

# MEET THE MACHINE: THE SIDEMAN 5000 EDITION

By Darsha Hewitt

*"Freeing the Sideman from its heavy wooden confines is like discovering a baroque electromechanical universe."*

Suggested citation:

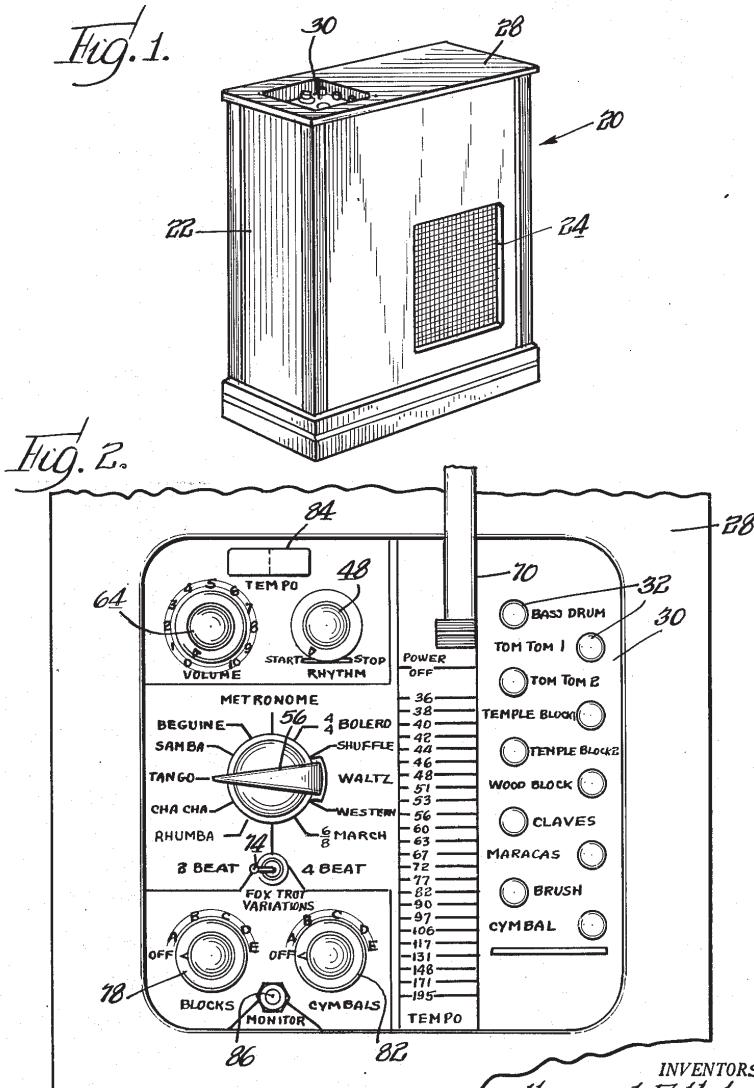
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Name: Sideman 5000  
 Make: Wurlitzer  
 Job: Rhythm Generator  
 Date of production: 1959

Weight: 30kg  
 Measurements: 80x35x70cm  
 Country of Origin: Germany/USA

RHYTHM DEVICE  
 Filed April 14, 1961      5 Sheets-Sheet 1



INVENTORS

*Howard E. Holman  
 Joseph H. Hearne  
 Marvin C. Korinke  
 By Olson & Trebilco atty*

# Overview

Like most domestic audiovisual equipment of its time, from the outside, the Sideman 5000 looks deceptively like a piece of mid-20th century furniture designed to blend in with the living room decor. However, a closer inspection of its details reveals that this cabinet of sorts has a secret mission. And with its semi-sparkly inlaid speaker grill cloth and classy top mounted control panel with patina worn brass switches and knobs, it is one that will move you. Not only will you feel compelled to groove because its duty as a machine is to synthesize a variety of hardwired electronic ballroom variations at various speeds, but the urge to get up and dance is hard to control once you see what this machine is made of. Freeing the Sideman from its heavy wooden confines is like discovering a baroque electromechanical universe.

