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LAMBERT CASTLE
Garret Mountain Reservation
Paterson, N. J.

PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 1969 No. 2

THE AGE OF THE MUSIC-BOX

By Mr. John A. Pfirrmann

From the earliest beginning, man has been aware of, and responsive to, the sounds around him made by simple things.

The wind rustling through trees, the sounds of birds, waves splashing against a shore, or the rippling of a brook, all challenged man to imitate them and create his own noises. Even the early cave man must have needed some form of expressing his emotions, and perhaps his first rhythms were developed from a dull but timed beat of stone against stone.

Following through the centuries, one finds man using animal skins to form a bellows-type instrument on which he would beat to obtain sound, or blowing through reeds fashioned from dry plants or weeds.

In still another era (and still being done in some remote parts of the world today), man used hollowed-out logs and bamboo poles on which he could produce different rhythmic tones to which he could dance, giving vent to his emotions.

Many centuries later, bells were rung to summon man to meetings, battle, worship, and as warnings of danger. Long before clocks had dials, bells rang out the time, so we are now relatively certain that it was in the early bell tower that automatic music was first conceived sometime in the fourteenth century.

It was the watchmaker who recognized the opportunities and further applications. The theory was that if large hammers driven by the tower clock could strike the bells, why could tiny hammers not strike small bells in a watch. The idea was picked up by two German inventors, Hasler and Heinlein, who presented Emperor Rudolf II with the first truly automatic musical clock in 1601. Edward Barlow invented the first repeater watch, and in 1730 Anton Ketterer produced the first cuckoo clock in the Black Forest of Germany.

To Switzerland however, we owe the music-box. No one knows for certain who invented the first music-box movement, but for the most part, it is believed that Louis Favre, a watchmaker from Geneva, was responsible for making the first unit in the eighteenth century. It was the Swiss who were responsible for making musical boxes a thriving industry in their land – an industry which today still ranks high among collectors. As early as 1770, Swiss watchmakers were setting small musical movements into watch cases, using a small tuned-steel comb played by pins or pegs set in a cylinder or disc. By 1880, they were making tiny music-boxes with from 15 to 25 teeth

tuned to scale, screwed separately into position on the comb, and played upon by steel pins set in a brass disc. These first music boxes played only the simplest of airs.

The 'key wind' was the next largest unit which played approximately four to six tunes and by 1815, specialized music-box makers had appeared on the scene. They improved on the early form of small units by enhancing the beauty of the case as well as adding more teeth to the comb, thus producing far greater sound, much more pleasing to the ear. It was found that mahogany and oak would deaden sound, therefore the woods favored for the cases were rosewood and walnut with zinc, brass, and mother-of-pearl used for ornate inlay work. Some of the known specialists of this time were Recordou, Junod, Nicole Freres and Moise-Aubert of Geneva.

In 1840, a new development called the 'ratchet wind' appeared. This box played anywhere from six to twelve tunes per cylinder. In the Ste. Croix district of Geneva the music-box industry prospered. Labor was cheap and material inexpensive. A flat piece of metal cut to the approximate size desired was given to the transposer of the music who would cut into the metal the lines (leger lines of music) and pin-point the notes necessary for the scale. When finished, the marked-up metal was given to various Swiss homes where the girls would drill the many fine holes to be pinned. This done, the metal was then sent to orphanages where the young charges inserted small metal pins in the openings. The final step was by the Swiss craftsman who would take the metal and form it into the cylinder. He would cement the pins in place and seal up the ends to produce the musical cylinder which was then placed into the box so it could operate at hundreds of revolutions per minute.

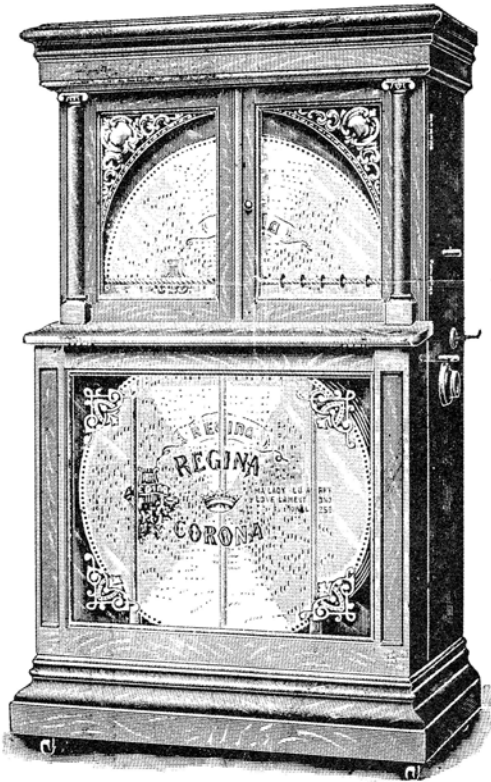
Many new developments took place in years to follow and as new competition sprang up, various companies made forced changes in order to stay in business. They added more teeth to the comb for better tonal quality and harmony, they added zithers, bells, castanets, drums and cymbals. In fact, so much was added to the boxes that the price became prohibitive and the cylinder type box was gradually going out of business due to over-improvement.

