

When a mother can turn on the phonograph with the same ease that she applies to the electric light, will she croon her baby to slumber with sweet lullabys, or will the infant be put to sleep by machinery?

Children are naturally imitative, and if, in their infancy, they hear only phonographs, will they not sing, if they sing at all, in imitation and finally become simply human phonographs – without soul or expression?

The country dance orchestra of violin, guitar and melodeon had to rest at times, and the resultant interruption afforded the opportunity for general sociability and rest among the entire company. Now a tireless mechanism can keep everlastingly at it, and much of what made the dance a wholesome recreation is eliminated.

The country band with its energetic renditions, its loyal support by local merchants, its benefit concerts, band wagon, gay uniforms, state tournaments, and the attendant pride and gayety, is apparently doomed to vanish in the general assault on personality in music.

There was a time when the pine woods of the north were sacred to summer simplicity, when around the camp fire at night the stories were told and the songs were sung with a charm all their own. But even now the invasion of the north has begun, and the ingenious purveyor of canned music is urging the sportsman, on his way to the silent places with gun and rod, tent and canoe, to take with him some disks, cranks, and cogs to sing to him as he sits by the firelight, a thought as unhappy and incongruous as canned salmon by a trout brook.

In the prospective scheme of mechanical music, we shall see man and maiden in a light canoe under the summer moon upon an Adirondack lake with a gramophone caroling love songs from amidships. The Spanish cavalier must abandon his guitar and serenade his beloved with a phonograph under his arm.

How the soldiers' bosoms will swell at the thought that they are being led into the strife by a machine! And when in camp at night, they are gathered about the cheery fire, it will not be:

Give us a song, the soldier cried.

But it will be:

Whir – whir – whir – Song by the Bungtown Quartet: "Your Name is Dennis."

Shades of Alexander, of Washington, of Napoleon, of Wellington, of Grant, and of the other immortal heroes! Never again will the soldier hear the defiant call of the bugle to battle, and the historic lines must be changed to:

"Gentlemen of the French guards, turn on your phonographs first."

It is at the fireside that we look for virtue and patriotism; for songs that stir the blood and fire the zeal; for songs of home, of mother, and of love, that touch the heart and brighten the eye. Music teaches all that is beautiful in this world. Let us not hamper it with a machine that tells the story day by day, without variation, without soul, barren of the joy, the passion, the ardor that is the inheritance of man alone.

Excerpt from: John Philip Sousa, "The Menace of Mechanical Music," Appleton's Magazine, Vol. 8 (1906).