

IN FOCUS

SONG AND DANCE | JAQUET DROZ'S BIRD REPEATER RECAPTURES THE MAGIC OF ITS NAMESAKE'S FAMED AUTOMATA
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Birds were a subject of particular fascination and inspiration when watchmaker Pierre Jaquet-Droz came of age in the mid-18th century. From home décor to fashion to art, birds were a popular motif symbolizing freedom and transcendence. As a boy who loved nature, Jaquet-Droz explored the woods around his home in the Swiss Jura, listening to the high trills of Blue Tits as they called from the evergreens. His studies of nature and the human form along with his visionary gift for mechanical engineering led Jaquet-Droz to produce incredibly lifelike automata, animated mechanical sculptures that captivated his well-heeled patrons, who included Spain's King Ferdinand VI.

Although he became famous for his astonishing human automata—including the Musician, the Writer and the Draughtsman, now displayed at the Neuchâtel museum of art and history—Jaquet-Droz also produced mechanical singing

birds that were placed in birdcages or emerged from pocket watches and table clocks. While the modern brand bearing his name has referenced birds on its dials before, its latest Bird Repeater is the most technical and romantic expression of the master's passion for nature and mechanical engineering.

It took Jaquet Droz's watchmakers and artisans about three years to develop and complete the Bird Repeater, which is the most complex timepiece the brand has ever produced. This modern interpretation of Jaquet-Droz's Enlightenment-era automata challenged engineers and artisans alike. Watchmakers were tasked with miniaturizing eight different animated mechanisms built on a cam system inspired by antique works and combining them with a minute repeater, which itself is a technical feat.

THIS MASTERPIECE OF MÉTIERS D'ART AND MECHANICS REMINDS US THAT SOMETIMES WATCHES DO FAR MORE THAN TELL TIME.



A push of the slide on the left side of the watch activates the movement's resonant cathedral gong to chime the hours, quarters and minutes. It also sets the automaton—a beautifully rendered pair of nesting Blue Tits and their fledglings—into motion on the dial. As one bird bobs its head to feed its young, the wings of its companion spread and an egg at the center of the nest

opens to reveal a chick, while a stream in the background flows in a shimmering cascade.

Every artisan in Jaquet Droz's Ateliers d'Art was engaged in the creation of the multidimensional dial, employing the time-honored decorative techniques of sculpting, engraving, and enamel painting. From layering yellow, blue, white and black enamel

to accurately portray the birds' colorful plumage to hand-sculpting each tiny blade of dried grass in the nest, the artisans have crafted a vivid natural scene, framed by the watch's 47-mm gold case.

This masterpiece of *métiers d'art* and mechanics reminds us that sometimes watches do far more than tell time—some are painstakingly crafted to stimulate the senses and stir the soul. Although only a lucky few will have the pleasure of admiring the \$472,500 Bird Repeater on their wrists, it's easy to envision the piece on display in a museum next to Jaquet-Droz's original creations. From the Enlightenment to the modern age, Jaquet Droz automata continue to captivate the poet in us all.

jaquet-droz.com

The Jaquet Droz Bird Repeater, with and without its decorated dial in place; the dial [opposite] featuring fine engraving and miniature enamel painting



See and hear the Bird Repeater in action at <http://jaquet-droz.com/#/movies-en.html>.

Jaquet Droz's Magician automaton with singing bird