

P R E S S R E L E A S E

International exhibition
‘Royal Music Machines’
in National Museum From Musical Clock to Street Organ

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the National Museum From Musical Clock to Street Organ in Utrecht, the Netherlands, presents the international exhibition ‘Royal Music Machines’. Having acquired a large number of loans from other museums world-wide, the museum will host a spectacular collection of some of the most famous musical automata of the past five hundred years. This event will take place from 13 April to 30 July 2006.

In co-operation with

State Hermitage, St. Petersburg
Musée du Louvre, Paris
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon, Dresden
Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Neuchâtel
National Library of the Czech Republic

Musée National des Arts et Métiers, Paris
Muziekinstrumentenmuseum, Brussels
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
Royal Collections, The Hague
Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg
Paleis Het Loo National Museum, Apeldoorn

In bygone ages behind palace doors, now open to the public

Over the centuries it was predominantly the crowned heads of Europe who could afford the acquisition of such spectacular works of art. In the past five hundred years, they had music machines made that crossed the border between art, music and technology. Unique pieces from collections of the Habsburgs, Romanovs, Bourbons, Esterházy’s and the Oranjes will be on view during the exhibition.



Worldwide masterpieces, for once in Utrecht

In 2003 the museum conceived the idea of an exhibition of some 50 musical automata in a survey of the most spectacular pieces world-wide. Long-standing co-operation with international museums proved fruitful, resulting in a number of invaluable loans, some of which are leaving their premises for the first time. For example *La Musicienne* (Musician), one of the most famous music machines ever, can now be seen for the first time in history together with her ‘sister’ *la Joueuse de Tympanon*, made for Queen Marie-Antoinette of France.



La Musicienne is an almost full-size mechanical lady of 233 years old. She plays a pipe organ with her own automated fingers. She breathes visibly (her chest moves) and her eyes follow the movement of her fingers on the keys. At the end of her performance she curtsies gracefully to her audience. In the 18th century this automaton was already a resounding success.

Photo: Automaton ‘La Musicienne’, Pierre Jaquet-Droz, 1773, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Neuchâtel

Royal toys

Royal houses and emperors wanted to display wealth and power so as to make a lasting impression on their guests and other royal families. As an ultimate proof of their good taste and status symbol, they instructed instrument makers to construct the most exclusive automatons, often as presents for special guests or dear friends.



Spectacular examples from the Renaissance are the ship automata that moved along the table as a showpiece during royal banquets. Only three of these royal toys are still left, one of which is this solid silver and fire-gilt ship automaton that was in all probability made for Emperor Rudolf II of Habsburg.

On board there is a colourful group of crew-members, and under the canopy, the Emperor himself is seated. Once the spring-mechanisms are wound, the ship will sail forward, rolling on its invisible eccentric wheels. Trumpeters play a flourish to the rhythmic accompaniment of a drummer and a kettle-drum player. Finally a wheel-lock mechanism is activated and a cannon loaded with gunpowder fires a deafening blast. Because the imperial ship's mechanisms are in a state of grave disrepair, the National Museum From Musical Clock to Street Organ has build a working model

which, on special occasions, can perform all of the above mentioned functions, complete with the firing of the gunpowder cannon.

Photo: The imperial 'Nef', a silver ship automaton, made by Hans Schlottheim, c.1585, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

About the carriage that was manufactured around 1795 for tsarina Catharina the Great, a moving story is to be told.

It took Egor Kuznetsov, a Russian blacksmith and serf of the Empress, 16 years to make the ingenious carriage, before presenting it to his mistress. Catharina decided to add the gift to the imperial collection and gave Kuznetsov in exchange for the piece of art his freedom.

The carriage is equipped with a hodometer and an automatic organ that could be switched on during a ride to entertain the passengers. The musical cylinder of the carriage contains a wide variety of the popular melodies of that day. Moreover, new cylinders could be made to keep up with the latest musical trends.

Photo: Carriage with hodometer and automatic organ, Egor Kuznetsov, c.1795, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.



In the 18th century in the Far East it was believed that giving presents in pairs would bring good luck, whereas giving one present would be bad luck. Automata such as these elephants of nearly 2.5 meters tall, were produced predominantly for the royal houses of the Near and Far East. Here it is not only the quality of the music mechanisms and the delicacy of the 150 water cascades but first and foremost the sheer size of the bronze patinated and fire-gilt bodies of the elephants.

Photo: Two elephant clocks with bell music and automata, atelier James Cox, London, c.1780, private collection

Visitor information 'Royal Music Machines'

National Museum from Musical Clock to Street Organ

The National Museum from Musical Clock to Street Organ is housed in the central mediaeval parish church in the old inner city of Utrecht. The museum contains an important collection of automatic musical instruments and is famous for its great number of pieces in perfect playing condition. These instruments are presented live during guided tours every hour. This way, the museum succeeds in keeping not only the instruments alive, but also the fascinating culture of music behind them. The combination of music, technology, history and anecdotes makes the museum attractive for visitors of all ages and all kinds; young and old, music lovers and specialists, collectors and clubs, thoughtful listeners and excited fans.

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Dates

The exhibition will take place from 13 April to 30 July 2006, in the National Museum. From Musical Clock to Street Organ, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays from 10 a.m. till 5 p.m.

During the exhibition on Thursday from 10 a.m. till 9 p.m.

Closed: Mondays.

Guided tours

Guided tours of 'Royal Music Machines' with live demonstrations of the instruments take place non-stop. Guided tours are offered in Dutch and English.

Groups, private tours and receptions

On special occasions private tours may be booked for groups, with a maximum of 75 persons. Reservations must be made in advance.

Children

For children there are special activities. They can make a journey along royal palaces in musical vehicles. There is an exciting treasure hunt that teaches them more about the royal, musical and technical secrets of the instruments and in the Music Factory children can make music by themselves.

Fees

During the exhibition Royal Music Machines an additional fee of € 3 p.p. will be added to the regular admission fee.

Admission fees for 2006 are as follows:

	Groups (of 36 to 50)	Individual	Royal Music Machines 13 April– 30 July 2006
Adults (from 13 years)	€ 245	€ 7	+ € 3 p.p.
Children (4 to 12 years)	€ 140	€ 4	+ € 3 p.p.
CJP pass	€ 210	€ 6	+ € 3 p.p.
Seniors	€ 210	€ 6	+ € 3 p.p.
Museum Pass		Free	+ € 3 p.p.

Reservations

With regard to the restricted exhibition period, we advise to make timely reservations for private guided tours, receptions and/or festivals. For reservations we refer to our management assistant (Flora W. MacDonald) who will be happy to be of assistance. You may reach us by telephone during office hours +31-(0)30-2312789, or e-mail post@museumspeelklok.nl .

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The most musical museum in the Netherlands!

The National Museum from Musical Clock to Street Organ, a former church in the Dutch city of Utrecht, houses a living collection of mechanical music. Carillon clocks, musical boxes, pianolas, belly organs, orchestrions, as well as full-size street, fairground and dance-hall organs are all on show. A tour of this unique museum tells the story of automated musical instruments through the ages.

Address: Steenweg 6, Utrecht, the Netherlands
www.museumspeelklok.nl

The exhibition has been made possible by:



Mondriaan Stichting

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Note for the editors: for more information, interviews or a visit to the museum, please contact Brechje Manschot, marketing manager Royal Music Machines,
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