

### A Quartet of Automata by Ted Brown

Ted selects four pieces from his own collection of automata, each one shown in glorious photographs



taken by Chris Fynes. First up is the Nubian prince, an advertising piece for the Belgian chocolate market. By removing excess lead weight from the figure's head and re-balancing it, Ted managed to get it working. The second automaton presented was an animated monkey made in the 1950's advertising scotch oats. The final two were Japanese tinplate toys of a bartender and a smoking Scotsman. More details on Japanese tin toys can be found in the article 'Batteries are included' in MMW issue 22.

*Extract:* "Apparently 51 of these advertising monkeys were made in the 1950s by a firm called Fyfes Engineering in Scotland. They were a copy of a French Descamp monkey, either singly or as a pair, mounted on a base. The drive was a 12-volt World War 2 military surplus motor supplied by a 240v/12 transformer. It had seven operating cams driven through a double reduction worm gear giving a 1:1600 speed reduction. The cams make the monkey blink, wink, lift its spoon to his mouth, open his mouth, turn his head, nod his head in appreciation and wave his flag."

### Resurrecting a Palais Royal Musical Necessaire by Bernard Novell

Bernard describes with accompanying photographs the step by step details of how he repaired a damaged necessaire and converted it to a luxury musical jewellery box for his daughter.

*Extract:* "The box itself was empty except for some scraps of blue material and lots of dirt. The turned legs, with pale brass ferrule at the top and cast claw feet, had been removed and very badly refitted at some stage in its life. Possibly one broke off and, rather than drill it out and dowel it, someone thought it clever to remove them all and mount them using a square of wood screwed to the top and then glue and pin them to the underside of the box. This had two effects, to raise the height of the box and to move the legs inboard thus hiding all of the detail of the top of the cast ferrule. I began by cleaning off the glued-on material and removing all of the legs, hinges and lock. Then I glued the lid back onto its frame, leaving it clamped in a vice for 24 hours. I quite expected it to pop off when released but it stayed in place. I then hand made two half round edging strips, with mitred corners to match the front and back and stained them to match the originals".

Bernard continues to describe full details of his project with photographs taken at every stage.



### **AMBC Meeting Paul Bellamy**

On 14<sup>th</sup> August 2022 AMBC held a meeting at The Old School for the first time in just over three years, because of the pandemic restrictions. Members brought along barrel pianos and organs for entertainment, others brought instruments for the 'Show and Tell session'. This article describes a number of these including upcycled boxes and a dancing doll automaton.

### **My Toy Accordion by Ted Brown**

In part of the Show & Tell session Ted presented one of his acquisitions, a toy accordion in need of some TLC. The toy itself was reasonably complete and intact but with some glued bits that had fallen off and a few rusty and broken screws. The cardboard case had just about survived in a number of torn, discoloured and missing pieces. The first task was to reconstruct the case before it deteriorated further. The paper was so fragile that the slightest touch caused bits of it to fall off. Finding a substitute thin card of similar colour was almost impossible but Ted came across a piece of modern corrugated cardboard packing. This was soaked in water, one side of the corrugation was pulled apart and ironed dry and flat on a breadboard; it is quite surprising how many useful kitchen utensils and modern material can be put to restoration use! Some of the printed covering was detached so this was glued back using an artist's archival PVA glue. The same glue was applied liberally to the inside of the very thin cardboard case. It was then covered in Clingfilm and flat on the breadboard. Ted continues to describe the painstaking work.

There is a sting in the 'tale' however after completion the mechanism worked fairly well but it was not possible to play the roll as the paper had aged and was too hard!

### **Celebrating the thirtieth Edition of Mechanical Music World by Chris & Juliet Fynes**

Mechanical Music World which has been published quarterly for over 7 years reached a milestone of 30 with this issue. The photographs of each cover, all expertly taken and formatted by Chris Fynes are reproduced here. Every magazine has been edited by David and Lesley Evans and contains a plethora (to use one of Ted's favourite word's) of articles spanning all forms of Mechanical Music, and much more. The article explores some of the background behind the items appearing on the covers.

*Extract:* "Our first magazine was published in the summer following the inaugural meeting. The blue colour was



chosen as it is distinctive and a good contrast to most musical instruments that tend to be brownish. With the old-fashioned typeface, it became our house style that could be adapted for future publications. We incorporated our logo in the title as the O in "World". The logo of a treble clef containing a spiral to represent a spring neatly encapsulates our main interest. For our first edition it was easiest to choose something from our own collection. The Aubert snuffbox".

