

The Perfect Stocking Stuffer



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SWEET MUSIC

STOLLWERCK CHOCOLATE PHONOGRAPHS

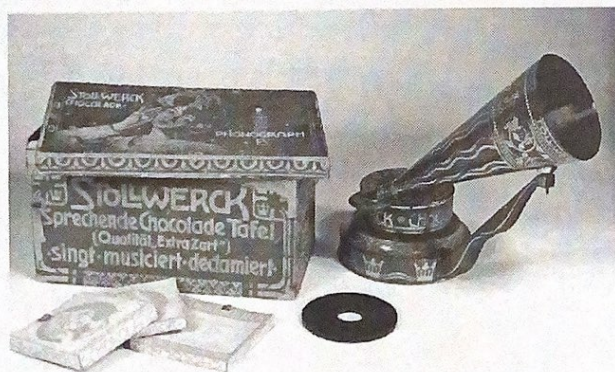
by René Rondeau

Founded in 1839 in Cologne, Germany, the Stollwerck chocolate company is still in business today. Stollwerck has long been considered one of the world's foremost chocolate manufacturers, however for a brief period in the early 20th century the company dabbled in an unusual sideline — phonographs.

Ludwig Stollwerck, director of the company in that era, first became interested in phonographs in 1891. On October 23, 1895 he co-founded a phonograph import company in Germany, the Deutsche Edison-Phonographen-Gesellschaft, and in early 1903 Stollwerck visited Thomas Edison at his Orange, New Jersey lab and obtained exclusive rights to market Edison phonographs in Germany, effective July 7, 1903.

However, Stollwerck's role as an Edison importer was merely an unprofitable sideline (he lost half a million German Marks during their association). Among modern phonograph collectors Stollwerck is best known for his own phonographs, made to promote his chocolate business.

In 1901 Ludwig Stollwerck happened to see a Columbia toy disc phonograph. This extremely rudimentary machine was hand-powered, with no motor or governor, and used small records molded in the same brown wax as was used for cylinder records at that time. Along with a close friend, Emil Heimerdinger, Stollwerck began to envision making a disc record molded out of chocolate rather than wax. The development process was slow, but in early 1903 Stollwerck finally succeeded in making a record out of hard chocolate. These records, measuring only about three inches in diameter, weighed less than one ounce and had a playing time of only 35 seconds. Priced at 20 German Pfennigs, they were both playable and edible.



The classic Stollwerck tin phonograph, complete with the original cardboard box in which it was packaged. This version was sold in Germany under the Stollwerck name. (Photo reprinted with permission from "Discovering Antique Phonographs" by Tim Fabrizio and George Paul.)

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This tiny wooden box with its original packing list, held six chocolate or "Karbin" records for shipment. On the left is a three-inch record as sold with the tin phonographs of 1903. On the right is a four-and-three-fourths-inch record for the wooden phonograph of 1904.

Stollwerck also marketed more durable records made of a non-edible wax-like compound called "karbin," which were manufactured by the Adler Phonograph Company of Berlin. The Stollwerck catalog eventually listed 300 titles, recorded in German, French, English, Hungarian and Russian. All records were listed as being available in either chocolate or karbin; apparently some customers preferred to have a more 'permanent' record than those made of chocolate.

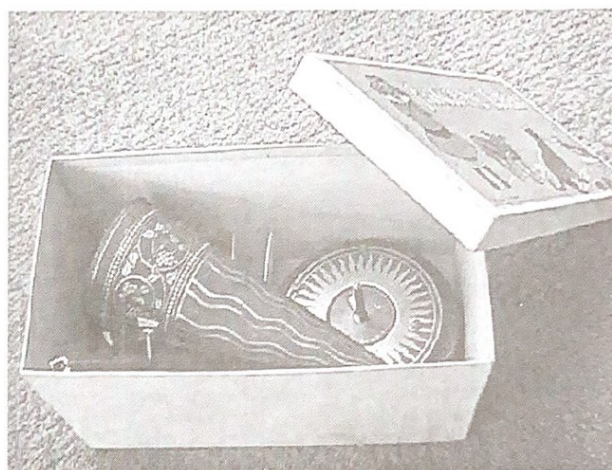
Stollwerck contracted with manufacturer Anton Reiche of Dresden to produce small lithographed tin phonographs to play these records. Two styles were originally produced. The first was a hand-driven model made of lithographed tin, similar in overall style to the Columbia toy phonograph and priced at 1.80 German Marks. The other was also made of tin but featured a tiny clockwork motor made by Junghans in Schramberg, Germany, a company still in the clock business today. The spring-motor phonographs sold for three German Marks and were far more popular than the hand-driven model — three times as many were sold. (At the prevailing rate of exchange in 1903, three Marks was equivalent to 75 cents in American money. Factoring for inflation, this would translate to about \$16 in today's dollars — obviously it was very inexpensive.)

These were tiny phonographs, measuring barely two and three-fourths inches tall, not counting the seven-inch



In the French market, the phonograph was called the "Eureka." It is identical to the German Stollwerck except that it does not have the name on the horn or turntable. Most were sold during Christmas, 1903, by the Félix Potin department store.

long horn. The motor was wound from underneath with a small clock key and the speed was controlled by the position of the on/off lever. The turntable served as a storage compartment, holding three records inside. (The weight of the records stored in the turntable also helped to keep the rotation speed more even, much like a metal flywheel.) The hand-crank phonograph was offered in maroon ("Bordeaux"), as were the first spring-motor examples. The color was soon changed to a deep green with gold decorations. Though inexpensive, these were extremely attractive ma-



The Eureka phonograph in its very rare original box, with separate slots for each component part.

chines.

