A Magnificent Musical Clock from Skärva

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In early December 2014, many of the contents of Skärva Manor, near Karlskrona in Blekinge, were dispersed. The property, which forms part of the Naval City of Karlskrona World Heritage Site, was sold in late 2013 to a German private citizen who did not wish to retain the original furnishings in situ.

Skärva Manor was built as a country house for the shipbuilder Fredrik Henrik af Chapman (1721–1808), who in 1785 had acquired parts of the village of Skärva. The main house, which has been described as a “cross between a palace and a hut”, 1 was completed in its original form in 1786. Initially conceived as a simple rural retreat, it gradually evolved, by means of alterations and extensions, into an unconventional manor house with clear elements of Neoclassicism, but also of vernacular architecture. Chapman was to divide his time between Karlskrona and Skärva until 1806, when he sold the house and its contents, two years before his death in 1808. The property had several different owners down to 1863, when it was acquired by the Wachtmeister family, who retained possession until the sale in 2013. Many of the furnishings from Chapman’s time were still in place when the house was sold.

The musical clock, or organ clock, now given to the Museum by the Friends of the Nationalmuseum had been in the large drawing room, the main reception room at Skärva, since at least 1793 (Fig. 1). 2 That year, Jonas Carl Linnerhielm, a civil servant, writer and artist, paid a visit to the house and described the clock, mentioning that its case was made “by Jung of Stockholm”. Pehr Ljung (1743–1819) was the leading Swedish wood carver of the day, with commissions from the court, and a member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Ljung and Chapman had previously collaborated on Gustav III’s schooner yacht Amphion, with Ljung carving the stern and figurehead and Chapman providing the drawings.

The term “musical clock” or “organ clock” is generally used for a musical mechanism built into a large longcase clock, where the sound is produced by a small pipe organ. 3 In the present example, and in several similar Swedish clocks from the Late Gustavian period, the organ pipes are controlled by a revolving, and in this case interchangeable, pinned cylinder, just as in a smaller musical box. The bellows that supply the pipes with air, like the clock and the cylinder, are driven by a weight. Musical clocks belong to a category referred to as self-playing, or automatic, musical instruments. The Nationalmuseum...
already had two clocks of this kind in its collections, one made in Berlin and presented by Frederick the Great of Prussia as a gift to his sister, Queen Lovisa Ulrika of Sweden (Fig. 2). The other was manufactured in Neuwied and has a case made by David Roentgen (Fig. 3). In their day, musical clocks were an innovation and, with their sumptuous cases, very much to be regarded as luxury items and status symbols.

As a rule, the making of a musical clock required the skills of four different craftsmen: an organ builder, a clockmaker, a cabinetmaker and a wood carver. The involvement of so many trades was a result of the guild regulations of the time. Linnerhielm’s description of the clock does not mention who made its inner workings, but probably two people were involved, one of whom was in all likelihood the organ builder Pehr (or Petter) Strand (1797–1844), the other, one of Stockholm’s many clockmakers. Given that Chapman’s musical clock was in place in the large drawing room at Skärva as early as 1793, it was presumably one of the very first Strand produced, made shortly after he had received his licence from the Board of Commerce in 1791.

The case of the 350 cm tall clock is High Gustavian, rather than Late Gustavian like most of the other organ clocks by Strand that survive. The plinth contains a cupboard holding the eight pinned cylinders with different tunes, on which Chapman himself noted whether he thought the piece was “good” or “the best”. Surmounting the clock is a cartouche with Chapman’s coat of arms, which he assumed when he was ennobled in 1772.

Although Strand was licensed by the Board of Commerce to make musical clocks, the guild rules meant that he was not allowed to work on the clock movement itself or the components driving both the clock and the musical mechanism. In all, some twenty organ clocks from his workshop have been preserved. There is much to suggest that Strand was apprenticed to the prominent musical-clock maker C. E. Kleemeyer of Berlin in the 1780s, although clocks were probably a sideline for Strand’s workshop in the Kungsholmen district of Stockholm, which primarily built church organs. Strand had previously trained with the court wood carver Ljung – who created the case of the clock now acquired – presumably so that he himself could decorate the organs that were his main source of income.

Notes:
2. The description that follows is based on Uppsala Auktionskammare’s catalogue information and Stina Odlinder Haubo’s text on the clock in the catalogue.
3. The technical description given in the following is based on Johan Norrbak and Jan Ling, “Flöjtturet och tiden”, in Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitetsakademiens årsbok 2013, pp. 37–61.