

## MECHANICAL MUSIC WORLD ISSUE 16

### AMBC Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> February 2019

The first item in the *Show & Tell* part of the meeting was a very fine, large 8-air musical box with a 17-inch cylinder, in good playing condition with case work unrestored. That in itself prompted the question as to what extent one should restore anything of historical interest. Restorers do what their owners want and there is no doubt that many want their treasured item looking like the day it was made, or even 'better'. Others buy them and 'restore' to achieve the highest possible price. The case-work of this musical box bore its well-earned age very well and it was a pleasure to know that it had not suffered a make-over. The main reason for bringing it was to identify the names of its airs, but only about two of the few already known were achieved. There was, of course, no tune sheet and no known maker, as is often the case. The general consensus was that it was a Paillard movement made in St. Croix. Its serial number was 15760, which equates with the Bulleid date chart for Paillard as circa 1884. It had two combs, each with 61 teeth that, at first sight, appeared to be tuned to the same scale. In part they were. The mid-range was tuned *sublime harmonie* where corresponding teeth were of the same pitch but slightly different frequency. When played together, the frequencies interact and create a vibrato effect, much the same as the *voix celeste* stop of the pipe organ. As each fine arrangement played, sometimes only the second comb was in full play with the occasional teeth of the first comb emphasising the rhythm of the arrangement. The most intriguing thing was that the bass notes of the first comb were about an octave lower than the second comb. This gave a very resonant bass when producing bass octave chords.



### Matchbox Musical Toys by Juliet Fynes



Juliet's article considers the history of the Matchbox brand which boomed in the '60's and 70's but ended up in receivership. As part of their diversification Matchbox produced a range of pre-school toys under the branding - Live 'n Learn. They launched a range of 'Busy Live'n Learn Toys' in 1972. Julia examines these toys and describes their features backed up with photographs of her completed set.

### Alibert and the mystery of his inscribed numbers by Chris Fynes

Francois Alibert is listed as operating from 10 rue J-J Rousseau, Paris from about 1807. He is well known as a maker and agent of small snuffbox movements fitted with sectional combs, larger musical boxes and musical clock movements with exposed controls. Many of his small movements are inscribed with his name and an associated number thought to have been repair numbers. Chris describes an example of a tortoiseshell snuff-box. The lid is impressed with a classical head surrounded by radiating lines. It has a sectional comb with twenty-two segments, each consisting of three teeth, playing on a 6cm cylinder. The brass comb base is inscribed 'alibert 5023' and the base stamped with the serial number '484'. The inscription uses a lower-case initial 'a' for the surname. Chris had to restore the movement and the tortoiseshell case, which were both badly damaged, and replace the broken spring kindly



donated by another member. The movement now plays two early airs very sweetly. Chris continues to describe other boxes in his collection and concludes interesting facts about Alibert.

### Restoring a Musical Marotte.

Paul talks about his marotte (a musical puppet that plays when twirled around), that was in a non-playing state. A previous attempt to repair the musical movement had not succeeded and had left it in even worse condition. What was left of the clothing was damaged, dirty and worn but its little bisque face was appealing. Most manivelle movements are played upside-down. Most are tin cased or with the movement mounted separately, as was the case with this little old (actually she looked quite young) lady. Its papier-maché case was spherical, made out of scraps of German newspaper. Paul describes each step of the painstaking work in the repair generously accompanied with detailed photographs.

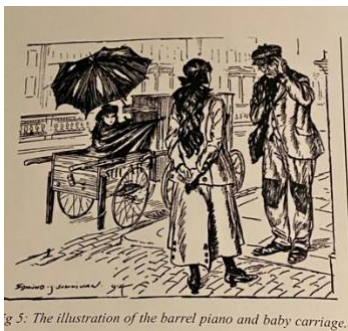


Fig 5. The illustration of the barrel piano and baby carriage.

### Yester Year - A Street Piano by Paul Bellamy

Paul describes an interesting gift book produced by Princess Mary in 1914 with all proceeds from its sale going to support the Suffragette movement. The heart-warming story tells of Pierre Dupont who wheels his street piano round the streets busking for money.