### The Melodia Organette by David Evans

David describes a new toy with accompanying photographs.

*Extract:* "The Melodia organette is a simple 14-note paper-as-valve instrument, playing 7 1/4" wide rolls. This example came with two original rolls, one labelled 'Mechanical Organette Company, the



other 'The Aeolian Organ and Music Company. The address is also mentioned: 831 Broadway, New York in both cases. William B Tremaine founded the Mechanical Organette Co in 1878 and the Aeolian Organ and Music Co. in 1887 to make automatic organs. Patent numbers printed on the instruction label show dates from 1877 to 1881, indicating that the Organette roll pre-dates the other one, and that Aeolian were still producing Melodia rolls after 1887. It has both 'Melodia' and 'Mechanical Organette' stencilled on the top. This instrument has the extra hole above the main crank

handle to 'fast forward' the roll using the small re-wind crank. The button seen front centre is to sustain notes by rocking the main frame down, thus halting the drive. As with all David's articles the level of detail is extraordinary.

### The Automata at Kew Gardens by David Soulsby



The article describes the special automata built by to celebrate the recent restoration of the dragons on the Kew Gardens Pagoda.

*Extract* "Two handmade automata were commissioned by Historic Royal Palaces at the same time. They are positioned inside the lowest level of the Great Pagoda and are built by Fi Henshall. The two dioramas are housed in specially designed wooden and glass cases. Each has three separate handles which when turned bring the scenes to life. The first depicts the Canton market in the 18<sup>th</sup>



century visited by the young architect William Chambers where he studied Chinese building design. The second shows Princess Augusta, William Chambers, George III and Queen Charlotte taking a tour round the Palace gardens during the construction of the Great Pagoda." The article includes references to some of Fi Henshall's other work and contains detailed photographs.

### To Restore or Not to Restore and Provenance by Paul Bellamy



Paul considers the restoration options for a 180 year old music box brought to one of the AMBC meetings. The end flap was missing and the metal of the cylinder and works was very dull.

*Extract:* "Once the casework and mechanism of a musical box have been cleaned and its old polish revived it is important that any repair work should be reversible. Modern glues are very effective but old-fashioned 'pearl' glue is just as good for most repairs, and is authentic and reversible. Missing parts such as the end flap need a little more expertise. Reclaimed old wood of the same species

is an unlikely source but new wood of the same type can be artificially aged. Woods can be colour matched using modern stains but to do so without artificially ageing the wood first, can cause the colour to change with time. Woods age naturally in free air, mainly due to oxygen (called oxidation), so even if stained, the colour can still change. One useful oxidising agent is potassium permanganate; when diluted in water, its brilliant purple colour will turn to brown and then quickly fade, so it does not actually colour-stain the wood; instead it does what the oxygen in the air does but, instead of slowly, can do in a short time what air takes years to achieve".

### Let's Put the Record Straight by Paul Baker and Paul Bellamy

The two Paul's examine corrections to their perceptions and to details of articles and AMBC publications from the past, and also consider the reasons behind the 'errors'.

*Extract:* "I have committed at least one such error in the appendix to our recent AMBC book entitled *The Cylinder Musical Box, Tune Sheets, Makers, Agents & Dates*. I quoted a known source concerning the date when the complex musical box movement called the *Plerodinique* was patented. well, patent law in Switzerland did not, apparently, apply until about 1887 although it was active in the USA. The Q. David Bower's book 'Automatic Musical Instruments' states that a US patent No.266826 was filed on October the 31st 1882. The inventor was Albert Jeanrenaud of Saint Croix, Switzerland. so the date I quoted was entirely wrong.

One of our members pointed this out to me so I have tried to retrace my steps. My failure was to check available sources such as Bowers. Another search on the internet revealed a noted auction description of a Plerodinique. It had a footnote quoting Bowers but the name Jeanrenaud was misspelt as Jearenaud, no doubt the result of a typing error when letters get typed in the wrong order and do not get picked up by 'spell check'. Once again, simple mistakes can cause lasting errors."

The article continues to highlight other errors that have occurred, (luckily not too many!) and the unusual circumstances that have lead to them.