

Meeting Report

The meeting took place at The Old School on 26th February 2017. The main programme for the day was a continuation of the study of the organette, the various makers, types, sizes and, of course, the music, plus contributions of other items by members. The Herophon aroused particular interest. The instrument has a decorative lithograph below a square aperture in which a square disc sits. The aperture retains the musical programme, which consists of a punched card that remains stationary whilst the playing mechanism rotates. This is completely opposite to other disc-playing organettes. The short legs on the case make it difficult to operate the hand-crank, which is too long and obstructs the table. Thus, the case has to overhang a table but the maker did supply an optional stand.



The discs are nominally 13 inches square, with logos in each corner and the names of the tunes in the centre together with patent numbers in various countries such as America, England, France, Austria, Germany. Under the French patent (the term is Brevet) are the letters S.G.D.G. These stand for Sans Garantie Du Gouvernement, which means that the government did not guarantee the performance of the patent. The first German patent was 1883. Subsequent improvements to the mechanism gave rise to more patents.

This excerpt shows the details provided by our knowledgeable AMBC members as they discussed other mechanical music machines and curios, finishing the day off with a beautiful snuff box built by Henri-Joseph Lecoultre.

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A musical box signed Alder by Jean-Marc Lebout

This article, first published in 'Musiques Vivantes' MMV 92, Autumn 2014 has been translated by Paul Bellamy. The story about musical box makers is expanded by the discovery of a name that has not previously been reported in literature on this subject. It was discovered in a Brussels antique shop. In isolation, the construction of this cartel musical box is not exceptional except for the name stamped on the comb. When discovered, it was so dirty that the name, in well defined letters, was difficult to read. It was the first piece of concrete evidence to be revealed after lightly cleaning the comb, as seen using a good magnifying glass. The name ALDER, in capital letters, was clearly visible.

I searched my memory but could not recall anyone of this name. Without hesitation, I negotiated a price and bought it. Studying the standard works of Ord-Hume, Jean-Claude Piguet, Ruud Maes, etc, confirmed my first thoughts that there were no previous references. It is therefore truly a rarity. The article continues to unravel this mystery and is well worth a read.

The Aeolian Orchestrelle the Home Orchestra by David & Lesley Evans

As Orchestrelle owners, our Editors tell us that they never cease to be amazed at the variety of sounds at their command. The selection of reed banks can create an astonishingly different interpretation of the music on the roll — indeed, it is quite difficult to play a piece twice to sound the same without making detailed notes on the registration. The Orchestrelle had evolved from the humble (by comparison) organette. These little instruments had sold well but as they became more established their restricted musical range became more apparent. The simple scale of fourteen or so notes was only enough for the simplest of times, shared as they had to be between the melody and a few lower and non-consecutive notes in the bass region for accompaniment. Even the largest of them still left the musically inclined wishing for more, and the race was on to produce a roll-operated organ with a greater range of notes which could also be a piece of furniture in its own right. David and Lesley tell us of the historic quests to achieve this.

The 2017 Steinway Spirio – The Ultimate Reproducing Piano

It was claimed for the Duo-Art, the Ampico and by many other reproducing piano makers, that they all do it pretty well!. Most player pianos of course reproduce human performances by recording the key strikes. This interesting article examines how the Steinway Spirio uses a far more sophisticated system using hardware and software integrated into the piano.



Restoring a Sectional Comb Movement by Chris Fynes

Described by the auctioneer as a 'Dear little musical box', this being a slight exaggeration of the truth, as 'musical' it was definitely not. True, it would certainly play all the right notes, but not necessarily in the right order!!

This description refers to an early four air, five-toothed-sectional comb movement with a total of a hundred and one teeth, the uppermost segment having six teeth. The serial number 2247 is marked on the front of the bedplate, but there are no marks to identify the maker.



Although I am far from a professional restorer, this box appealed to me as an interesting project to put right and to share those experiences with others.

Before I could start work sorting out the tunes, it was necessary to clean the governor and reset the depth of the worm to allow it to work easily at the correct speed. I knew the comb was out of register, so I initially tried shimming the snail position laterally a bit this way and that to see if I could get a recognisable tune out of it, but rapidly came to the conclusion I was wasting my time. Not

that this was easy to test anyway as there was no registration screw. Closer attention reveal that the segments were all misaligned with each other and pointing in different directions. This article describes Chris' painstaking work on this project. As you would expect accompanied by his illuminating photographs.

A Link with the past

The Anglo-French Music Co. Ltd - Few may have heard of this company that was set up in the midst of the First world war, 1916, by two directors of the Aeolian Company. The aim was to record certain set pieces of music for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, a leading UK musical Examination Board. The Company chose composers and academics who prepared interpretations of the set musical examination pieces as examples of performance considered to be an ideal standard for examination.

The first recordings were made by the well-known concert pianist Desirée MacEwen. The publishing venture was successful and by 1923 five more pianists were deployed including York Bowen (1884-1961). Although he was highly talented, being a conductor, organist, violinist and horn player, his mostly romantic works got little recognition in his lifetime.

The Aeolian Company Ltd was American, producing pianos and other musical instruments. The Aeolian Vocalion label began recordings in the United States in 1918 and records under this label were issued in the UK from December 1920. It was then sold in January 1925 to a new company, the Vocalion Gramophone Company Ltd. Records were produced by the Marconi electrical process in 1926 under the Vocalion label but only until 1927. Famous pianists were by then signing-up to other companies such as Columbia and HMV.



This interesting article leads into the history and examples of sheet music production.

How to make an Automaton

The late Lyn Wright was amongst other things a restorer of automata and his family have given AMBC access to his records and the many photographs that he took during his work. The late Betty Cadbury was a leading authority on bygone toys having a vast collection of her own. She had a special interest in automata of all types, especially mechanical figures. Lyn's portfolio of his restoration work includes a clockwork car, a musical automaton necessaire, a Negro fruit seller, a conjurer and much more.

Lyn wanted to demonstrate to others how most automata work. He concentrated on a model of a head, which was introduced as Fred the Head in Issue 1 of Mechanical Music World. This article copiously illustrated with Lyn's photographs show the workings and operation of this amusing automaton.

