

## **The three automata created by Pierre Jaquet-Droz et Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz Musée d'art et d'histoire de Neuchâtel**

On the 1st of May 1909, the *Société d'histoire et d'archéologie du canton de Neuchâtel* gave the three automata, created by Pierre Jaquet-Droz et Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to the Musée d'art et d'histoire de la Ville de Neuchâtel.

The clock and watch-making industry, which started in the Neuchâtel mountains at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was making rapid strides at the 18<sup>th</sup> century, chiefly at Le Locle and La Chaux-de-Fonds. The latter became the centre of the clock industry in Switzerland and was to acquire a European reputation; thanks to the Jaquet-Droz, the Robert, the Roy and many other master craftsmen.

### **Pierre Jaquet-Droz and Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz**

Pierre Jaquet-Droz (1721-1790) was born at La Chaux-de-Fonds. After having acquired some knowledges of clock and watch-making, he studied theology at the University of Basel and then at the University of Neuchâtel. However, being interested in mathematics, he devoted himself to them and more especially to applied mechanics and to watch and clock-making.

Thus armed with a scientific culture much superior to that of his fellow artisans, he tackled the problems that fascinated him becoming the leading mechanician of his country and one of the greatest of his age.

Around 1747 the work of Pierre Jaquet-Droz was already known and admired in Europe by specialists and authorities. In 1758, accompanied by a workman and his father-in-law, Abram Louis Sandoz, he took several of his already famous masterpieces as far as Spain to the King's court. The Jaquet-Droz rapidly became one of the most important firms, established not only at La Chaux-de-Fonds but also in Geneva, London and Paris.

Henri Louis Jaquet-Droz (1752-1791), the son of Pierre-Jaquet Droz, worked with his father as assistant and worthy disciple at a very young age. He studied science and also developed his artistic tastes, especially music.

Pierre Jaquet-Droz worked with apprentices, among them a very talented technician, Jean-Frédéric Leschot (1746-1824), who became his right hand and took over the business after the death of the Jaquet-Droz father and son.

### **The three automata : the Scribe, the Ladymusician and the Draughtsman**

The works of Pierre Jaquet-Droz, Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz and a few assistants resulted in the birth of the three mechanical puppets now belonging to the *Musée d'art et d'histoire de Neuchâtel*.

In 1774, Pierre and Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz show them to the public at La Chaux-de-Fonds with another piece La Grotte, a very complicated pastoral scene with many animated characters. The success of these automata was such that people flocked

from everywhere to admire them “as on a pilgrimage”. On the same year, their creators took them from one capital to another and show them to many Court of Europe as the Court of Louis XV in Paris, also in Brussels, London, Kazan in Russia, Madrid. Newspapers and posters record their journeying. In 1787, the Jaquet-Droz sold their automata to Spanish impresarios. In 1812 we found the prestigious automata in Paris. They traveled again across Europe, without La Grotte which disappeared. In 1830, F. Martin and H.-L. Bourquin bought them and traveled to Austria, Germany and Denmark with their “Museum of Illusions”. Carls Marfels, an German collector, bought them in 1904 and two years later resold the three automata to the *Société d’histoire et d’archéologie du canton de Neuchâtel*, thanks to subsidies of the *Swiss Confederation* and private donations. After a Swiss tour, the three automata created by the Jaquet-Droz, father and son, were definitively conserved in the *Musée d’art et d’histoire de la ville de Neuchâtel* since 1909.

### **The Scribe (l’Ecrivain), on the right**

The credit for the essential part of the Scribe’s internal construction must go to Pierre Jaquet-Droz. He designed it when his son was still an adolescent, but was assisted in his research by Jean-Frédéric Leschot and other skilled workmen.

The Scribe’s mechanism is extremely complex, much more intricate than those of the other two puppets. It is possible to set the mechanism in such a way the Scribe will write any programmed text of not more than forty letters or signs on a moving paper (as a typewriter).

### **The Ladymusician (La Musicienne), in the middle**

She differs considerably from the other two : she is much bigger. She was born in the hands of Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz. The girl plays an organ with two bellows which pump air into 48 pipes. She breathes during her playing and finish each piece of music with a elegant bow. The five melodies she plays were composed by H.-L. Jaquet-Droz who had studied music. She really does play her instrument, contrary to most automata whose fingers only follow the keys while the instrument does the playing. This detail is further proof of the Jaquet-Droz’s genius.

### **The Draughtsman (Le Dessinateur), on the left**

This child with a pen resembles his brother the Scribe, but there is a slight difference in his attitude because his paper remains immobile and the hand moves all over the paper.

The Draughtsman, who can draw 4 different motives, was made chiefly by Henri Jaquet-Droz, with the precious assistance of Jean-Frédéric Leschot and three expert workmen. The automaton was completed in the relatively short time of two years (1772-1774). The Draughtsman’s performance is more spectacular than the Scribe’s. His mechanism is however far less complicated than that of the Scribe.

## **Demonstrations, booklets in English and postcards**

The three automata can be seen in function **the first Sunday of each month**, from 14 o'clock to 17 o'clock. With reservations, **special demonstrations** about one hour are also organized for groups of more than 5 people at any time in the week. Our reception desk will inform you about the conditions and the prices. Postcards and booklets in English are sold at the reception desk situated in the main hall near the entrance of the museum.

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