

Master's Legacy

Two contemporary watchmakers - George Daniels and François-Paul Journe - are considered worthy successors to Abraham-Louis Breguet's mantle of watchmaker *non-pareil*. Alan Downing discovers what connects the three great horologists in a pocket watch completed by Journe in 1986.

In the early 1980s, George Daniels, at the peak of his career, unwittingly gave François-Paul Journe the break all aspiring watchmakers dream of - the wealthy patron who discovers their genius and introduces them to a glittering circle of collectors, all waving blank cheques.

The man who discovered Journe was a dentist from Basel, Dr Eugène Gschwind. He was also one of the great horological collectors of the time, and had a grudge against George Daniels. Like most watch enthusiasts, Dr Gschwind desperately wanted a unique piece made just for himself, and Daniels - the only watchmaker worthy of a collector of his stature - had rebuffed him.

Stung, and determined to show he could do without Daniels, Dr Gschwind cultivated a young watchmaker, François-Paul Journe, who had just



(Above) François-Paul Journe's brand is accompanied by the motto 'Invenit et Fecit' - 'invented and made' - a philosophy upheld by Breguet throughout his prolific career, and a guarantee of creativity and craftsmanship.

The sixth creation of François-Paul Journe (opposite page) was an automatic pocket-watch chronometer, commissioned by one Dr Gschwind. The rock-crystal dial reveals the mechanism of the retrograde perpetual calendar with equation of time, inspired by the famous watch ordered for Marie-Antoinette from Abraham-Louis Breguet in 1783, completed in 1827 (left). Breguet's eponymous brand should complete its own faithful replica in 2008.



(Above) George Daniels at the press launch of the Co-Axial escapement at Omega HQ in Bienne, 1999. 'No. 1' of the first Omega Co-Axial limited edition is in Daniels' right hand, and in his left is his Space Traveller's Watch from 1983, which started the Co-Axial project. (Photo: Timothy Treffry)

opened his own workshop in Paris. The Swiss dentist flatteringly bought Journe's first watch - a tourbillon pocket watch in the Breguet style. Journe had been encouraged to make it by Cecil Clutton, Daniels' friend and patron. In those days, serious horological collectors (there were about 10 in the world) did not consider wristwatches made by brands as proper watchmaking.

Although Journe's first effort, begun when he was 20, was crude compared to Daniels' exquisitely engineered and crafted pocket watches, Dr Gschwind saw promise in his work and decided to test him further. The result - Journe's sixth watch, completed for Dr Gschwind in 1986 - set out to prove that Journe could be mentioned in the same breath as Abraham-Louis Breguet and to satisfy his client that here was indeed a rival to Daniels.

It is an obvious remake of Breguet's most famous and most complicated creation - the Marie-Antoinette watch (No. 160; see Issue 18). It has all the horological functions of the Marie-

Antoinette minus the minute-repeater: *perpetuelle* winding, retrograde perpetual calendar, equation of time and power-reserve indicator. Instead of Breguet's rather clumsy escapement in watch No. 160, Journe's watch has a chronometer detent escapement with a five-second remontoir delivering constant energy from a going-train, which is further equalised by a fusée-and-chain mechanism.

Even though Journe added a moonphase to his perpetual calendar at 8 o'clock, and relegated time indication to a subdial at 12 o'clock, he made the resemblance to the Marie-Antoinette watch clear, proclaiming his allegiance to Breguet in no uncertain terms. His watch has a similar rock-crystal dial painted with white numerals, revealing needle hands and the complex under-dial mechanisms.

Breguet's ghost

Breguet, Daniels and Journe have one gift in common. To them, mechanics is a natural language, expressive of the innermost workings of the mind. A glance at any machinery tells them how it works. Both Daniels and Journe had the opportunity to develop an intimate relationship with Breguet through an in-depth study of his work. Daniels is the only watchmaker to have made a systematic mechanical study, gaining access to the major Breguet collections - notably the Sir David Salomons collection (the majority of which was stolen from the LA Mayer museum in Jerusalem, including the Marie-Antoinette), the Royal Collection



(Above) Journe's sixth pocket watch uses a fusée and chain to equalise the torque fed into the gear train by the mainspring as it unwinds. A chain of tiny, handmade links (just visible here, round the circumference of the barrel) uncoils from a stepped cone, graduating the leverage. Dr Gschwind's commission also houses a five-second remontoir and a detent escapement.



(Far left and left) As well as commissioning Journe's Marie-Antoinette watch, Dr Gschwind bought Journe's first watch - a tourbillon pocket watch that is now back in the hands of its maker. Inspired by the tourbillons that Journe was working on in his uncle's antique restoration workshop in Paris, it consumed all his spare time for five years from 1978.

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as well as those of the Worshipful Company of Watchmakers, the British Museum and of private collectors including Cecil Clutton and Thomas Engel. As a restorer in Paris, Journe had similar access to the French collections of Breguet.

In my view, both have a gift of understanding the language of mechanics and Breguet 'spoke' to them through his work. Daniels even mentions sensing the presence of Breguet when working on one of his watches. Both strive to emulate Breguet's mechanical elegance and both put precision timekeeping at the heart of their watchmaking. Daniels, however, has concentrated on developing the escapement while Journe's interests, like Breguet's, range wider into the development of complications (see *QP's* in-depth review of the *Sonnerie Souveraine*, Issue 18). Another contrast is that Daniels is the most consummate and multi-skilled craftsman, capable of making the finest cases, hands and dials, as well as movements. Breguet was an indifferent workman but employed the best in Europe. Like him, Journe is an original designer working with his customers in mind.

The watch commissioned by Dr Gschwind to get back at Daniels established Journe among the blank-cheque clientele. But it was the end of an era. The collectors who commissioned unique exercises in classical horology from a watchmaker were dwindling, with the money gravitating towards wristwatches made by brands.

Breguet's shoes

Dr Gschwind died in 1992. His fabulous collection of 16th and 17th century watches and clocks was dispersed to the leading horological museums, and forms the core of the International Watch Museum in La Chaux-de-Fonds. He returned Journe's first watch to its maker, who keeps it still, while the Journe 'Marie-Antoinette' has gone to an American collection.

Who, then, is the worthiest successor to the French master of horology? Daniels, on the one hand, is a pure and a complete watchmaker who has made his watches entirely by himself. His ambitions did not give him the scope of Breguet but his work is more focused as a result, bringing him recognition as the leading horologist of the 20th century, and also 20 years of frustration trying to sell his Co-Axial escapement to the Swiss watch industry. He is now 80 and signs a few wristwatches based on the Omega Co-Axial *ébauche*, made in his workshops by his pupil, Roger Smith. Throughout his career, though, he has made some 30 pieces entirely from the raw materials - each one different. He revived interest in proper mechanical watchmaking and has been generous with his knowledge.

Journe on the other hand, like Breguet, understands and seizes market opportunities and has established the best watchmaking resources to produce his work. If he can make a contribution to mechanical horology as useful as Daniels' Co-Axial escapement, he deserves to step into Abraham-Louis Breguet's shoes. ◯

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