

Thierry Brandt



## A tweet-tweet that has no price

**2**013 is certainly the year of the songbird! After The Charming Bird of Jaquet Droz, the first mechanical bird enclosed in a wristwatch, we present Babylone and Intemporis, two symbols of the Renaissance by the Frères Rochat, another mythical house which has its roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

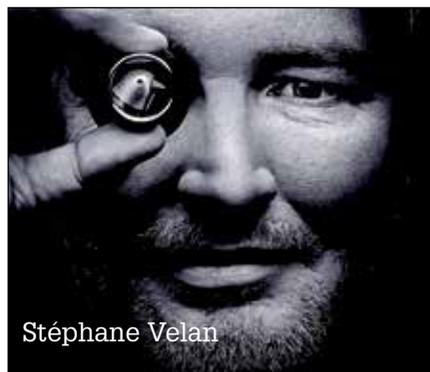
This renaissance, which is not a Rochat from the Vallée de Joux, but a former private banker, Stéphane Velan, who gathered around him investors from the same background before embarking on this slightly crazy adventure. Because who today, if not a squad of fortunate enthusiasts, would have had the idea to commit a handful of millions to revive these snuff boxes and their songbirds?

"It's true that we took financial risks. It's a disproportionate project, a real entrepreneurial challenge. For my part, I dedicated myself entirely for months and months. For someone who didn't have any watch-making background, I had to quickly immerse myself in the middle to understand the ins and outs. And I admit that this was not easy every day. But I also received so much in return and met many exciting personalities. It was a kind of revelation," says Stéphane Velan.

In this story, money isn't everything. Because it meant designing everything from a blank slate. Nothing remains of the automata of

David Randall and his three sons, Samuel, Frédérick, and François. More precisely: if some of their fabulous objects are preserved in museums, the plans and construction plans are non-existent. Their expertise is lost over the centuries. So, it meant searching for the skills necessary to complete the project. Naturally, these skills exist in Switzerland, a country of fine watchmaking and precision mechanics. But could they be convinced of the relevance of it?

The answer is "yes" because after four years of work in the shadows, the first of these new Frères Rochat songbirds were presented at BaselWorld and they move their wings, turn their heads, and are even able to «sing» a few notes of a Mozart symphony. In pure moments of mechanical poetry that went so far as to cause tears of emotion and frantic applause among some visitors.



Stéphane Velan

The movement, completely unique and 100% Swiss made, is not strictly watchmaking since it doesn't give the time. But it inspires. It contains 1,227 components, distributed in four main subsets: the cylinder-fused energy dispensing mechanism, the gear and lever systems operating the bellows and the whistle, the set of 14 camshafts that coordinate the entire mechanical ballet, and the part housed in the body of the bird. All built and completed according to the criteria of fine watchmaking, customisable according to the desires of each client, in gold, silver, with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and so on...

The technical challenge was therefore successful for Stéphane Velan and his team of Musketeers. Commercially, it's another story. It remains to be seen if, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are collectors and enthusiasts rich enough to afford, or offer, this kind of fantasy. The coming months will tell.