

Exhibition at the HMB – Museum of Music

Up Beat! Metronomes and Musical Time

In a new exhibition at the Museum of Music called *Up Beat! Metronomes and Musical Time*, the Historisches Museum Basel takes a closer look at the metronome, a seemingly humble musical aid that nevertheless made history and has had a formative influence on music for the past 200 years. This is the first time that the over 175 metronomes, musical chronometers and pulse-givers belonging to the London-based collection of Tony Bingham have been shown in public. Taking the subheading “Musical Time” as a cue, however, the exhibition will also venture beyond the metronome itself and will feature a display of conductors’ batons, “finger gyms” for budding pianists and much else besides. The exhibition is to run until 20 August 2017.

The launch of the metronome 200 years ago gave the world a mechanism that at last seemed to make musical time measurable. Henceforth, tempi could be defined exactly and composers no longer had to rely on relative terms like *adagio*, *andante* or *allegro*. The triumph of the metronome in composers’ studies, practice rooms, concert halls and later in recording studios changed people’s feel for musical time with lasting effect. Although first and foremost a means of setting certain tempi, the metronome was soon being used to drill young players and eventually became a strict timekeeper for music itself.

These are the stories that are told in this exhibition of over 175 metronomes, musical chronometers and pulse-givers from the 18th to the 20th century. The ingenious yet fascinatingly simple mechanism behind the metronome is explained, as is the impact and importance to us of rhythm, and the influence of physiological factors like pulse on our personal musical preferences. Visitors will be invited to take their own pulse and then try walking at the same pace on a treadmill; they will be able watch figure-skaters pirouetting and to listen to the same piece of music played at completely different speeds. A range of alternative pulse-givers in the form of the batons used by majorettes and conductors also forms part of the show. There is a section dedicated to musical compositions scored for the metronome as an instrument (including by György Ligeti and Mauricio Kagel) and an acoustic pendulum created by Lukas Rohner as a contemporary artist’s interpretation of the theme.

The exhibition will be flanked by a programme of concerts and talks staged in collaboration with the bird’s eye jazz club, the Hochschule für Musik, the Schweizerische Musikforschende Gesellschaft and the Sinfonieorchester Basel, as well as a blog in which well-known Baslers describe the role of the metronome and/or of rhythm generally in their lives.

A detailed and lavishly illustrated catalogue covering both the Tony Bingham Collection and the place of the metronome in its larger historical context has been published to coincide with the exhibition.

Exhibition venue: HMB - Museum of Music, Im Lohnhof 9, CH-4051 Basel

Exhibition dates: 20 January – 20 August 2017

Opening hours: Wed.–Sat. 2–6 pm, Sun. 11 am–5 pm; closed Mon. and Tue.
Closed: 6–8 March (Fasnacht), 14 April (Good Friday), 1 August (Swiss National Day)
Open: 25 May (Ascension Day) 11 am–5 pm

Press information: <http://hmb.ch/de/presse/medienmitteilungen.html>

For further information and photos:

Dr. Martin Kirnbauer, Director of the Museum of Music and exhibition curator,

Tel. +41 (0)61 264 91 62, martin.kirnbauer@bs.ch

Eliane Tschudin, Marketing & Communications, Tel. +41 (0)61 205 86 24, eliane.tschudin@bs.ch

Daniele Turini, Marketing & Communications, Tel. +41 (0)61 205 86 25, daniele.turini@bs.ch

www.hmb.ch