

August 20

Howard Hope's programme of **Extraordinary Machines** was a celebration of ill-conceived gramophones and phono-graphs, produced for reasons of novelty, pretension or low cost. Almost all of them flopped. With the aid of the projector, Howard aimed to bring us a hundred machines in the course of the evening. I lost count but have little doubt he achieved this goal.

Following is a selection: the Amet Echophone from 1896, a machine with glass tube and wooden bellows which needed no diaphragm; the splendidly named Impersonatograph Syndicate Personophone; the Éventail Automatique which started life as a fan; a clutch of machines with multiple turntables and/or horns (among them the Columbia Quadrophone, Beethovensaal Concert, Banjo Multiphone, Duplex Pathéphone); the Deveneau Biophone (as seen in the film of *My Fair Lady*); Edison Bell's Homestead phonograph; and Edison's concrete phonograph which famously turned to dust. In the interval we enjoyed a short film demonstrating an oscillating horn gramophone. Part two began with Le Palmodian, a gramophone with a violin on top, and continued with gramophones designed to look like something else: a windmill, Zeppelin, flower (the Floraphon), watermill, Chinese temple and the Belknap Circus Bandwagon.... and still they came: the Elephant-footophone (all too real); the Urophone Alarm Clock, Banjophone, Pianophone, the Bach and the Paganini (Klingsor machines with myriad mirrors), the Light Phonograph (the tiniest of machines), the Gyrophone and the Gold-Plated Edison Electric Phonograph.

These wonderful machines – some beautiful, a few ugly, many daft – were described by Howard with wit and great attention to detail. It made for a fascinating evening. A bonus was that our usual room was unavailable and we met in the Conway Hall Library, which still looks as a library should. I found myself sitting near a small drop-leaf table, the 'fellow prisoner' of Richard Carlile gaoled during his 19th century struggles for press freedom.

London Reporter (aka Bob Carlisle)