



Impact Statement

Kevin Chen, Grade 10

Shaping Sound Through Innovation, 2026

Acrylic, colored pencil, marker on paper, 14.5 x 10 inches

Shin Studio, Bellevue, WA

Unsung Hero: Emile Berliner

In my artistic project, I depicted the Unsung Hero Emile Berliner, a pioneering inventor whose work transformed the way people experience sound. Berliner's impact on modern day society talked to me personally because of his deep connection to everyday life like music, podcasts, and recorded audio. These technologies are often considered such normal parts of our world that we often neglect their origins. While inventors like Thomas Edison are more often widely recognized, Berliner's contributions played an equally important role in shaping the modern music industry. The mindset to immediately think of possible improvements to Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone is deeply inspiring since it reflects Berliner's innovative mindset. My selection of Berliner for my art piece was fueled by his determination to improve existing ideas as well as his focus on making sound recording more accessible, a key part of today's world.

Born on May 20, 1851 in Germany, Berliner later moved to the U.S. after receiving a job offer at a dry-goods store in Washington D.C. His most significant achievement was the development of the gramophone, a device that transmitted sound using flat discs rather than cylinders. This advancement in the field of sound made it much easier to duplicate recordings, allowing music to be mass-produced and distributed to a wide range of people. Berliner's invention directly allowed more people to listen to music in their homes for the first time, fundamentally altering entertainment. The invention of the gramophone and the usage of records was an improvement in sound technology as well as a steppingstone for later developments like vinyl records and modern audio systems.

My artwork aims to demonstrate the impact of Berliner's contributions to sound, music, and communication. The bottom half of my art piece includes a recreation of the famous painting His Master's Voice by Francis Barraud, where the image depicts a dog named Nipper listening to a recording of his deceased owner's voice through a gramophone. This section reflects the powerful ability of recorded sound where it isn't just an invention but also something deeply personal. The upper half of my art piece features Emile Berliner listening to an early form of the telephone, mimicking Nipper's action of listening to sound, symbolizing the ability of sound to preserve human presence. Behind Berliner, there are many telephone variations, reflecting the evolution and development of sound technology throughout the years. The background also highlights Berliner's strive for innovation and improvement alongside the impact he had on sound. To create a cohesive painting, I used many different artistic tools to sculpt my piece into its final form. I utilized acrylic paint as a base, and I utilized markers, sharpies, and color pencils to add tiny details that refined my artwork.

The story of Emile Berliner and his contributions have taught me the importance of an innovative mindset. Through the creation of this artwork, I hope to carry along persistence and creativity similar to Berliner, as well as the ability to add improvements to existing ideas in a meaningful way. His impact on sound and communication has encouraged me to think more profoundly about the impact of innovation and the importance of recognizing those who have contributed to advancements in society even if others haven't yet. In the future, I hope to carry this mindset into my own interests, especially in fields related to technology or problem-solving where development relies on continuous improvements. My plan for sharing my artwork is to showcase it at school displays or to a local music school to help others learn about Berliner's impact on sound. Through this approach, I can extend the innovative mindset of Berliner to broader audiences and encourage others to appreciate the history behind the technology we use today. Emile Berliner's contributions have left a lasting legacy that demonstrates how one individual's ideas can shape and influence the future, even if their name isn't widely recognized.