### Charles Ullmann's Baton and Bells by David Evans

David begins his article:- "Whilst perhaps not considered to be in the highest echelons of musical box manufacture, Ch. Ullmann Frère were certainly the largest producers in France. Serial number 6679 was made about 1896, so as the business started in 1881, their output appears to average about 440 per year, which puts them way behind Paillard or Nicole. In terms of quality they are much like other manufacturers, most of whom bought in the component parts. Arrangements are generally good but not outstanding, judging by the extant examples. Anthony Bulleid did not produce a dating chart for them, nor make any comment upon their boxes in his published works. Nevertheless, they did produce some interesting examples, some of which are shown in this article.

As dealers in and presumably manufacturers of all sorts of musical instruments, the business must have prospered, judging by their ability to finance other businesses, as discussed below."

David continues with a detailed history;- "Charles Ullmann was thought to be a German-speaking Swiss. With his brother Jacques he lived in Paris and set up as musical instrument dealers in 1881 at Faubourg Poissonnière 11. The firm's head office remained there until 1924. The firm was known as Charles Ullmann and was also listed in trade directories at rue du Tyrol 9 in L'Auberson in the municipality of Ste. Croix."

One of Ullman's mid-sized boxes is illustrated on the front cover of this issue. This is an eight-air box with seated mandarin bell ringers, the cylinder 11", the comb with 71 musical teeth. plus 5 for the bells and one for the conductor. The unusual thing about the arrangement of the movement is that it has five bells. The centre figure rings one bell and wields a conductor's baton in his right hand."



### How Music Was Made by Kegan Harrison

Kegan considers some of the lots at a recent auction. "In the mid to late 19th century, Cylinder Music Boxes, along with their close cousins Disc Music Boxes, were the only way a household could play 'recorded' music. Prior to Thomas Edison's invention of the Phonograph and later the Gramophone - once seen in every home in the land and now in almost none - music boxes were popular as after dinner entertainment.

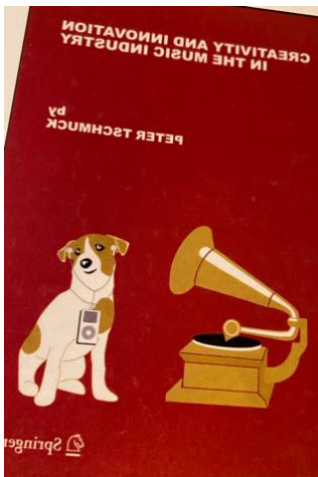
Like all technologies, they were produced at differing levels of quality and complexity to suit budgets and tastes. Today there is a nice simple way for us to tell the wheat from the chaff — count the teeth! Teeth are to music boxes that cylinders are to cars; the more you have the better, as every different note a music box plays requires a tooth. The more teeth, the more notes you can have, which results in better sound definition within the tonal range of the box. Now you can own a piece of music history, whatever your budget. At the simplest end of the scale, we have a Swiss box with a short cylinder (six inches), 56 teeth, and which plays six tunes. This is the Fiat 500 of the Music Box world, a good starter model produced in large numbers for the mass market. It sold for £120."

The article describes other cylinder boxes that were sold.



### Book Review:

*Tschrnuck, Peter — Creativity and Innovation in the Music Industry* - published by Springer, Dordrecht, The Netherlands 2006, Second Edition, March 2012, available now price US\$103.88 in paperback.



This is a very comprehensive work on the business side of the music industry, this book covers the period from before the emergence of the phonographic industry, through the jazz and swing eras to heavy metal, punk rock and disco. It includes formats ranging from Edison cylinders to MP3 files and covers virtually all of the world's businesses involved in the recording, production and distribution of these formats. The author states: 'A history of the music industry comprehensively covering industrial music production throughout its existence and in all its aspects is yet to be written.' Peter Tschrnuck has come very close to writing it. He continues: 'This study has another goal — the search for an explanation for the emergence of novelty in the music industry'.

So why would this be of interest to mechanical music enthusiasts? This article attempts to answer this question.