliness, that sort of way, he just was gentle and it came through. ...it certainly came through all the time with me and the girl who was doing the stylus lapping...who later became active in the payroll department out in Lachine, all the time. All these people who worked with him, and with whom I worked too, never had any thoughts that are ... never made any statements to the effect that he was anything except very kind and thoughtful. And I've sort of objected to some of the comments that were made at times. It never came off with me...

On Berliner's Studio:

Mr. Berliner ... invited me to go into the studio and look at the place. I'd never seen it before, of course, and it was very strange because any studio I had been in had not got windows all the way down one side ...the area where we did the recording, which was the other side of the wall from the studio, had so many things in it and in the photograph that I have of Mr. Berliner in the studio, you can see that there are so many things on shelves where there are two, two meters, two boxes of something or other.

"Whenever I was to go to New York, or had an idea that we could do something better by buying something, and generally I had to go to New York to get it, H.S. would say, "Buy two of them." I'd say, "Mr. Berliner, we don't need two of those transformers, we don't need two of those tone controls, and so on." "Buy two of them." So when you look at this particular photograph that one of the artists took in the workroom at the back of the studio, you see that there's two of everything and it went on for years. ... He was doing it because, ... you're driven to improve all the time and to get that little extra. It's selfish, in some ways, you just want more kick for yourself and to share the kick with your friends that's very important. And he wanted to do it, too."

"He wanted things to be well done. Mr. Berliner put a great deal of emphasis on stylus design..."

"He used to take copies of records home. In fact, when I visited in his home, there were piles of records all over the place, and various phonographs, and so on, at home and he would listen to things ... and make decisions on why he wasn't happy with it.... He kept books of every cut that we did, the numbers, which were the mother numbers, and he would make notes, or I would make them for him, and so on, of the temperature, the humidity, any unusual factors at all, and then when the records came out he evaluated what he was hearing against what had been written in the book.

Jean-Marc Audet, renowned sound recordist and owner of Les Studios Marko, speaking of his days in the 1930s as a technician at radio station CKAC in Montreal: [iii]

"One night, someone came in around ... the recording was at seven o'clock exactly ... came in around five minutes after seven o'clock. He said, "Hello." I said, "Hello, do you want to see something?" He said, "Yes, I want to see this." I said, "What this?" He said, "Your recording there." I said, "Why?" He said, "I'm Mr. Berliner" ... Then I told him my name and [that is how] we met ... And he said, "Wait let me see." He took it out a little loupe ... and went right down [close to] the record about...a quarter of an inch [away] to see the depth of the cut. While he was doing that, all the shavings were coming [off] around the

record and I said, "if it gathers under my needle, it's going to jump". I was shaking and he said, "No, no I see that you're nervous." I said, "Sure I am nervous; you're going to spoil my record." He said, "No, I won't spoil your record." Then he said, "You're cutting a little bit too deep, just lift it up a little bit." I started to unscrew it and the spring loaded. He said, "Stop. That's perfect." He said, "Keep it there." At that time we just had a little machine with just a little magnifier, ...with a little light underneath. It was not very good.....He said "That cost about three dollars. Buy something good to check your records, not a three dollar mastering that goes to seventy-five stations. You're going to make a mess out of it. So, that's a lot. And he used to come in nearly every two or three days just to check how I was recording."

One thing I forgot to tell you about Berliner. Mr. Berliner was a very nice man. I liked him very, very much. He was a very... human man. But he was tall and ... he was a bit frightening when you saw him for the first time.

He used to call me at night when I was at master control and say, "Marc, Berliner here ...Feed me CBS, OK?" So I used to feed him CBS because he had a trunk line with us. I was listening at the same time to see what was going on. It was always music. I didn't know anything so - every two nights ... it was "Marc, send me CBS". One day I had a notice [from management] "Don't send any more music to Mr. Berliner because he's recording it and selling it on record"So [the next time he called] me I said, "Mr. Berliner, I'm not allowed to - I can't." He said, "Marc, come on, just for a couple of hours." So as I knew him well, I said, "I cannot refuse...". I said, "Now don't tell, please!" <laughing> Because I enjoy, I enjoy this man very much. He was such a pleasant man.



Jean-Marc Audet with Barry Lucking in the background

[i] Todoruk, Ihor, *A Hundred Years of Recorded Sound, 1877-1977*, Toronto, 1977, p. 4.

[ii] Smith, Brian M., Unpublished interview with John Bradley, Montreal, 1996.

[iii] Smith, Brian M., Unpublished interview with Jean-Marc Audet, Montreal, 1996.

Next His Master's Voice

The Edison Phonograph

At the MOEB

News from the Exec:

Financing the Musée des ondes Emile Berliner

A large percentage of the Musée's finances comes for a host of activities that canvass funds. Here are some of the early 2017 result.

