Antique Apparatus hits it big with reproductions of classic jukeboxes

by MARCUS WEBB

Question: who is America's fourth-largest jukebox manufacturer?

Answer: it's Antique Apparatus, the "little company that could" in Southern California.

Unbelievable as it may sound, the Torrance, Calif. firm founded by classic jukebox buff Glenn Streeter only entered the jukebox arena in 1985... but in four short years, they've mushroomed from "pee- wee" to "potential powerhouse."

Antique Apparatus began as a handcrafted, one-at-a-time operation in Streeter's little antique radio store, where Glenn and a couple of key helpers struggled to produce one jukebox every two weeks.

Today, Antique Apparatus is a sophisticated assembly-line operation (located in a converted Howard Hughes aircraft plant, yet). The firm employs 38 staffers in eight departments which smoothly crank out seven or eight jukeboxes every day. The firm's goal is to increase production to ten boxes a day in 1989. Thanks to recent retooling efforts, they'll probably accomplish this goal without even working up a sweat.

Now, don't get us wrong. The guys and gals at Antique Apparatus still make 1940s reproduction jukeboxes. They still craft them lovingly, with a perfectionist's demands for quality in every detail (Glenn Streeter is the perfectionist here). They still use the very finest materials available, and they still incorporate that ultra-reliable, 200-selection Rowe 45rpm mechanism.

It's just that now, Antique Apparatus mass-produces those illuminated musical marvels on a scale that reminds you of... well... Rowe International, their exclusive coin-op distributor.

JUKEBOX MOGUL

Company President Streeter is a somewhat retiring fellow, an ex-Georgia country boy at heart, but his colorful background includes past careers as everything from submariner to oil executive, to world-class antique radio dealer. Now Streeter can add "Jukebox Mogul" to his resume.

It's a title he plans to keep for quite a while... because for Glenn Streeter, making reproductions of classic 1940s jukeboxes is a labor of love. He'll probably be able to keep that title as long as he wants, too. After all, he's got everything going for him: he's a sharp businessman who knows the psychology of the antique market. He makes a top-quality product incorporating the ultra-reliable Rowe mechanism and backed by the top-drawer Rowe dealer network. And demand for reproduction classic jukeboxes is going up, up, up.

Said the normally soft-spoken Streeter: "I've got orders coming out my ears."

A '1015' CALLED "THE BUBBLER"

Antique Apparatus currently makes three full-size jukeboxes and three wall speakers, all reproductions of the immortal designs of Paul Fuller. The company's top seller is an updated remake of the 1015 which AA calls the Bubbler (designation RB8). This machine features the lighted, three-colored plastic pilasters on the sides and top arch, a chrome-plated die-cast central
The Gazelle and Peacock models are adaptations of 1940s Wurlitzers designed by Paul Fuller. The side columns glow with a constantly changing array of colors, as do the decorative front panels. These are real beauties.

A member of the “AA-Team” installs a Rowe 200-selection record mechanism in the Bubbler, Antique Apparatus’ 1015 reproduction. You can also see two bubble tubes in the light-up side pilasters.

grill, chrome-plated die-cast side and top trim, and eight (count ‘em, eight!) lighted bubble tubes.

“It seems to be an unwritten law,” Streeter muses, “that whatever was most popular when it first came onto the market, will be most popular as a collector’s item, or as an antique reproduction, in later years. For example, today everybody wants ’57 Chevies, but only a few eccentrics collect Edsels.

“The same law applies to jukeboxes,” Streeter continued. “Paul Fuller’s designs were works of artistic genius that totally dominated the market in their era — especially the 1015. And all of Fuller’s designs remain the ‘demand’ items for collectors today.”

FULLER REDUX

Besides the Bubbler, Antique Apparatus also makes reproduction versions of the 1941 Wurlitzer 950, with four lighted bubble tubes. This model features opposing twin gazelles which are etched into mirrored glass on two front panels. Polarized lights inside the cabinet create a continual shifting and melding of illuminated hues in the gazelles and their backgrounds. The top panels feature stylized Art Deco silk-screens of fauns playing the pipes of Pan, while the translucent side pilasters glow and shift colors from red to green to blue to gold. Naturally, Antique Apparatus calls this one the Gazelle (GB4).

The Peacock/RB6 is Antique Apparatus’ version of Wurlitzer’s 1941 850, featuring six lighted bubble tubes, the same type of color-changing lighted side pilasters, and a front panel whose stylized peacock design also continually changes colors, thanks to a polarized light system inside the cabinet.

MATERIALS & SPEAKERS

All Antique Apparatus jukeboxes are made with 21 layers of wood — including Italian poplar, Finland ply (the world’s most expensive plywood), walnut, olive ash, alder, and Corinthian burl elm. Using a unique curing and molding process, the straight plywood sheets are combined and curved into strong-as-steel arched cabinets that should maintain their beauty for decades.

