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MBSI News

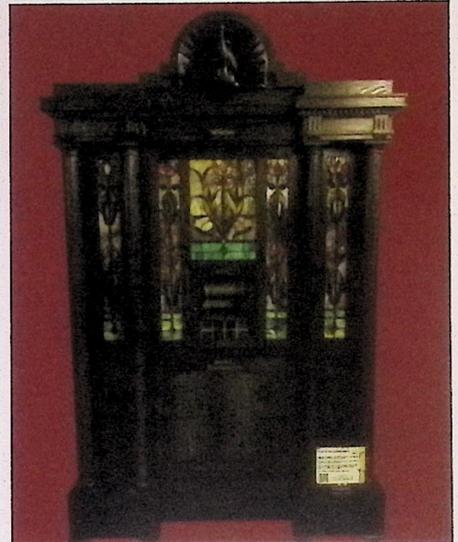
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On the Cover

This Wurlitzer Mandolin PianOrchestra Style 12, circa 1915, is part of the MBSI collection that will be included on a visit to American Treasure Tour as part of this year's annual meeting.

This majestic machine is dominated by a "wonder light" creating a beautiful tail for the peacock in front of it.

This machine cost \$5,000 to purchase brand new. That was more than the price of an average house at the time.

Only 61 machines of this design were produced. The exteriors were made at the Wurlitzer factory in North Tonawanda, NY, while the interior mechanisms were made by Phillips of Germany. The machine is 8-feet 6-inches high and weighs 1,500 pounds.

More details about the annual meeting are available on Page 16 of this issue. Photo by Bob Caletti.

What was old is new again

Baroque Orchestra of New Jersey
and Music Box Series return to the Morris Museum

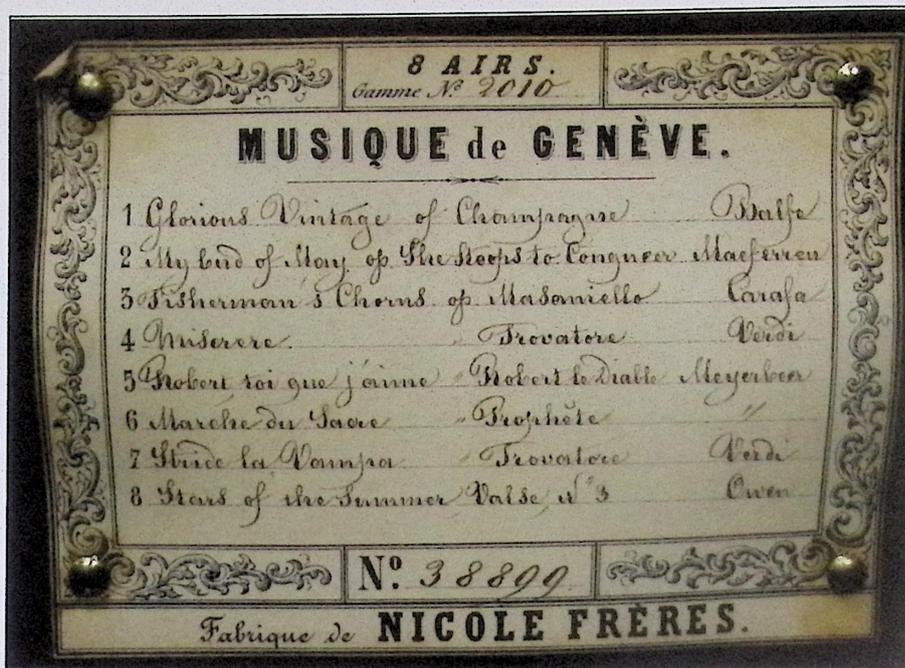
By Jere Ryder

Nov. 14 and Nov. 16, 2025

It was with pleasure and a near capacity audience that the Baroque Orchestra of New Jersey (BONJ) returned to the Morris Museum for its second musical box-inspired program series. Maestro Robert Butts led a 28-piece orchestra, a master pianist and six operatic singers.

The opening note in the BONJ musical box series, on Nov. 16, 2024, focused on Madama Butterfly and the "Puccini" musical box in the Murtoth D. Guinness Collection. The event was detailed in a New York Times article and also documented by a television program called State of the Arts NJ (stateoftheartsnj.com/video/puccinis-music-box).

