Music in Code

The Decap Cafe Organ

RICHARD SEATON
Today listening to music is easy. We have CD players, radio, television or even the internet /but a hundred years ago that wasn't the case you either had to play it for yourselves or you had to go out to /concerts, the church, public house or even the music hall.

RICHARD:
There are two different aspects to making music either we make it for ourselves or have others make it for us. Unfortunately we're not all blessed with the ability to make music but there is another way.

RICHARD
This amazing robot organ, one of eight made in Belgium in the nineteen fifties for the Blue Angel café chain, probably represents the peak of the mechanical music manufacturer's craft. The principles used to create and control both the music and the automata that play, some of it, are what we're going to be looking at it in these sequences. Making music by mechanical methods, that is, without human intervention other than possibly providing motive power, has taxed human ingenuity for centuries.

RICHARD
The European clock makers of the sixteenth century needed great mechanical expertise in their trade, with many fitting chiming mechanisms to their clocks to ring out the hours. In the clock towers of churches and town halls mechanisms were further developed to play tunes on the bells that were hung alongside the clocks, each bell is struck by a hammer, which is operated by an electric solenoid. Each solenoid is controlled by a computer, which receives its instructions from a floppy disk, such as this. But, we're getting ahead of ourselves here for in the sixteenth century a carillon such as this would have been operated by a pin barrel.

CAPTION
Carillon Eisbouts of Holland
recovered from the Arndale Centre
Manchester, in 1996.