

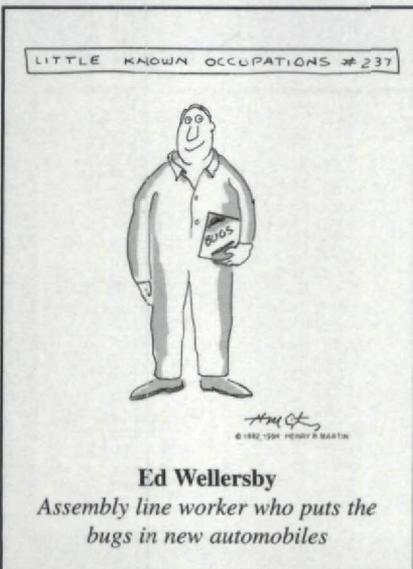
The Music of the Gears

Gear Technology's bimonthly aberration — gear trivia, humor, weirdness and oddments for the edification and amusement of our readers. Contributions are welcome.

It should be obvious by now that gears are more than just mechanical components. We have brought you movies with gears and Shakespeare with gears, jewelry made out of gears and so on. Now we, the humble staff at Addendum, are proud to present gears in the world of music.

"Music?" we hear you cry. "Sure, there are gears in a music box, but beyond that what else could a musician, or a musically-inclined engineer for that matter, hope to do with gears? Play them like drums? Bang them together like cymbals?" No. Gears form the motifs behind some of the most intriguing music and musical staging in the past thirty years.

In 1967, the British band Cream came out with the album "Disraeli Gears," which was their first big step toward mega-stardom because they, as one reviewer put it, "stopped covering American Blues musicians and started writing their own psychedelic blues-based hybrids" including "Sunshine of your love" and "Tales of Brave Ulysses." While the album was a step forward for the band, the only gear reference came from the album title.



In the mid-1980s, "Spam Town" (a.k.a. Austin, Minnesota—the home of Hormel) gave rise to another union of gears and music, this time in the form of the Gear Daddies, a group led by guitarist Martin Zellar. Famous, at least in and around the Minneapolis music scene for their gritty girls, booze, and getting-out-of-this-small-town songs, the Gear Daddies produced solid, country-tinged rock and roll until their break-up in 1992 with only three albums to their credit. Their songs spoke to the unfulfilled dreams of everyone who works, sweats, and quietly lives a life of unrequited love and broken dreams in this mechanistic society. Gear manufacturers everywhere should recognize this lifestyle. In spite of their local, and later regional, successes, the Gear Daddies couldn't break out of the shadow of their harder-edged peers such as Soul Asylum and the Replacements.

By 1993 the idea of gears in music had definitely been taken down a rough road with a new genre in rock called "Grindcore/Industrial-influenced/Death Metal." Los Angeles was the center and Turning of the Gears was the band. Founded on the notion of doing something brutal and original, Turning of the Gears (whose very name implies the relentlessness of a mechanical grinder) was a quick success in spite of numerous personnel problems (the band lost their lead singer and two bass players in three years). They have just released their second CD.

Now, it's not all ugliness and pain when you think of gears in music, though that seems to be the trend in "industrial rock." No, gears also appear in gentler pieces as well, and the 1997 San Francisco Opera production of *Les Contes D'Hoffman* (The Story of Hoffman) by Jacques Offenbach is a prime example.

The story is simple enough. Hoffmann is waiting for a lady (Stella) in a tavern, and while he waits, he entertains the other patrons with stories of the three loves of his life: Olympia, Antonia and Giulietta. These three represent three aspects of love: mindlessness (Olympia), purity (Antonia) and carnal love (Giulietta). What will be of particular concern to cultured Addendum readers everywhere is the character Olympia and the way the San Francisco Opera's Lighting Designer, Thomas Munn, handled her scenes.

Olympia is simply a wind-up mechanical doll, run on fine gears and clock-workings, made real to Hoffmann only when he dons a pair of rose-colored glasses given to him by one of Olympia's makers. When he wears the glasses, the stage is flooded in pink light and Olympia is as real as any other woman in Hoffmann's world. However, when he removes the glasses the light becomes harsh and white, and projected upon the stage and background are the shadows of huge, moving gears that never once allow you to forget who and what Olympia is. This addition of the gears to Olympia's already mechanical movements played a pivotal role in the success of the first act and is one of the things audience members walk away talking about.

Gears in music. They tinkle out a sweet melody for us from music boxes, give personality to bands obsessed with the darker side of our industrial, technological culture, and make the opera a memorable experience as they help Hoffmann tell his tale of love never shared. So what's next? Gears as fine art and sculpture? You bet! Stay tuned.

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