## Technical Breakdown

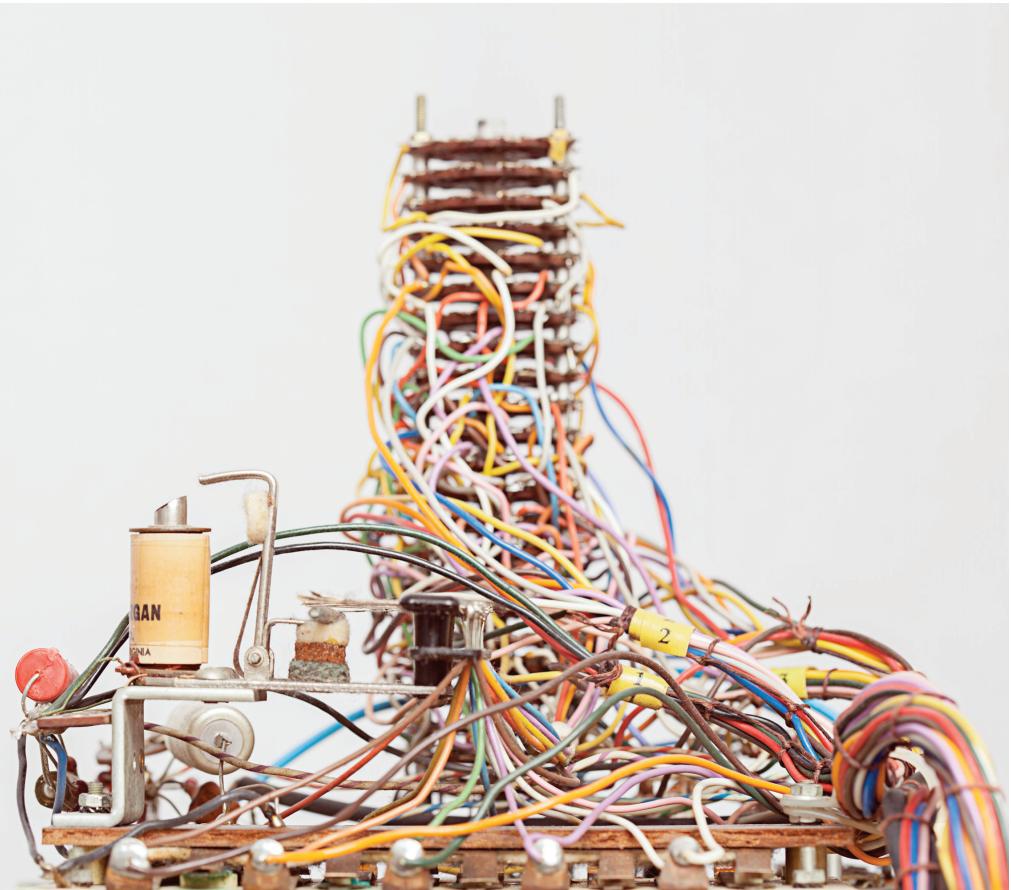
Levered into action, the world's first commercially available drum machine warms up like a hearth. The dry smell of warm dust escapes as its ever inefficient vacuum tubes heat up to produce showers of electrons that shimmer through glass voids, across ornate clusters of resistor and capacitor and travers precisely inter-tangled networks of multicoloured wires. A wide band of frequencies

awakens, awaiting filtering and amplification. Mechanically programmed renditions of the Rumba, Salsa, Cha Cha and Waltz embed themselves throughout the omnipresent drone of the tempo wheel. While tracing revolutions around a brilliant starburst circuit board, this electro-mechanical selector picks out sequences of synthesized instrument voices and generates a danceable beat. Though the Sideman was designed to maintain a consist steady rhythm, after a sixty-year career, naturally occurring effects such as material fatigue, electrolytic deterioration, frequency leakage and contact corrosion cause it to echo in and out of sync with time.