The simple reproducer was almost exactly the same as those used on the ubiquitous German "Puck" cylinder phonographs, with a glass stylus. (The discs were vertically recorded, like the later Pathé and Edison discs.)

Apparently even Thomas Edison admired a prototype of Stollwerck's little machine. Following his 1903 visit to Edison's New Jersey laboratory, Stollwerck wrote to Edison: "I thank you for all the consideration and kindness ex-

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The French Eureka featured a colorful lithographed label on the lid. Drawn in the classic Belle Epoque poster style of Toulouse-Lautrec and Chéret, it is truly a work of art!

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tended to me and to my pet, the toy phonograph, which is, if not Edison's child—Edison's real grandchild. I trust that this toy will be a special delight to the children and prepare them to want the real 'Edison.'"

Stollwerck expected to sell a million machines and an equal number of records, which were promoted through advertisements in newspapers and on posters. In the early fall of 1903 he contracted for 50,000 to 60,000 phonographs to be produced by Reiche, but manufacturing problems led to long delays. While the first ones reached the market at the end of October 1903, the supply was not adequate and too late for effective promotion for the Christmas retailing season.

In the German and Belgian markets the phonographs were emblazoned with the Stollwerck name on the horn and the sides of the turntable. Stollwerck's French partner, Kratz-Boussac, sold the identical machine in France under the brand name "Eureka," without the Stollwerck markings. The price was 3,90 French Francs (equal to the German price of three Marks). A total of 17,000 such phonographs were sold in France by Christmas, primarily through the department store of Félix Potin.

However, this initial enthusiasm was short-lived. A French magazine, *La Nature*, had initially described the phonograph as "not a toy, it is a solid machine which rivals more expensive phonographs. It speaks loud, it sings well, and it reproduces all songs with clarity." Alas, this was hyperbole. In reality they were extremely delicate little machines with noisy, underpowered motors and mediocre sound quality. They were far too fragile to withstand rough handling by children, who were (not surprisingly) the main market for chocolate records. Most phonographs were likely broken beyond repair in a matter of days. (The big advantage was the records themselves. As explained in *La Nature*, "when a song no longer pleases, oh well! just savor the disc like you would a simple snack, and eat it.")

In early 1904 Stollwerck came out with an improved,



The 1904 model of the Stollwerck phonograph was more substantial, with a tiny, yet ornately carved wooden cabinet.

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The wood model carries a brass nameplate with both Stollwerck and Junghans logos (a 'J' in an eight-point star).

slightly more substantial model. This phonograph had an elegant wooden case only two inches tall and six inches long, a stronger motor with a separate speed control, more solidly constructed support arm, and a horn with brass bell and a lithographed woodgrain pattern on the body. The turntable and most other metal parts were brass, and a plaque on the base carried both the Stollwerck and Junghans logos. The winding key fit through a hole in the turntable, making it easier to use than the earlier model. The fragile and easily broken glass stylus of the tin model was replaced by a sapphire point in the improved machine.

At the same time Stollwerck offered new, larger records (four and three-fourths inches rather than three inches in diameter), made of a pressed wood composition with a very thin coating of a wax-like material into which the sound was impressed. Unlike those made of chocolate or karbin these new records were unbreakable. However the recorded surface tended to delaminate and chip, destroying the recording.

A total of 25,000 of these improved wood-bodied phonographs were made, but by January 1905 only 5,000 had been sold. The remaining 20,000 proved to be virtually unsaleable, although Stollwerck continued to offer them until 1908.

In the end, Stollwerck's flirtation with the phonograph proved to be a costly failure, which he subsequently abandoned to return to what he knew best — chocolate. Today these phonographs and records are highly coveted by collectors but due to their very fragile construction their survival rate is extremely low. Because of their minuscule sales volume the hand-driven and wooden machines are particularly rare. Only a few chocolate records are known to survive and even the more conventional "karbin" wax records are rare. Particularly desirable today are the boxes in which the machines were packaged, and the advertising material issued by Stollwerck and Potin.

Aside from the sheer visual attraction of these very tiny yet ornate little machines, there is something irresistibly appealing about phonographs designed to play chocolate records. Even non-collectors tend to find these unique

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machines to be enchanting, just as they surely were to children a century ago!

The author wishes to thank Martin Van Almsick of the Stollwerck company museum in Cologne, Jalal Aro of Paris, Stephan Puille of Berlin, Guido Severijns of Holland, and Paul Israel of the Edison Papers Project at Rutgers University for their invaluable assistance in researching these unique phonographs.

Discoveries

by René Rondeau



The transitional model Stollwerck phonograph.



Wood grained reproducer of the transitional model Stollwerck.

As a follow-up to my December 2001 article in *ITG* on Stollwerck chocolate phonographs, a previously unknown variation turned up in Europe recently. It is apparently a transitional model, between the round tin phonographs of 1903 and the wood case machines of 1904.

It has the improved case and motor but with the old-style cone horn rather than the brass bell style found on other wood Stollwercks. This cone horn has a lithographed wood grain pattern like the belled horns, and even the reproducer is wood grained — the only example yet found with this decoration. (Photos are courtesy of Jalal Aro)