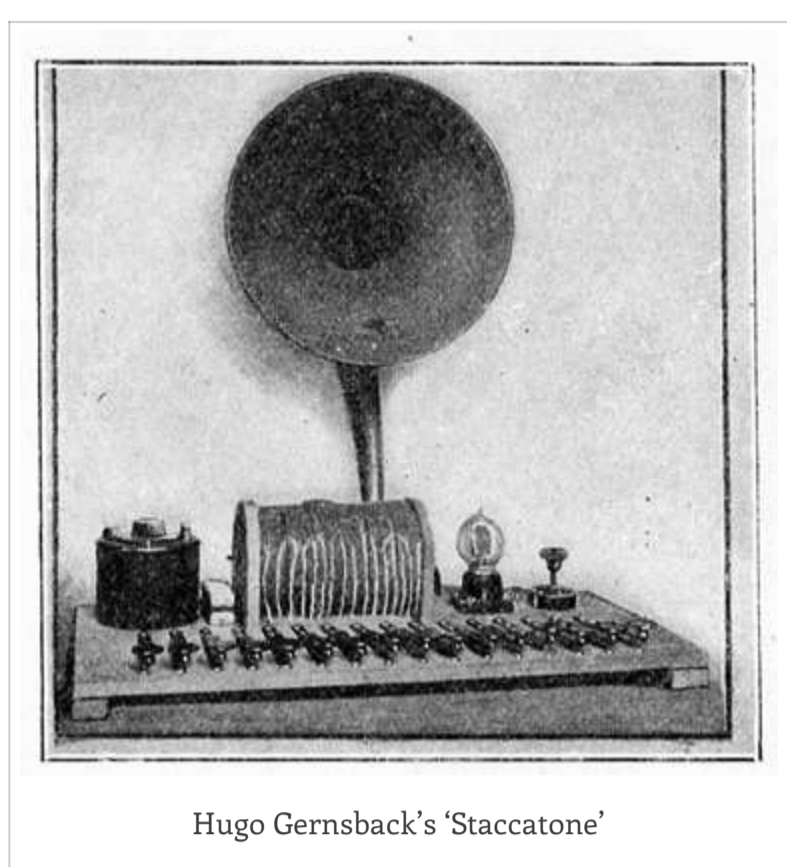


The 'Staccatone'. Hugo Gernsback & C.J.Fitch. USA, 1923



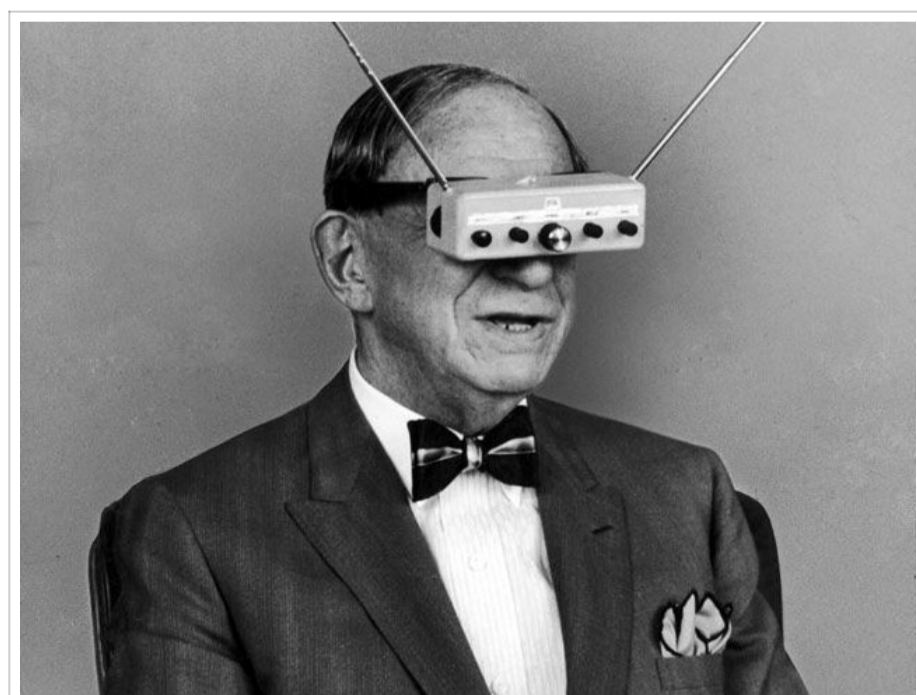
Hugo Gernsback's 'Staccatone'

Hugo Gernsback, perhaps better known as the 'Father of Science Fiction' (and currently eponymously celebrated in the 'Hugos' Science Fiction Awards) also invented and built an early electronic instrument called the Staccatone in 1923 (with Clyde.J.Fitch) which was later developed into one of the first polyphonic instruments, the Pianorad in 1926. Gernsback was a major figure in the development and popularisation of television, radio and amateur electronics, his multiple and sometimes shady businesses included early science fiction publishing, pulp fiction, self-help manuals and DIY electronics magazines as well as his own science fiction writing.



The Staccatone was conceived as a self-build project for amateur electronics enthusiasts via Gernsback's 'Practical Electrics' magazine. The instrument consisted of a single vacuum tube oscillator controlled by a crude switch based 16 note 'keyboard'. The switch based control gave the note a staccato attack and decay – hence the 'Staccatone'. Gernsback promoted the instrument through his many publication and on his own radio station WJZ New York:

“The musical notes produced by the vacuum tubes in this manner have practically no overtones. For this reason the music produced on the Pianorad is of an exquisite pureness of tone not realised in any other musical instrument. The quality is better than that of a flute and much purer. the sound however does not resemble that of any known musical instrument. The notes are quite sharp and distinct, and the Pianorad can be readily distinguished by its music from any other musical instrument in existence.”



Hugo Gernsback, born Hugo Gernsbacher August 16, 1884 of Jewish Luxembourgish descent, moved to New York in 1904 and died on August 19, 1967

Self-build instructions for the Staccatone from 'Practical Electrics' magazine 1924:



Gernsback's Practical Electrics magazine March 1924 describing the Staccatone Gernsback's Practical Electrics magazine March 1924 describing the Staccatone

Sources:

Hugo Gernsback: “The ‘Pianorad’ a New Musical Instrument which combines Piano and Radio Principles” Radio News viii (1926)

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