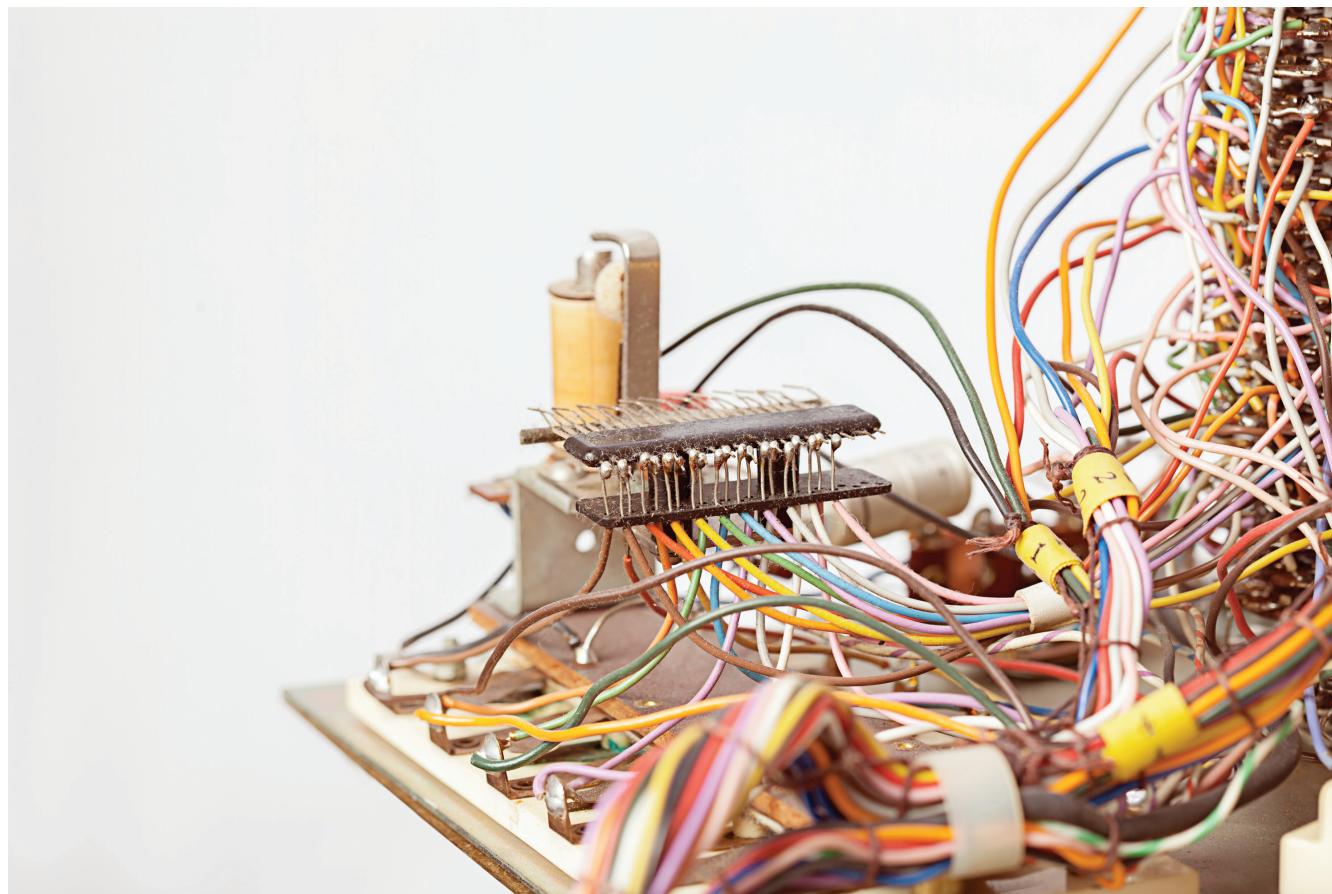
## Warning

**(1)** Don't let romantic geeks lie to you. The Sideman is not obsolete nor are its vacuum tubes rare. Though its commercial life was cut short due to the influx of much smaller, more efficient and economic transistor technology, this machine was built to last. It's not a problem that all the original Sideman technicians are retired – all parts are user serviceable and the manual will show you the way.

**(2)** Question your dance music. This machine demonstrates that today's techno is yesterday's Fox Trot, only sped up without enough time to glide across the entirety of the dance floor.



*Shimmer Generators V.2D*, 2018, is a photographic series by Darsha Hewitt. It was commissioned by the Eastern Bloc Media Arts Center in Montreal Canada and made in collaboration with Lena Maria Loose and Carolyn Meyer. »



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