

# ADRIAN ALAN

*Fine Art & Antiques*



**Robert Richard**

## **A Very Rare Louis XVI Period Serinette or Bird Organ Music Box**

Circa: Circa 1775

21 x 34 x 24 cm (8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches)

Marquetry

France

1775

With a label for ' RICHARD - maitre facteur d'orgues et mécanicien / Rue de richelieu à la bibliothèque Du Roy / Paris 1775'.

A Very Rare Louis XVI Period Serinette or Bird Organ In The Form Of A Transitional Style Gilt-Bronze Mounted and Marquetry Inlaid Miniature Commode In The Manner of Gilbert, By Robert Richard, Paris.

This rare Serinette or Bird Organ has a wooden cylinder barrel mounted by twelve pins and linked to twelve sound pipes. A crank attached to the front panel controls the bellows that activates the mechanism.

The exceptional marquetry inlaid case is in the form of a gilt-bronze mounted transitional style miniature commode. The top of the commode is inlaid with a landscape scene with buildings, opening to an interior with an allegory of Love Conquering All, represented by two doves perching on a bow and quiver. The front of the commode depicts two obelisks centred by a fine musical trophy and each side is inlaid with panels depicting the Medici Vase. The back of the commode is decorated with floral marquetry.

A closely related Serinette dating from circa 1770, also in the form of a miniature commode, with the marquetry case stamped by the master marqueteur Leonard Boudin, is in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Museum No. 629-1868).

The term serinette is derived from serine, French for finch. The instrument worked like a small barrel organ with a barbed cylinder, wind box and lead pipes and produced a high, thin sound in imitation of birds. Other versions included a merline, which copied blackbirds and a turlutaine, which copied curlews. Used to teach caged birds to sing tunes, different barrels could be inserted to train different birds. It first appeared in France around 1730 and became a popular drawing-room toy for fashionable women. An interesting painting commissioned in 1751 for Louis XV by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin

and now in the collection of the Louvre, depicts a refined lady seated in her salon playing a bird organ to encourage her bird to sing.

**Literature:**

Pierre Kjellberg, *The French Furniture of the XVIII th Century*, The Editions of the Amateur, 2008.

Count Francois de Salverte, *Cabinetmakers of the eighteenth century*, Editions of Art and History, 1934.

Raymond Russell, Victoria and Albert Museum *Catalogue of Musical Instruments*, Volume I - Keyboard Instruments,(London, 1968; p. 69.

Elizabeth Miller and Hilary Young, eds., *The Arts of Living. Europe 1600-1815*, V&A Publishing, 2015; illustrated p. 169.

**Artist description:**

Robert Richard was a Parisian organ and harpsichord maker and the mécanicien du roi to Louis XV and Louis XVI and was based in the Bibliothèque du Roi in rue de Richelieu.

Initially working alongside the Cliquot family who acted as 'facteur d'orgue du Roi', he is recorded as building an organ for the church of Notre-Dame de Quebec, in Montreal in 1753 (destroyed in 1759) and as the inventor of a mechanical concert shown in an engraving by d'Eisen in 1769.

Canon Jean Marie De La Corne described Robert Richard as : "Le plus habile ouvrier de paris, fameux mechanicien et homme de probité".