This second season series delved into the music of Giuseppe Verdi,



The first performance featured a Nicole Frères cylinder box featuring eight tunes that was made circa 1862.



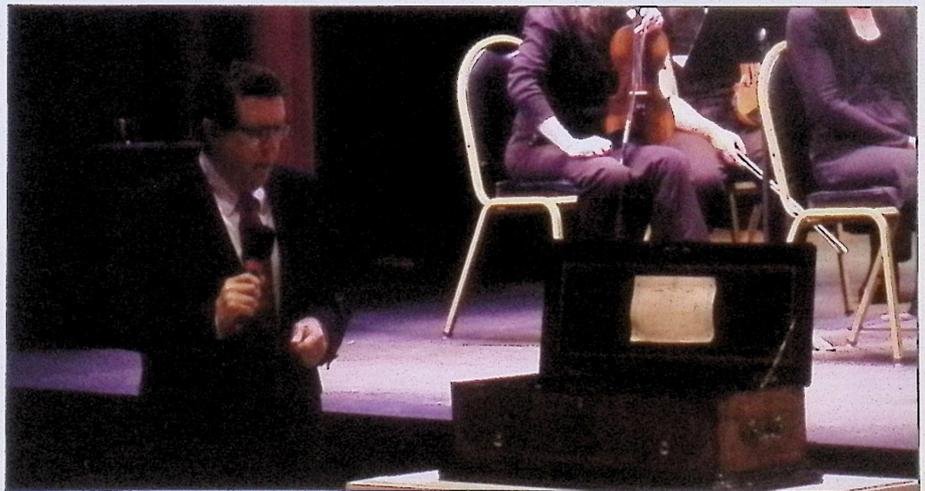


The audience and orchestra watch and listen as the cylinder box plays.

juxtaposing live performances of three selections by three different, 19th century cylinder musical boxes from the Guinness collection. Maestro Butts inspected, listened to and selected the cylinder boxes which were displayed in the museum's Bickford Theater orchestra pit area, immediately below and in front of the stage. Microphones and a GoPro camera were used to project a picture above the orchestra on the rear stage screen and the music could be heard nicely via the theater sound system.

The first instrument introduced was made by Nicole Frères of Geneva, Switzerland, circa 1862 (ID No. 2003.18.506). It performed "Stride la Vampa," an aria from "Il Trovatore." That was followed by the BONJ, supplemented by a compelling performance by mezzo soprano Diane Fox of that same piece.

Second to come forward was an organo, mandoline basse piccolo



Jere Ryder introduces the musical box and the music to be performed.

cylinder box by David Langdorff, also from Geneva and dating from about 1861 (ID# 2003.18.602). It performed "Mira di Acerbe Lagrime," from "Il Trovatore," a well-known duet from act IV which premiered in 1853.

The third instrument to be introduced was a quatuor (four voices) cylinder box made by Gueissaz Fils

& Cie., of L'Auberson, Switzerland, circa 1890 (ID No. 2003.18.625). This instrument performed the "Finale" from Rigoletto that premiered in 1851, followed by an outstanding quartet of singers, in four voices. Timothy Maureen Cole (soprano), Dimitri Zigrino (tenor), Jason Adamo (bass) and Diane Fox (mezzo soprano), sang



The second cylinder box tune sheet showing six airs on a mandoline basse piccolo musical box.