With the support of Ms Dominique Anglade, Member for Saint-Henri-Sainte-Anne. Minister of Economy, Science and Innovation, and Minister responsible for the Digital Strategy, a total of \$9,000 was collected from colleagues within the Quebec Government. A huge thank you to Ms Isabelle Gautrin, the director of the Riding office.

With great pride I can announce that our museum director Anja Borck, and Mary Catherine Shea, one of the interns, managed to get a \$20,500 grant from Library and Archives Canada. This is a first for the Musée.

Upcoming activities:

- Soliciting major grants at the beginning of the summer.
- A Crowdfunding campaign this autumn.
- A series of Conferences and musical events this autumn.

As always, please do not forget to renew your MOEB membership. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Pierre M. Valiquette
President MOEB Board of directors

Photo by Maurice Mc Duff



Design Montréal RCA The Sixties and Seventies

Photos by Maurice Mc Duff

by Anja Borck



On April 9th 2017, the Musée des ondes opened its twenty-first temporary exhibit which displays the record players of the three Canadian manufacturers which introduced North America to sound systems in a Modernist design. They were Clairtone, Electrohome and RCA Victor Canada. In the 1960s, Modernism was heavily influenced by space-technology. The launch of Canada's first satellite, the Alouette 1, on September 29th, 1962, had won Canada global recognition in this sphere and had become an inspiration to creative minds worldwide.

In 1963, Clairtone's Project G, with the futuristic design of its detached sphere-shaped speakers by Hugh Spencer, was featured in Time Magazine and won a silver medal for design at the Triennale di Milan in 1964 (*Made in Canada: Craft and Design in the Sixties*, 2005, p. 33). Shortly after, Electrohome's design director, Gordon Duern, responded to Clairtone's popularity with the creation of Circa 75. In 1966, with Duern's junior designer Keith McQuarrie, Electrohome put the Apollo series on the market.

The big stereo-systems by Clairtone and Electrohome were targeted mostly at the rich and famous, whereas the world's largest consumer-electronics producer of that time, RCA Victor, created an affordable modernist line, Forma, designed by Montreal born André Morin. His colorful and playful creations came out around the time of the Woodstock festival and appealed to the growing, young hippie generation.

RCA Forma designs



The inclusion of the two Ontario-based companies in the exhibition, Clairtone and Electrohome, compromised the usual support of the City of Montréal and the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec. In the opinion of the selection com-

mittee, the exhibition topic did not qualify for the Programme de soutien à la diffusion du patrimoine montréalais 2016 – Entente sur le développement culturel de Montréal.

The rejection of the grant in the year of the Museum's 25th anniversary came as a shock, but an exhibit of Modernism in industrial design without the other Canadian contributions seemed incomplete. Montreal's influence was not just its contribution to creating an international style. Even more important was the inspiration as a result of RCA Victor Canada's outstanding space technology. How better to prove that than with a look at the larger picture?

Electrohome designs



The Musée des ondes has one of the most complete collections of André Morin's stereo designs worldwide, including unique prototypes, which were donated to the museum by the designer himself. Furthermore, most of the exhibited pieces are in working condition and our guides will play music on selected stereos to visitors during our opening hours.

For all interested in learning more about Canadian industrial design of the modern age, the Musée des ondes is presenting a series of four lectures in September 2017. Industrial designer André Morin will be one of our selected speakers. Dates of the lectures will be published in July. The exhibition Design Montréal RCA runs until March 18th 2018 at the Musée des ondes Emile Berliner.

Musée des ondes Emile Berliner: Calendar

DESIGN Montreal RCA The Sixties and the Seventies: 09 April - 18 March Conferences:

- 20 September: Jean Belisle: Industrial Design In Canada. (In French)
27 September: Matthew Boerum: Development from Mono to 3-D sound. (In English)
04 October: Anja Borck: Inspiration Bauhaus. (In English)
11 October: André Morin: Designing for RCA. (In French)

Musée des ondes Emile Berliner: Contacts

<p>Pierre M. Valiquette, President pierre@moeb.ca 514-974-1558</p>	
<p>Anja Borck, Director aborck@moeb.ca 514-594-9333</p>	
<p>Michel Forest, Executive Adviser miforest@moeb.ca 514-588-6163</p>	
<p>Tim Hewlings, Boardmember tim.hewlings@icloud.com 514-979-1477</p>	
<p>Abibata Koné, Treasurer abi.kone@yahoo.ca 438-995-1460</p>	
<p>Michael E Delaney, Boardmember michaeledelaney1@mac.com 514-214-7039</p>	
<p>Denise Dussault, Boardmember denise.dusso@bell.net 514-934-3622</p>	
<p>Janine Krieber, Secretary krieber@moeb.ca</p>	



Postcard from the collection of Joseph Pereira

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21025 Trans-Canada Highway
 Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec H9X 3R2
 Tel: 514-457-2150 | www.mdacorporation.com

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 Canada H4L 4Z6

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1001, Lenoir street, A-202
 Tel : (514) 933-2211