

The history of mechanical music and music boxes

14th century	The history of mechanical music begins in Flanders. An ingenious bell ringer invents a cylinder with pins which operates cams, which then hit the bells.
1780	The mechanical singing bird is invented by the Jaquet-Droz brothers, clockmakers from La Chaux-de-Fonds. In 1848, the manufacture of the singing birds is perfected by Blaise Bontems in his Parisian workshop, to the point where it has remained unchanged to this day. Barrel organs become more popular.
1796	Antoine Favre, a clockmaker from Geneva, replaces the bells by combs with pre-tuned metallic notes, which produce more varied and more precise sounds. Numerous musical objects are produced.
1811	The first music boxes are produced in Sainte-Croix; an industry which surpasses the watch making and lace industries, and rapidly brings renown to the town. At this time, the music box industry represents 10% of Switzerland's exports.
1865	Charles Reuge, a watchmaker from the Val-de-Travers, settles in Sainte-Croix and begins making pocket watches with musical movements.
1870	A German inventor creates a music box with discs, therefore allowing an easier and more frequent change of tunes. It is also the golden years of automata. Already known from Egyptian times, they will be improved to become real works of art.
1877	Thomas Edison invents the phonograph, which has important consequences for the music box industry, especially around the end of the century.
Early 20th century	<p>The discovery of the phonograph, the First World War and the economic crisis in the 20's bring down Sainte-Croix's main industry and make the luxury music box completely disappear.</p> <p>Reuge, created in 1865 by Charles Reuge, manages to make it through the crisis, due to its various other activities. At the end of the war, the Americans discover "the little music" and make it famous in their country.</p>
1950	Arrival on the music box market of the Japanese. They rapidly become very productive. It is the biggest challenge for the Swiss manufacturers since the phonograph.
1960	About thirty of the music box manufacturers still exist. In fact, Swiss or foreign, they are more or less all confronted with the same reality: their industry is declining rapidly and their installations are growing old. Closing appears to be the only way out.
1985-1993	This period of time is marked by a consolidation of several companies.
Since 2004	Reuge holds the worldwide monopoly on the luxury music automatons, singing bird and musical pocket watch markets.