The death-knell of the cylinder type music-box gave way to a new form of musical box. the disc-box. In 1885, Paul Lochmann of Liepzig, Germany, introduced a musical box playing circular cardboard discs.

The revolving discs were struck with goose quills to produce the desired effect. This patent was first put on the market in 1886 and known as the Symphonion. The Polyphon Music Works, also of Liepzig, offered immediate competition and improved so much on the original that they far surpassed the Symphonion Corporation in quality. Both of these companies kept the music-box industry alive but in so doing they still had to turn to Switzerland for their fine comb makers. Both companies were involved in making small nursery boxes, clocks, coin-in-the-slot machines and many other types of boxes.

Like much else in life, success can be imitated, and it was true with the disc-type boxes. Many new companies came into existence overnight such as Calliope, Monopol, Komet, Gloria, Celesta, and the Triumph. It made no difference to Symphonion and Polyphon however because they still prospered and remained far superior in the field.

In the year 1899, the Polyphon Music Box Factory sent workers and equipment to America to form what was to be known as the Regina Company of Rahway. It was under the inventive leadership of Gustave Brachausen that the industry continued to prosper after being transplanted, and it was through him that music could be brought into homes because the price per



**Regina Orchestral
Corona No. 34**

*This instrument has
a piano sounding
board, changes the
tune discs
automatically,
and has a
long-running
movement.
The largest and
best instrument
of its kind
ever made.*

box was not prohibitive and could be purchased in any size from a four-inch disc type to a twenty-seven inch automatic coin-operated box.

As the disc-type box continued to prosper in America, business boomed, and people by the score were hired to manufacture them. But — “Mary had a little lamb” — these words, uttered by a Mr. Thomas Alva Edison, marked the death of the music-box industry. It was Edison’s invention of the talking machine in 1878 which created the first turmoil among manufacturers of music-boxes. The machine which could produce voices (not well, but nevertheless recognizable voices) was designed originally for commercial purposes but soon gave way to entertainment.

The Regina Company, realizing Edison’s machine meant doom, took immediate steps to improve existing machines, and came up with the first automatic disc-changing machine — The King of the Music Boxes. It offered the truly finest reproduced musical sound ever heard.

Edison kept improving the quality of his wax records while Brachausen of the Regina Company was looking for some means to compete. In 1903, Brachausen finally invented a device which would allow his machine to play not only the metal disc-type records but also the new flat type wax recordings as well. The Regina became known as the Regina-phone, and kept the Polyphon factory going full swing for at least another 19 years.

The ever-inventive genius of Edison continued to make improvements in the phonograph, and with the Victor Talking Machine, the era of the music-box ended.

If one is fortunate today, he may have one of the prized music boxes, or have had the pleasure of hearing the music of other years in the homes of collectors. Even now, some metal records are being made for those fortunate enough to own music boxes. Man does not forget the past too readily, even while trying to seek the ultimate in perfection in many kinds of machines that now produce and reproduce music. We have a tremendous variety of entertainments, but music still plays a major part in most of them.

It is interesting to note that even though the invention of the phonograph ended the great period of music boxes, because of constant improvements made by Edison, and especially Victor, the music of the antique boxes, both cylinder and disc-type, can still be heard on modern wax recordings, and in all their richness, thanks to hi-fi and stereo. Thus the very thing responsible for the death of the music-box industry is responsible for its revival. Today you may buy music-box recordings, as well as toy pianos, key rings, jewel cases, dancing dolls, toy banks, and similar objects in unimaginable variety — all musical, and all because one day long ago a watchmaker first created a tune by making small hammers strike against tiny bells.

(Mr. Pfirrmann is a collector of musical boxes and a dealer of fine arts.)

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Sale of Cropsey's Pictures — The other day Mr. Jasper Francis Cropsey, the well known artist of West Milford, sold a number of his pictures at the Leeds Gallery, New York. The sale was well attended and produced good prices, not so much, perhaps, as the pictures would have produced in good times, but still fair prices. About sixty four pictures were sold among which were:-

“Wawayanda Water”	\$220
“Sunset, Lake George”	145
“Old Mill, New Jersey”	140
“An Old House in Sussex Co., N. J.”	140
“Moonrise, Greenwood Lake”	135
“Wyoming Valley”	175
“The Fourn Mountain”	150
“Foggy Morning, Gulworth”	120
“The Thousand Islands”	300
“The Mellow Autumn Time”	675
“Sandy Hook from Staten Island”	575
“Evening”	625
“Mount Washington from Lake Sebago”	375
“Stoke-Pogis, the scene of Grays elegy”	470
“Pompton Plains”	250
“Niagara Falls in Winter”	110
“Wood Scene”	170
“An Italian Garden”	270
“The Thousand Isles”	370

Reprinted from The Paterson Press, Feb. 11, 1868

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The fish horn band was one of the amusing features of today. We thank them for blowing in front of our office, and only regret they did not keep on blowing, till they blew their brains out. Perhaps they had none.

Reprinted from the Paterson Guardian, June 5, 1867