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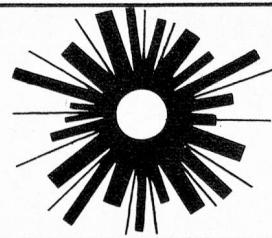
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MEET SOME BEAUTIFUL THINGS IN NEUCHÂTEL



Pierre Jaquet-Droz (1721–1790) — Father of Neuchâtel's Mechanical Dolls

Hunters, farmers and artisans — notably a few goldsmiths — lived in the secluded valleys of the Jura mountains, when Pierre Jaquet-Droz was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1721. Watchmaking had already produced its first master-craftsmen in nearby Le Locle, but Pierre's father — himself a watchmaker-farmer — sent his son to Basle. At the famous University, he was to study philosophy and prepare himself for a clerical career. One of his teachers was the eminent physician and mathematician Daniel Bernoulli.

But upon his return to La Chaux-de-Fonds, young Jaquet-Droz became interested and fascinated by the delicate craft of watchmaking. Between 1740 and 1747 he polished his skills, and on October 22, 1747, he landed his first contract for a domestic clock. His dexterity and imagination, paired with solid mathematical knowledge, led him on to new and original works. He began to build complicated clockwork mechanisms, complex machines and working models. Dancing figures to strike the hours and songbirds adorned his new timepieces. A little later he started building automatons the size of children. Demonstrations at the courts of France and England found an enthused audience. The fame of the Jaquet-Droz and the watchmaking capital La Chaux-de-Fonds spread quickly. Pierre's son, Henri-Louis, had followed in his father's footsteps and even opened a branch office in London.

Today — after more than two hundred years — the metal hearts of Pierre Jaquet-Droz' automaton children are still intact. The "Clavicord Player" plays her five easy pieces, the "Draftsman" draws the profile of King Louis XV without a moment's hesitation, and the "Writer" has not stopped repeating his bemused question: "I do not think . . . Might I, therefore, not even be?"

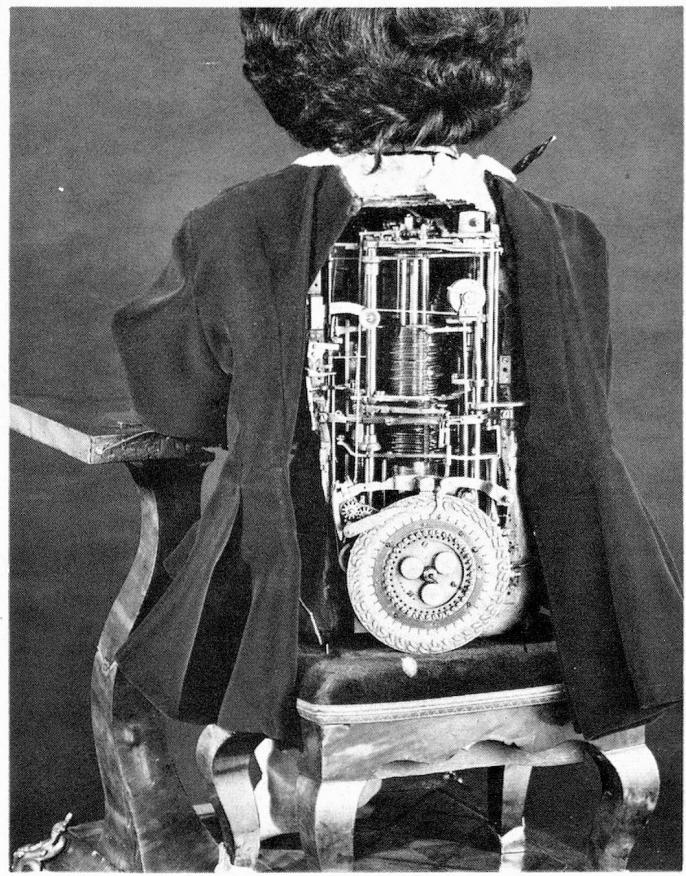
Anybody who wants to make sure that these mechanical puppets really do exist can easily do so. Since 1907, they are part of the many exhibits of the Neuchâtel Art and History Museum and will continue to delight its visitors.



Pierre Jaquet-Droz, brilliant watchmaker and designer of mechanical musical clocks, from a painting by Emanuel Witz. Picture by courtesy of SNTO.



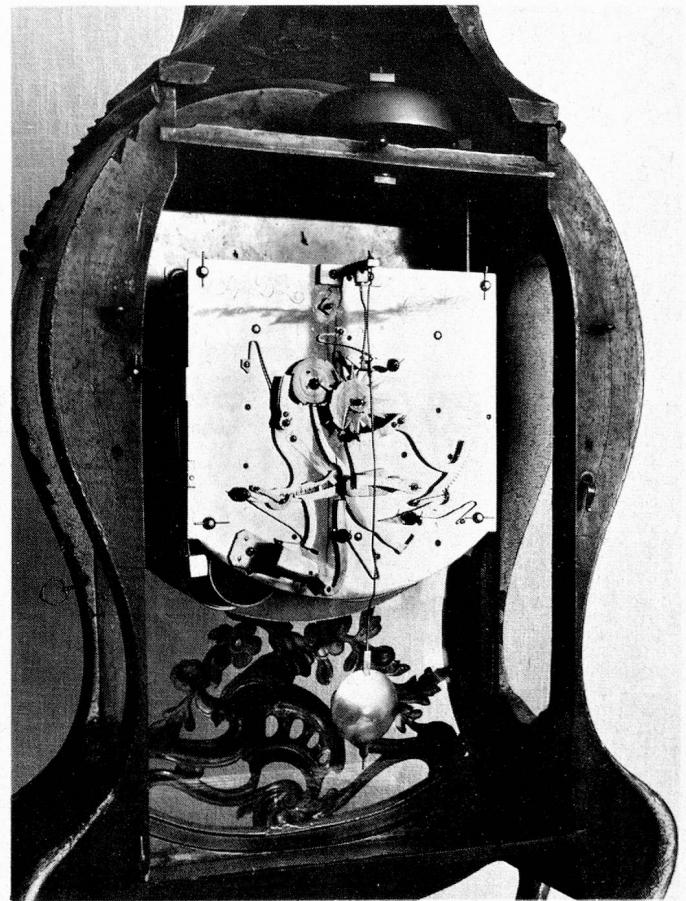
Front view of the "Draftsman", completed in 1774 by Jaquet-Droz father and son, one of the three famous mechanical dolls from the Museum of Art and History in Neuchâtel. Courtesy of SNTO.



While the rear view of the "Writer", another of the famous three, shows us some of the incredibly complex works. Courtesy SNTO.



The third of the triad is the "Clavichord Player" pictured here by courtesy of SNTO.



A movement measuring 180 mm x 185 mm of a Louis XV table clock with glockenspiel by Pierre Jaquet-Droz. Photo by courtesy of SNTO.