

Hungarian Revolutions



Hungary is not a country that automatically flashes up on the radar when in pursuit of fine watchmaking craft, though after spotting the Primus by fledgling brand, Bexei, at Baselworld this year, there is every reason why it should. The man responsible is Aaron Becsei, the Budapest based member of Académie Horlogere Des Créateurs Indépendants (AHCI), who is harbouring an unsung talent and a penchant for mechanics in miniature.

David Stone

In Aaron's case a career in horology was something of a foregone conclusion. Born in 1979, he is a third generation watchmaker, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, both of whom ran workshops in Budapest, offering specialist repairs and services.

The young protégé spent his formative years immersed in a watch collection built up in part thanks to the rag and bone trade that prospered amid the chaotic post-World War II ruins and continued to trickle through the city within the leniency of the prevailing 'Goulash Communism' of the 1960s, 70s and 80s. His father's interest in the unusual and unique side of horology goes some way to explaining Aaron's unconventional designs and the strikingly ornate decoration that has appeared on all three creations to date.

"Unfortunately there is no Hungarian watchmaking tradition" Aaron says when asked about his sources of inspiration. "But I have had opportunity to see several clock and watch museums. When I was in Vienna I realised that the timepieces made in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy are the last records we have as our own. As I liked the ornamentation on these empire style clocks, I use these in my works as a way of honouring Hungarian watchmaking".





The Miniature Zappler is a double pendulum clock that measures 35 mm tall with its glass dome. It uses a rolling escapement, jewel wheel system and has blued steel hands with silver tips.



Aaron Becsei in his workshop in Budapest.

Setting the wheels in motion

His training has been a thorough one; Becsei recalls his father and mentor insisted on the "strict requirements for perfect precision". Having graduated from the watchmakers programme at the Budapesti Szolgáltató -és Kézművesipari Szakképző School, he went on to the Donát Bánki Polytechnic, adding CAD/CAM skills to his watchmaking apprenticeship. It was during this latter stage in his education that Aaron began hatching plans for his first timepiece and in 2003 he finished his first clock.

The Miniature Double Pendule Zappler is a charming and distinct design. The clock is built upon a shield decorated with an intricately carved leaf patterns and flanked either side by a pair of gold fish. Two pendulums swing back and forth from the top section, with ruby encrusted suns attached as weights - the whole construction then sits on a similarly carved circular base. But what makes this handmade clock remarkable is not so much the detail as the proportions. The Miniature Zappler, complete with domed glass case, measures just 35 mm in height and 34 mm in diameter, while the movement is a mere 20 mm tall. All

together it stands a little bit taller than a 1 Euro coin.

From here the only realistic step was to grow and the next creation saw an increasing of dimensions and the development of a far more complicated movement. The Tourbillon I is a table clock that includes a calendar, moon-phase, wind-up indicator, thermometer and a world-time function, not to mention the duplex tourbillon escapement. The piece was an incredible achievement for the 23-year-old Becsei and one that was finished with all the assurance and confidence of youth.

The clock is given the appearance of an almost otherworldly esoteric instrument, with a decorative style that hovers somewhere between an Art Nouveau revival and a much less identifiable folk art - perhaps reminiscent of the Austro-Hungarian Vienna Secession movement of 1897 (the Vienna Secession was an anti-conservative art and architecture style that focused on organic flowing forms. Counted among its members were Rudolf von Alt, Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt). The detail is incredible; several subdials sit slightly raised above a mulch of gold leaves and flowers. Every aspect

is aglow with rich harmonious balance, despite the sprawling asymmetry of the carvings. The caseback is a large expanse of gold and further explosions of Becsei florid etched doodling. To one side he has included the world-timer and another moon-phase detail, this time featuring a disgruntled and melancholy moon opposite a much cheerier sun.

Becsei graduated in 2005 with a thesis propounding the ideas behind the duplex tourbillon escapement of the Tourbillon I; a paper that was honoured by the Chamber of Engineering in Budapest. He even exhibited the clock at that year's Baselworld, with the result that he was granted admission into the AHCI.

Next step

Back in Budapest his attention turned towards creating a wristwatch, however opportunities were scarce, as Becsei puts it, his "time was largely taken up by smaller repairs, restorations, creation of replacement parts". Commitments for the family business filling most his days, so it was that evenings and weekends were sacrificed (as well as a confluent ambition for a career in water polo), in order to work upon his watchmaking solutions. What followed seemed to be a furious two years of scribbled notes and piles of sketches, countless different components and experiments with various arrangements.

Finished days before Baselworld 2008, the Primus was easily worth all the meticulous effort and dedication. The triple axis tourbillon dominates a sizable portion of the dial, while the power reserve and the hours, minutes and seconds subdials take up an asymmetric order around the remaining space. The tourbillon itself makes use of the much older technique of jewel bearings, allowing it to do away with the need for standard ball bearings. "The usage of ball bearings", Aaron says, "is a forced solution that does not reflect the traditional way of watch engineering. I think mechanical



Tourbillon No. 1 features a duplex tourbillon escapement, calendar, moon phase, wind up indicator, world time function and a thermometer. It has a silver case and silver dial, with gold plated wheels and plates.





The Primus is a triple axial tourbillon with jewel bearings. The watch shows hours, minutes, seconds and power reserve.



watch systems should follow the traditional way e.g. avoid the special oiling necessary for the ball bearings".

The cage, which can be seen from the front and the back, is an engaging joy to watch. The inner section rotates at a speed of 30 seconds per revolution; the middle takes 2.5 minutes; while the outer cage takes 12.5 minutes. During those 12.5 minutes, as the system works through its permutations back around into its starting formation, the balance will take on a total of 3750 different positions.

Once again, Becsei adorns the dial with a design rich with floral motifs, although this time he uses the lighter tones of white gold, creating a much more subtle effect than with the early models. The colours are then balanced well with gold edges to the subdials and blued steel hands.

Due to the complexity of the Primus only nine will be made in total, but Aaron tells me he is already working on an alternative timepiece. " Soon I would like to present a new, beautiful and not so complicated wristwatch. I hope with a wider portfolio more watch enthusiasts will be able to wear a Bexei timepiece."

Further information: www.bexei.hu

