Meg Flavell

Sound on!

No recording studio? No worries! Plug your instrument into your iPhone and away you go!

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Back when Steve Poltz started life in the music industry, cassette tapes were the weapon of choice, and if he wanted to record music, studio time would need to be booked and band members organised. Fast forward to 2018 and Poltz is still recording music, but now studio time is a maybe, not a necessity. As this troubadour trots across the globe, inspiration may strike at any time, whether in a suburban coffee shop or miles up in a jumbo jet. Now, rather than wait to lay tracks in a recording studio, he just needs to pull his iPhone from his back pocket and the studio is right there in his hands.

The recording industry began it's long and illustrious history back in 1857 when Frenchman Leon Scott de Martinville invented a device that could record sound. He patented this device on March 25, 1857 and called it the Phonautograph. The phonautograph worked by tracing sound waves as deviations in a line traced on paper or glass that had been blackened by smoke (EMI Archive Trust, 2016).

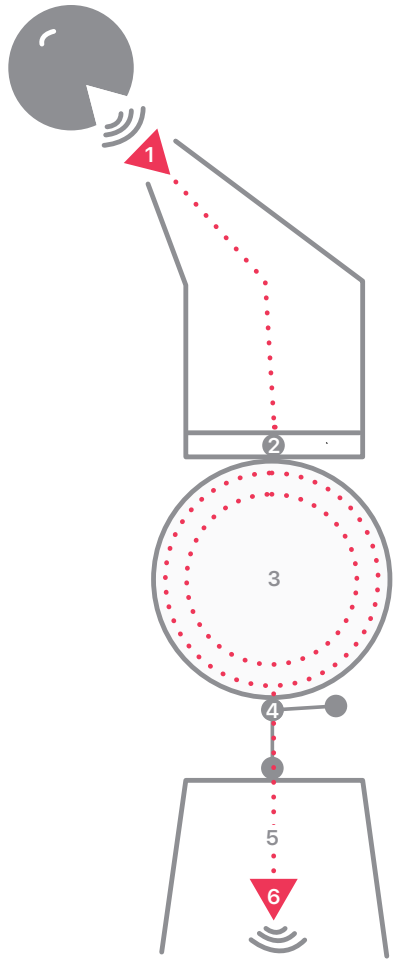
The Phonautograph couldn't actually play back sound though, and it wasn't until 1877 when Thomas Edison found a way to record and playback sound by using two needles on a tinfoil cylinders and thus, the phonograph was born. The first song ever recorded? Mary Had A Little Lamb.

Technology has advanced in leaps and bounds since 1877, and instead of needles and tinfoil cylinders, you can now record your next hit song in mere minutes from the palm of your hand using an app such as GarageBand.

GarageBand started life on your desktop Mac before becoming available as an app on iPad and iPhones from 2011.

GarageBand enables you to knock out impromptu jam sessions, all without having to lug around expensive recording equipment.

No longer does a musician need to hire a producer to record and mix their tracks, now it's as simple as plugging your instrument into your iPhone and off you go!



How Edison's phonograph worked:

Sound goes in (1), making a diaphragm vibrate and push a needle (2) back and forth, cutting a groove into foil wrapped around cylinder (3) that is going around whilst a second needle (4) presses into the groove, bouncing up and down in the pattern. Another diaphragm and horn (5) amplifies the sounds, turning them back into sounds you can hear (6).

A method put to good use by Steve Poltz when he's on the road. He can record song lyrics into Voice Memos when inspiration strikes or lay down the guitar track for his next song in GarageBand. "GarageBand is so easy to use! Sometimes, it helps me try different time signatures, and things I never would have thought of." A method also used to great effect by teenage music prodigy Steve Lacy.

Grammy Award nominated, teenage music producer Lacy has been using his smartphone as a personal studio since he first received an iPod Touch as a a Christmas gift after coveting the MacBook Pro used by creatives.

By 2015, Lacy joined the band The Internet for their album Ego Death. It was from here that he began collaborating with Kendrick Lamar. Lacy and Anna Wise were in the studio recording Lamar's track PRIDE when the studio equipment malfunctioned. Lacy told Wise "Let me make a lick on my laptop, bounce it to my phone, and we'll play this acoustic". Lacy then recorded her vocals and his guitar track using GarageBand on his iPhone. (Genius, 2017)

This track would go on to be nominated for a Grammy award. A track that was demoed on an iPhone whilst Lacy was still in high school.

Even now that he has access to all the best equipment and studios, Lacy still prefers his guitar connected to GarageBand on his iPhone 6.

In a time when most people prefer to stream their music rather than purchase it physically on CD, the future of this recording method looks bright.

Now the next Steve Lacy could be sitting at home in his bedroom, strumming a few chords on his guitar whilst laying down a drum track and some vocals and he's recorded his very first song. Something that garage bands in the 80s could only dream about!

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History of sound recording