Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
ARTEFFECT

Impact Statement

Angela Yi, Grade 12
The Sound of Berliner, 2026
Colored pencil, watercolor on paper, 11 x 14 inches
North Penn High School, Landsdale, Pennsylvania, USA
Unsung Hero: Emile Berliner

In choosing my Unsung Hero I wanted to select someone whose contributions are connected to something that is already an important part of my life. I chose Emile Berliner, an inventor whose work helped change the way people experienced and shared music. I was especially drawn to Berliner because of his invention of the gramophone and my own love of listening to music.

Music is something that people can enjoy almost anywhere, but it is easy to forget that there was a time when recorded music was not easily available. Learning about Berliner made me appreciate how much creativity and innovation went into making it possible for people to listen to music outside of a live performance.

Emile Berliner was born in Hanover, Germany in 1851 then later moved to the States 1870, primarily to avoid being drafted for the Franco-Prussian War. His early American life was rough. For his first few years in Washington, Berliner was a shop clerk. In 1873 he moved to New York City, where he continued taking difficult jobs during the day while educating himself at night at the Cooper Institute. His big break came when he got a job as a general cleanup worker in the laboratory. This opportunity sparked Berliner's passion to chase after science, research, and invention. As he continued exploring new ideas, he began developing inventions that would eventually change the way people experienced sound and music. His most important invention was the gramophone, which used flat discs that could be mass-produced, making recorded music cheaper and easier for ordinary people to own and enjoy. His technology helped create the modern recording industry and eventually influenced the records and music players people used for decades.

The vision behind my creative interpretation of Emile Berliner's story was to show how his inventions changed the way people experienced and listened to music. I depicted Berliner on the right side of the paper holding a disc to represent his important contribution to recorded sound. Next to him, I included the iconic gramophone with Nipper, the dog, referencing the famous "His Master's Voice" trademark associated with The Gramophone Company. I wanted the music and sound to appear as if it were flowing out of the gramophone, so I used musical notes from "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little

Star," one of the early songs recorded on a Berliner disc. The musical notes then warp behind Berliner and gradually fade into the background, representing how Berliner's invention allowed sound and music to spread to people around the world. For the background, I used the recognizable "His Master's Voice" logo to connect my artwork to the history of the gramophone. These choices were based on my research about Berliner's invention of the gramophone, his use of flat records, and the impact his technology had on the development of recorded music. For the materials I used colored pencils for the artwork, however I densely layered the foreground and middle ground to make the main subjects stand out from the background. Additionally, for the dark background I added some watercolor on top of the colored pencil to mimic the murky backgrounds of portrait photographs from the 19th and 20th century. Overall, I wanted my artwork to portray Berliner as an innovative and determined person, using recognizable features and symbols, such as the gramophone, the disc, and Nipper, to make him more noticeable and clearly connect him to his impact on recorded music and everyday life.

Through researching, brainstorming, and creating this artwork, it has helped me understand how one person's determination and creativity can have a lasting impact on the world. Emile Berliner's story influences me to be more open to trying new ideas and not give up when something is difficult. Even though he faced challenges as an immigrant and had little formal education, he continued learning and experimenting, being fired by his passion, until he created inventions that changed how people experienced music. I hope my artwork can help others learn about Berliner and recognize his contributions, since he is not as well known as other famous inventors, such as Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell. I plan to share my artwork with my friends and family and also upload it to my social media platform so that more people can discover his story and understand how his work helped shape the way we listen to music today.