



Music in Code

Electromechanical Violin Player

RICHARD (V O):

This mechanical violin player is American. Dating from around 1910 it was then said to be the eighth greatest invention of the decade. Encoded on the paper roll are some of the elements of expression a live performer would use. The four spinning wheels bow the strings. While the motor that spins them, speeds up and slows down to recreate the strength and speed of the live bowing action.

The strings are stopped by raising the individual mechanical fingers. The violin is kept in tune by the constant force provided by these weights. As well as providing the instructions to operate the complexities of the violin, the paper roll also drives the piano accompaniment. Unfortunately, the ingenuity of the mechanism isn't matched by the sound it produces. As an example of how far manufacturers pushed technology this mechanicalised violin is a triumph of ambition over achievement.