In the 1920s in Weimar Germany, Friedrich Trautwein was a young electrical engineer and musician who wanted to make a splash in the burgeoning field of electronic music. And so he invented the Trautonium. The instrument’s playing interface consisted of a single wire stretched over a metal plate. When the musician pressed the wire against the plate, it closed the circuit and produced a tone. Moving your finger along the wire from left to right changed the resistance and therefore the pitch. It sounded like a violin. Sort of. Trautwein’s attempt to find a mass market for his instrument went nowhere. But decades later, electronic music pioneer Oskar Sala would use the Trautonium to terrifying effect, producing the screeches and caws for Alfred Hitchcock’s 1963 horror-thriller The Birds.

For more on the history of electronic musical instruments, see https://spectrum.ieee.org/pastforward1019