

## *Using Children's Toys to Become a Turntablist*

*Dr. Thanatos of Ann Arbor*

[This is a transcript from a recent edition of The Frequency Mutineers, show date indicated in brackets.]

[01.13.07]

Greetings! I am Dr. Thanatos and you are listening to the Frequency Mutineers. We started out tonight with my set which featured a new record by Tom Sora (1). Those tracks were made using samples from a child's toy—a wind-up music box. And Bleep's next set will also include music-box samples (2). That's because tonight's show is dedicated to the music box which was invented 200 years ago (3). Not only does a music box make beautiful music, it also provides an easy way to become a Turntablist. Please let me explain.

Bleep and I are teaching a course this semester at BGSU on Turntablism, and in our preparations for the course we had an intense discussion on the meaning of this term. Our conclusion is that a simple definition for Turntablism could be “performance art involving the physical manipulation of a sound medium altering the time structure of the original source thus creating a unique piece as if playing a conventional music instrument”.

Given this complex definition, one can easily become a Turntablist by dramatically winding up a music box and then intentionally altering the its playback by exerting pressure on the wind-up key. Such pressure will affect the box's internal gears thereby changing the speed of the cylinder whose “bumps” determine the resulting music. These changes in cylinder speed will cause shifts in musical pitch, a technique (incidentally) that we use to beatmatch records on our modern turntables.

Interestingly, the reason that we use turntables today instead of Edison's original phonographs—which like music boxes played cylinders—is because of the unintended pitch shifts often accompanying them. That is, because phonographs don't have a turntable acting as a flywheel they don't have sufficient rotational inertia to ensure a consistent pitch playback. And disc-based systems such as modern turntables (while less fidelic) are more resistant to untoward variations in pitch (4).

By the way, I have seen a local artist, Jason Zey, perform music-box Turntablism several times, and we are hopeful to have him perform at a multi-genre event we are organizing this summer. We're planning to hold that gala in May, and it will feature stages reflecting the subcultures The FM often draw on: Goth, Rivet, and Rave as well as Experimental music. Please stay tuned for additional information on that event. In the meantime, enjoy the music-box samples scattered throughout the Turntablism on tonight's edition of The Frequency Mutineers. We are WBGU broadcasting live from Bowling Green, Ohio, The United States of America.

[Notes]

- (1) Sora, T. (2006). Music for mechanical and electronic instruments [Sound Recording]. Egling, Germany: Col Legno. [Part 1 of this release (Tracks 1-9) features a wind-up music box.]
- (2) Tester / White Lion Soundsystem (2005). Renegade lighter / Lightah [Sound Recording]. Baltimore, MD, USA: Top Ranking. [The Tester track “Lighta” on this release samples a music box.]
- (3) Ord-Hume, A. W. J. G. (1980). Musical box: A history and collector's guide. London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- (4) Millard, A. J. (2005). America on record: A history of recorded sound [Second Edition]. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University.