

Title:

A Unique Interview on How to Repair Music Boxes and Other Mechanical Collectibles, Part 2

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Summary:

As most music box and antique collectors know, in order to preserve their music box and antique collectibles, sometimes repair and restoration is needed. For this special work, it is important to choose a company that is reputable and an expert in this area. This is the second part of an interview with music box and mechanical instrument repair and restoration expert, Mr. Jim Weir

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Ballerina Music Boxes, inlaid music boxes, musical jewelry boxes, cylinder music boxes, and antique music boxes are delicate and beautiful. As most music box and antique collectors know, in order to preserve them, sometimes repair and restoration is needed. For this special work, it is important to choose a company that is reputable and an expert in this area. This is the second part of an interview with music box and mechanical instrument repair and restoration expert, Mr. Jim Weir

Jim does all kinds of antique musical box repairs and restoration. His work includes comb repairs, releading and tuning, dampering, cylinder repairing, and organ bridge work. Jim also offers all manner of musical box work on disc and cylinder music boxes..Let's listen as he continues to give us an inside peek of this unique business.

6. What if your least favorite part of running your business? Your favorite part?

"Paperwork. Dealing with taxes and Customs (although I've got quite good dealing with Customs and Carriers). My favorite part? There is a satisfaction in finally getting a job finished; there's also a fair amount of satisfaction in finally

getting paid."

7. What are some of your favorite music box and collectible pieces and why?

"A 26" consul model Stella. It belonged to the late Bruce Devine and literally arrived in pieces (it had been dropped from a crane while being loaded). Originally Bruce gave it to one of my trade customers, who passed it on to me. Then my trade customer ducked out of the deal, and I ended up working direct for Bruce. It was an 'interesting' experience and quite a steep learning curve. At the end though, the box did sound good. Excellent tune arrangements."

8. Is there any interesting history associated with some of your pieces?

"I don't collect musical boxes; without being funny I genuinely cannot afford to. Some of the pieces I've worked on have had 'history'; as an example the Stella referred to above. Another would be a rare long and short pin Forte-Piano box (maker unknown) I overhauled for a customer in France. It had a silver presentation plaque in the lid; as far as I could gather it was presented to a Mayor in 1847 for some kind of 'service to the townspeople'. I'm not up on French politics, but the middle of the 19th century were turbulent times. One of the nicest stories is a box I fully restored for an old lady in Edinburgh. She was in her 70's. The box had been in her family since new, and she had last heard it play when she was a child."

9. What important advice or tips would you give to someone who would like to start a business such as yours either online or offline?

"I wouldn't. Things move faster now that we have the Internet. To get fully involved in this kind of work takes time, which the whole 'I want it NOW' approach of the Internet doesn't favor. I was lucky in that I had a skill with clocks that I was able to sharpen and direct to music box work. If I had to give advice, I'd say by all means get involved with music boxes, or whatever else begins to drive you, but try to maintain a backup. The wisest thing? Learn that 'quitting' is not necessarily a personal failure; it's recognizing that some choices can turn out to be wrong. There are maybe a few music box repairers who would be happier now if, 30 years ago, they'd sold their lathes, workshop tools etc. and taken up farming. Not me though, I hasten to add."

10. For those antique and music box collectors looking to find valuable and interesting pieces for their own collections, where would you suggest they go either online or offline? How about those who are just starting a collection?

"Take advice from your friends. Don't necessarily follow it, but give it some

thought. Subscribe to music box sale catalogues, it's a good way to check what things actually sell for; they often give the hammer price of items from previous sales. Go to music box auctions if you can; not necessarily to buy anything but to observe, to get a feel not just for how much pieces sell for, but for what sells and what doesn't. Try to figure out why what looked like a nice box didn't sell. If you're really interested in buying a specific musical box, either from a dealer, private seller or at auction it can save you a lot of heartache if you get someone who knows what they're looking at to check the box over and advise you of likely repair costs before you buy it. A lot of repair costs can be itemized; if a potential customer emailed or wrote to me (even `phoned me) with a good description of a box needing repair, I would do my best to advise them as to how much the repairs could cost before they part up with maybe a lot of money to buy it. I don't charge for this and neither do most restorers; having given advice we all hope for the work if the customer goes on and buys the box. If the box is a particularly fine example, and likely to be expensive to buy, it's can be worth paying a restorers time for them to go and check it out at the sellers address. I've done this; a collector armed with an itemized potential repair cost of something he's interested in buying is in a very strong position when it comes to arguing the sale price with the seller".

Jim ends with saying this about his hopes for the future:

"To bring in more work and pay off the mortgage. Ok, there's a lot more to life than that but one way or another, the bills still have to be paid. Most of my work to now has come from dealers; what I'm hoping is that by advertising in the MBSI Journal, I'll attract more work direct from the public. In theory I could put up my public prices, but in practice I cannot, at least not to customers in the USA. They already have to pay shipping costs, and the simple fact is that whether a musical box needs comb work, cylinder work or a full restoration, there's a top limit to how much most people will pay to have it worked on, irrespective of how long the work takes. People have to make choices; your car's broke, your washing machine leaks and the antique music box you inherited from your Grandmother squeaks. Which one do you spend your money on? That's about it really; the sun's shining and it's time to get back to the workshop."

I'd like to personally thank Jim for taking the time to share with us this valuable information about his business as well as letting us get a sneak peak into the world of music box repairs and restoration. Jim Weir can be reached at combwork@aol.com or by telephone/fax at 01144-1575-572647.