After cabinets are crafted, the components are then hand-assembled by AA’s expert staff, passing rapidly from the woodworking department to lighting and cabinet assembly, to speaker and mechanism installation, door assembly, and then final inspection and quality control. The Rowe sound system includes a 130-watt amplifier, 12” woofers and 4” tweeters. They can be set on continuous free play (a computer stores your selections and plays them in order) or on coin operation.
The Antique Apparatus line of reproduction Golden Age wall speakers is equally well-crafted. The RS3200 takes the bold, snazzy 1015 style and three-color scheme into a huge, 32” diameter, round “tire-shaped” speaker whose rim features lighted red, yellow and green plastics. A mirrored, rotating central hub adds spectacular glitter, while four lighted bubble tubes complete the effect. AA’s second speaker, the RS1800, hails back to the Swing Era: it’s a round wooden cabinet bearing the legend “Strike Up the Band.” Finally, the GLB is a “Gazelle Light Bar” wall unit, featuring lighted gazelle mirrors on the front, two lighted bubble tubes for accent, and a 5” speaker on top.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Streeter’s colorful background, combined with his shyness about personal publicity (he loves to talk about his company, but not about himself), may account for one or two misconceptions that some people have about him. “To a lot of people, I came out of nowhere, so they think I automatically have lots of money and that building my company was easy,” Streeter said. “That’s just bull.”

While it’s true that several movie stars, rock singers and L.A. celebrities have purchased jukeboxes from Streeter, their wealth hasn’t rubbed off yet. “There are even stories that Hugh Hefner liked my early jukeboxes and financed me,” Streeter laughed. “That’s the craziest thing I ever heard in my life!”

Finally, in 1985, Streeter created a prototype jukebox (copied from a restored original, since none of the old blueprints and specs exist). That year, he launched Antique Apparatus into the jukebox business, making 22 jukeboxes. With the help of some invaluable people like shop foreman Jack Weatherhead (“He can do anything,” said Streeter), AA stinted on neither time nor materials in an attempt to present the finest possible reproduction jukebox. Street’s goal was simple: to make a jukebox that was worthy of the beloved Fuller designs.

OVERWHELMING RECEPTION

The immediate, overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception to Streeter’s box was one of those classic cases of “I struggled for years to achieve my overnight success.” By 1986, Streeter had signed an agreement with Rowe International, which was seeking an entry to the classic reproduction jukebox field. Under this arrangement, Rowe provides their mechanisms, and Antique Apparatus drop-ships completed boxes to
the Rowe distributor network, which enjoys the exclusive rights to the coin-op market. Streeter handles the non-coin consumer market through his own international distributor network, plus specialty catalogs, discount houses, etc.

**THE UNVEILING**

Streeter still remembers the day he unveiled his original Bubbler model jukebox at Rowe’s AMOA Expo booth in November of 1986. “The aisle was instantly jammed with people trying to get a look at our jukebox,” he recalls. He loved the reaction to the product itself, but to this day he still laments that Rowes Joel Friedman made me stand up and give a speech to all those people!”

Today, Streeter’s glamorous jukeboxes are found in Burger Kings, McDonalds, Hiltons and Hyatts. They add glitz to movie stars’ basements and a dash of drama to the lobby of the German Consultate in San Francisco. (After all, Rudolph Wurlitzer came from German stock.) You can even see AA’s jukeboxes on TV: they’ve been featured on ABC News and Entertainment Tonight, and have been used as prizes on The Price is Right and High Rollers.

For all the flashy publicity, Glenn Streeter still prefers to talk about nuts-and-bolts topics like the $200,000 retooling job that AA did last summer. The firm changed over from sand-casting to die-casting of all metal parts: grills and trim, and coin and dollar bill escutcheons. The new die-cast metal is cleaner, smoother, lighter and brighter for a much more attractive appearance. Yet the new process also means Antiques Apparatus can make these parts much faster and cheaper. It’s typical of the company’s never-ending quest for quality... and it’s going to help AA reach its higher production targets with ease.

Future plans are vaguely alluded to — “We are currently working to try to adopt one our our cabinets to play CDs” is all Streeter will say. But future prospects are clearly excellent. Streeter is well poised to take full advantage of the Jukebox Centennial Year.

“Even before the latest wave of publicity hit from the Jukebox Centennial,” Streeter said, “antique jukeboxes had already returned to public esteem because of restoration and reproduction jukeboxes. The entire industry is fortunate that the Centennial came along when it did. I hope we see even more attention paid to it.”

This much is certain: the industry will see more attention paid to Antiques Apparatus.

For more information, contact Antique Apparatus at 213/534-1511.