

MUSEUM FÜR MUSIKAUTOMATEN SEEWEN SO

Sammlung Dr. h.c.
Heinrich Weiss-Stauffacher

Museum of
Music Automatons
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Seewen, summer 2019

General press release – Seewen Museum of Music Automatons, Canton Solothurn

The Seewen Museum of Music Automatons has been building a steadily rising following for many years. Located some 20 km south of Basel, the museum ranks amongst north-eastern Switzerland's most popular attractions.

The aural museum owes its existence to the passionate collector Dr. h.c. Heinrich Weiss who, over a period of decades, lovingly assembled what has become a world-famous collection of Swiss cylinder and disc music boxes, music automatons, musical timepieces, animated figures, phonographs and gramophone players. He created a museum for his collection in 1979 and made it accessible to the public. In 1990 he donated his entire collection, the museum building and the grounds it stands in to the Swiss Confederation.

As part of the Swiss National Museum, the Seewen Museum of Music Automatons comes under the jurisdiction of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture. It has been led by Dr. Christoph E. Hänggi since June 2003.

Thanks to its setting at alt. 610 m in the delightful countryside of the Schwarzbubenland region of the Jura in Canton Solothurn, it is a popular destination for walkers and day-trippers alike. A spacious new building, which doubled the amount of exhibition space available and meets contemporary needs, was completed in 2000. The museum also benefits from a restaurant with a terrace offering views of the countryside, as well as a shop.

A visit to this aural museum comprises an hour's guided tour of the permanent exhibition, during which visitors discover the fascinating world of mechanical music making; a number of the automatons are explained and made to play. The contents of the museum reflect a now-vanished world of music: the Salon Bleu room, for instance, shows how perfectly played piano music was reproduced in the upper-class drawing rooms of 1910 – performances by the best pianists of the day were captured on music rolls and played back on mechanical player-pianos. Also on show is a top-of-the-range music box, of which thousands were exported from Switzerland in the late 19th century to great acclaim. In the museum's ballroom, visitors can marvel at waltzes and tangos, played by great German, Belgian and Czech orchestras as our grandparents and great-grandparents knew them, while the museum's workshop reveals the inner workings of the automatons, the construction of which called for immense patience, precision and meticulousness.

One of the exhibits taking pride of place at the museum is the Welte Philharmonie organ: on display since autumn 2007, it was originally destined for the ocean liner SS Britannic, sister-ship of the Titanic. The Britannic organ can play the museum's 1500 or so music rolls containing interpretations captured during the early decades of the 20th century. Only around five Welte Philharmonie organs of this type remain playable, while the museum's collection of music rolls is the largest in existence. Since autumn 2008 visitors have also been able to admire the museum's latest attraction alongside the fairground organs in the lobby: a loud 1915 Mortier dance organ.



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The Seewen Museum of Music Automats also hosts special exhibitions on a regular basis. Recent years have witnessed exhibitions including "The Golden Age of the Jukebox – Music from Automats" featuring jukeboxes newly acquired by the collection; "Charlie and Friends – a Homage to Franz Oehrlein", a German automaton builder of the 20th century; and "Stella, Gloria and Edelweiss – Metal Disc Music from Switzerland", which turned its attention to the collection's disc music boxes. "Debussy live" was devoted to performances by the composer Claude Debussy captured on music rolls; and in 2018, the special exhibition "Melodic Gold – Glorious Masterpieces from the Collection of the Museum of Music Automats" brought yet another aspect of the museum's collection to the fore.

Talking of special exhibitions, 2019 marks a unique year: the museum is hosting a special exhibition celebrating its 40th anniversary: please refer to the separate press release regarding the anniversary exhibition "Automaton Music 4.0".

The Seewen Museum of Music Automats also acts as a platform for events of a cultural nature presented, in large part, in association with matinees of the Society of the Seewen Museum of Musical Automats (GMS) in a series of attractive programmes. Previous years have featured musicians and writers such as I Salonisti, Galina Vracheva, David Rumsey, Steppin' Stompers, Chris Conz, Frölein Da Capo, Geschwister Küng, Alex Capus and Roland Jeanneret.

Any visit to the museum to see the exhibits or attend a concert should include the museum's restaurant and outdoor terrace: the latter offers views of the countryside, while the former can cater for events of all sizes. The restaurant is perfect for drinks, a meal or refreshments (breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea) before or after a performance or tour.

The museum shop, meanwhile, stocks a wide range of sound-producing souvenirs, wonderful music boxes, exhibition brochures and specialist books, picture postcards and CDs.

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Further information on the Seewen Museum of Music Automatons, Canton Solothurn

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The entire museum is wheelchair accessible.

Opening hours: Tuesday - Sunday 11 am - 6 pm
Groups taking an exclusive tour may visit the museum outside the normal opening hours, i.e. before 11 am and between 6 pm and 8 pm.

The price of the tour of the permanent exhibition is included in the admission fee. The tour lasts 60 minutes and includes explanations and demonstrations of mechanical music automatons.

Guided tours:
Permanent exhibition 12.20 pm, 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm (60 minutes)
Britannic Organ 1.40 pm and 3.40 pm (20 minutes)

Concessions: families, school classes and groups, military personnel in uniform, AHV and IV recipients, apprentices or students. Free entrance to children under 6 years, ICOM members, holders of the Swiss Museum Pass or the Museums-PASS-Musées, members of the Association des Amis du Château de Prangins and members of the Society for the Museum of Music Automatons Seewen (GMS).

A bus stop is located directly in front of the Museum: "Seewen SO, Musikautomaten", the way from the "Seewen SO, Zelgli" bus stop is signposted with the museum being just a 10-minute walk away. Parking spaces for cars and coaches are available in front of the museum.

The museum shop with its wide range of products and souvenirs is open from Tuesday to Sunday from 12 pm to 5.30 pm.

The museum restaurant with its panorama deck has space for gatherings large and small. Inquiries and advance orders directly via phone + 41 (0)61 911 14 00.