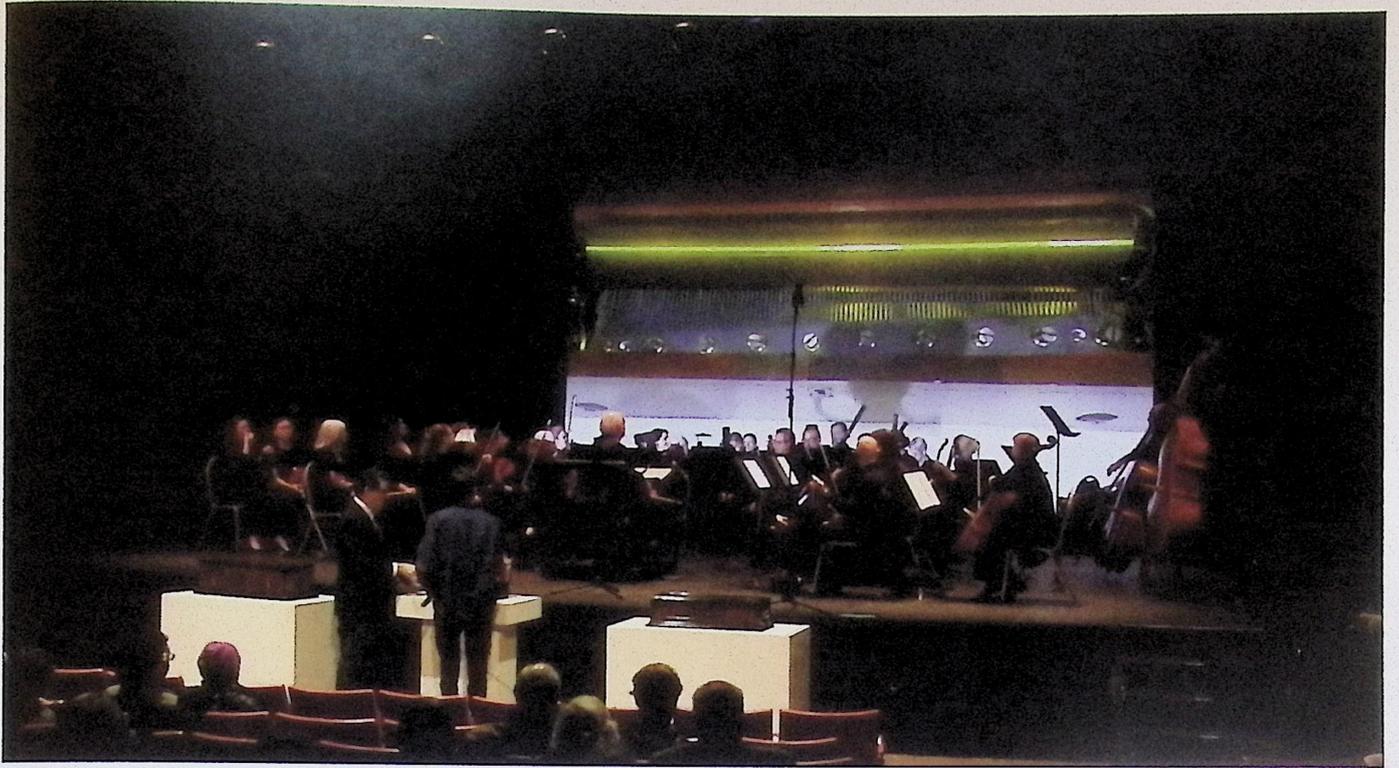
The third cylinder box to play was a quatuor (four voices) musical box made by Guessaz Fils. & Cie.



Each musical box was left open for the audience to view before and after the performances.



The music played from this cylinder box debuted to the public in 1851.



The musical box performances captivated both the audience and the musicians on stage.

“Bella figlia dell’amore.”

Guinness collection staff created a short video of the “Finale” so that you can see how the presentation and performance took place ([youtube.com/watch?v=bV80a4f0uFA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV80a4f0uFA)).

After a brief intermission, the second part of the evening program featured New York-based classical pianist Daniel Colalillo and his powerful performance of Ludwig van Beethoven’s “Piano Concerto No. 4,” *allegro moderato — andante con moto rondo (vivace)*.

Of particular interest to Maestro Butts, while inspecting the cylinder boxes in the Guinness collection, was the wide variety of musical selections

that would not normally be included in any live orchestra’s repertoire in the last 100 years. These musical pieces would not be readily recognized by the public today. The situation would, however, have been quite the opposite during the time these instruments were being newly manufactured.

It will be interesting to see where the third installment of the BONJ music box series may head next, as there are many composers and musical selections to choose from in the Guinness collection. As one of the largest reference or study collections of cylinder musical boxes, numbering more than 275, it represents the widest variety of makers, composers, musical

arrangements, musical formats and mechanisms under one roof in the world.

The Morris Museum and the Guinness collection look forward to hosting MBSI and Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors’ Association members during the upcoming joint convention to be held in Princeton, NJ, later this year. ■

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Jere Ryder is a Guinness Collection Conservator.

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WE WANT YOUR STORY!

Every mechanical musical instrument has a tale to tell. Share the history of people who owned your instrument before you, or the story of its restoration, or just what makes it an interesting piece. Send stories via email to editor@mbsi.org or mail your story to Iron Dog Media, 130 Coral Court, Pismo Beach, CA 93449

