

Acquires One of First Theremins

By RUTH ANNE SILBAR
Special Writer for The Eccentric

If strange sounds and wails are heard around the vicinity of 835 Oakland avenue, there is no cause for alarm, for it is only someone trying to play Robert O. Ellery's newly acquired theremin.

This electronic musical device, invented in 1924 by the Russian inventor Leon Theremin, is probably the only one in the city. If there are others, Ellery would like to know, please.

The instrument is played with the hands although no physical contact is made with it. One hand is used to produce the music by holding it at varying distances from a vertical antenna while the other hand controls the volume from a horizontal antenna.

THE THEREMIN owned by Ellery is an "antique" as far as theremins go, for as Ellery explained, his instrument was one of the original theremins made by RCA about 1924-27.

"There weren't very many of these early models built," Ellery said, "and they were very expensive as was anything with radio tubes in those days. Apparently, only RCA had the facilities for making them at that time for I haven't been able to discover any other maker of that period."

In the beginning, this instrument was given to someone in the General Motors Corp., but it has been handed down to others until now it has been owned by four different people.

IN ALL CASES, the men who have had it were connected with General Motors, all knew each other because they were in the same field of work and all possessed it when they were in the same age bracket—the middle 30's.

Ellery, who is assistant electrical engineer of the GMC Truck and Coach division in Pontiac, says he has had his eye on this theremin for the past 10 years. It was not, however, until the latter part of August of this year that he finally got it.

THE THEREMIN'S previous possessor in Indiana, where Ellery and his wife went to pick it up, had stored the instrument in his garage.

He never learned to play it," Ellery said, "and was tired of having it around, I guess. He evidently had no inclination for music. The theremin is not an easy instrument to learn to play because you have to have a good sense of pitch to get music from it."

Ellery's theremin still has the original tubes. After cleaning up the case (which is of solid mahogany), Ellery tinkered with the circuit. (For those uninformed of the terminology, the circuit is the "innards.")

A DECISION was made to keep it in its present antiquated condition, Mrs. Ellery helping to decide that so Ellery rigged up a speaker of 1924 vintage for the device. He also replaced the pilot light which had burned out.

That pilot bulb is antique, too," Ellery remarked. "It has a carbon filament and you can't even buy those kind any more. I hunted around until I found one. "If any of the tubes of the instrument burn out, I have a box of them stowed away, so noted enough of the old time tubes to keep the thing running the rest of my life. The circuit is not very hard on the tubes."

The theremin—whose circuit is similar to a radio—is an instrument that plays one tone at a time and can produce unusual effects, some musical, others not, depending upon the ability of the performer.

SINCE IT is not keyed, it glides from one tone to the next. "By waving your hand, you can get away from sour notes or off-key notes," Ellery said. "That's the beauty of the thing. "You can make it sound like a choir, if you wiggle your hand just right, but I can't do that yet."

The device can also mimic other instruments such as a violin, a trombone or saxophone, as Ellery demonstrated.

The best way to learn to play it, he has found out, is to play along with a phonograph record which will provide the melody as well as the harmonic background. The device can produce tones of the entire musical range. It even goes beyond the range of hearing, according to Ellery.

INFORMATION concerning these electronic musical devices has been rather scanty but through the research library of his company, Ellery has been able to gather what material there is available.

"In one article I read," Ellery remarked, "it said that 'the theremin never was particularly popular, for its output wave form is almost pure sine wave and does not interest the ear.'"

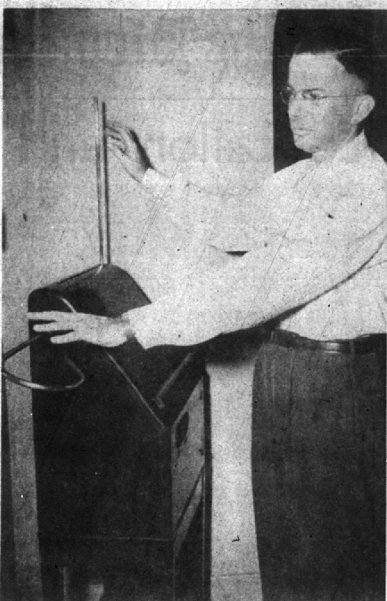
"I think that is a matter of opinion because the instrument has been seen and heard on TV and in the hands of a capable player, beautiful musical effects are possible. It also has been used by Hollywood to provide that 'Wally, eerie background music in pictures with psychological plots.'"

