



Impact Statement

Owen Pierson, Grade 11

Inventor of the Record, 2026

Brass sculpture, 18 x 2.25 x 0.25 inches

Harrilton High School, Bryn Mawr, PA

Unsung Hero: Emile Berliner

I chose Emile Berliner for my Unsung Heroes project. I chose this man because of one thing that caught my eye, that being the invention of the gramophone record. I've always found the art of invention a very interesting thing, but with something as particular and somewhat mechanical as this, I couldn't help but be interested. What I admire about Berliner is his drive to invent. At first, he stayed an accountant to make ends meet, while still spending much of his free time inventing and tinkering. But later in his life, to avoid being drafted into the Franco-Prussian war, he moved to America, where he took odd jobs to stay afloat and studied physics. All for the pursuit of invention and discovery.

Emile Berliner's biggest impact is the invention of the gramophone record. But before he accomplished this, first I should begin on where he started his interest in audio science. It all began when he lived in a livery stable, essentially a garage for horses, where he began to develop an interest in the new technology of the telephone and phonograph. This interest sparked him to invent an audio device of his own, an improved telephone transmitter, which is one of the first types of microphones. Sadly, however, Berliner couldn't get the patent, as courts ruled in favor of Thomas Edison, who argued that Edison had preceded Berliner in the invention of the microphone. But later, again, in his life, he had created another invention. In 1887, the gramophone record was born. At this time in history, recordings of audio meant for playback were stored on wax cylinders, which were inefficient and quite easy for their information to be damaged. What makes Berliner's disk stand out from wax cylinders is that it could store more information due to its larger surface area, its etchings were far more durable than that of wax, and his record was easily able to be mass produced, jumpstarting an industry of more accessible sold music and other audio.

The process of making my metal arts piece started with the disk. From the second I picked Emile Berliner, I knew the centerpiece of my project would be the disk that he invented, as it was his most impactful invention. When deciding what type of piece I should do for Berliner, I ultimately decided on a necklace. A long-chained necklace with music notes intertwined into the chains. It's essentially a large loop, representing how the spread of audio that is only possible because of him has brought us more together, and allowed for everyone to connect over music like links of a chain. I also decided on using only brass for this project, as gramophones would often have their horns made from the very same metal.

I hope that my artwork inspired people to look more into Emile Berliner, and people like him. I think that every innovator and discoverer in this world is worthy of having their name remembered and spoken of when their accomplishments have had as great an impact as his. I've always loved researching or hearing about inventions, but it saddens me to hear the same few names of "Einstein, Edison, Tesla" and more of the same. I hope that my artwork, even if it's very few, inspires people to ask more questions about who invented what, whose research allowed for your everyday things you couldn't live without. But most importantly, I hope my piece inspires people to educate not just themselves, but others, on unsung heroes such as Emile Berliner.