ALTHOUGH Ellery has not, as yet, had time to become an experienced player, he is able to play such melodies as "Old Black Joe" and "In a Monastery Garden" with a recognizable degree of proficiency.

He has become so enthusiastic about his theremin that there is doubt that he will ever pass it to another GM employee.

Mrs. Ellery has tried her hand at playing the device too, but she admits that she can't do as well as her husband.

"I think Bob has done real well for the thing, I think I'm the one who appreciates music in this family, but I guess that the theremin is his pet."



ROBERT ELLERY SHOWS HOW A THEREMIN IS PLAYED
His instrument is one of originals made about 1927
(Eccentric Staff Photo)

Child Guidance Clinic to Meet

Dr. Clinton J. Mumby, consulting psychiatrist at the Pontiac Child Guidance Clinic, will address the annual meeting of the group on Oct. 29 at Devon Gables. The program is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Dr. Mumby serves at the clinic offices, 1 Lafayette street, Pontiac, four mornings each week, and at the juvenile home one morning each week.

Mrs. Edward A. Proctor, 6180 Wing Lake road, is chairman of the board of directors. Other Birmingham members are Mrs. Edwin V. Clark, Dr. Robert J. Mason and Mrs. Lawrence S. Martz.

Operating under the sponsorship of the state department of mental health, the clinic serves Oakland and Macomb counties. It offers diagnostic, treatment and consultation services for children showing emotional and personality problems.

Parents, social agencies, physicians, courts, health departments and others are free to refer children to the clinic for these services.

To buy or sell a used automobile, read and use Eccentric Classified Ads.



ERNE McCULLOCH

Ski Champion Film To Be Shown Here

Ernie McCulloch, the present U. S. National and International downhill ski champion, is featured in a special ski movie called "Mont Tremblant Powder" to be shown at Birmingham Community House Friday, Oct. 17, at 7:30 p.m. by the Pontiac Ski Club.

Ernie McCulloch first emerged into the limelight of the ski world in 1949 when he defeated the entire Olympic Championship French team in the Quebec-Kandahar. In the last three years he has won six U. S. National Championships and is the present U. S. National and International Downhill Champion. He has also won the Harriman Cup for the last two years and is known in the ski world as "The Grand Slam Champion."

McCulloch, a native of Three Rivers, Quebec, is just twenty-six years of age and is director of the internationally famous Mont Tremblant Lodge Ski School.

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Building Permits Issued LAST WEEK

TOTAL VALUATION	Number	Valuation		
13	4	73,500		
Residences	2	2,500		
Garages	2	71,000		
Alterations	1	1,000		
Residence	1	1,000		
Wrecking	1	0		
Moving garage	1	0		
Mo. Permits	1951	1952	Per.	
Jan.	93	1,075,485	628,208	48
Feb.	63	680,850	514,000	88
Mar.	85	428,200	574,000	40
Apr.	52	748,715	484,212	84
May	115	842,889	624,265	97
June	71	786,000	510,270	110
July	101	823,550	1,044,000	104
Aug.	89	843,390	584,275	66
Sept.	118	1,162,918	822,749	74

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IN THE WABEEK BUILDING
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Radio Society To See Navy Films

Two U. S. Navy radio training films will be shown at the October 20 meeting of the Catalina Amateur Radio Society at St. James Episcopal Church.

Any amateur radio operators or other interested persons are invited to attend this regular monthly meeting of the organization. The Society meets the third Monday of every month at St. James where they have a Civil Defense radio station, WSHLD.

Walter B. Carey Heads American Truckers

A Franklin man, Walter B. Carey, was elected president of the American Trucking association when that group held its annual meeting in New York City last week.

Carey, president of Automobile Carriers, Inc., of Flint, promised to oppose competitive attacks on the trucking industry.

Referring to the trucking industry's forbearance to reply in kind to assaults upon it, Carey said it "has been interpreted as weakness" in some quarters.

"A great many people in the trucking business," he concluded, "feel the time has come for us to stop 'turning the other cheek.'"

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