

Introduction

Background

The term “music box” no longer applies only to square or rectangular containers that play a tune when wound. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the original model of what was to become a music box was designed as a pocket watch. These are believed to have been created in Switzerland, one of the best-known watchmaking countries, in the late eighteenth century. From pocket watches, they evolved into the traditional box shape that held the music-producing mechanism. However, they were much larger than those that are more familiar to today’s consumers.

These early music boxes were actually the preferred household instrument for roughly one hundred years. The songs were stored on cylinders with physical markers that interacted with the rest of the mechanism to produce the music, and the users could swap out the cylinders with others to change the song. When the cylinders became too much for the average person to change frequently and storage needs took precedence, they were replaced by flat, round discs that functioned similarly. The phonograph eventually outshined these music machines in the early twentieth century.

Today, as stated above, what is considered a music box has expanded greatly. There are smaller versions of the traditional boxes, jewelry boxes for girls and women that play music when they are opened, and jack-in-the-box toys for children, to name a few. The average size of music boxes has also shrunk back in the direction of the original pocket watches. Due to the varied nature of the items discussed and described here, there was some thought that a less specific name than music boxes may be beneficial. However, most of the alternatives weren’t inclusive enough to satisfy. They allowed items such as a Dancing Santa toy that operated by way of electronic circuits at the push of a button rather than a mechanical operation. Therefore, the name for the items in this schema will remain “music boxes.”

Purpose and Scope

The purpose behind this descriptive schema is to provide some structure in cataloging various types of music boxes. This will display the wide variety of options that exist, assist users in finding what they are looking for, and promote targeted browsing. The users particularly considered during the construction of the schema are collectors looking to add to their shelves or display cases. It will also be useful to those looking to give a music box as a gift.

Most of the schema attributes focus on the physical aspects of the items because those will be the most helpful to collectors. However, a couple of the attributes are concerned with when they were made or whether they have a purpose beyond being musical. While about half of them are marked as required, only the first attribute possesses the ability to disqualify an item. The remaining required attributes are labeled so as being essential to the descriptive cataloging process. The attributes that are not required are also helpful to the process but may not apply to every item.

Attributes

1. Musical Mechanism (R)

Definition: The object must emit a musical tune by way of a mechanically operated structure. It cannot operate electronically with the push of a button.

Format: Must include one or more of the possible entries listed below, or have a similar mechanical description.

Entries:

- Wound by a key
- Handle that must be cranked
- Clockwork driven
- Music is triggered by opening of a lid or other piece of the item

2. Shape (R)

Definition: A short, general description of the object's appearance. It does not have to be identifiable as a box, or even have a storage space included.

Comment: This will vary depending upon the object. Some may have a simple geometric shape, while others will be modeled after much larger objects and require more description.

Examples:

- Square box
- Water/Snow globe
- Oval box
- Piano
- Four-horse carousel

3. Decorative Theme (R)

Definition: The most identifiable aspect, or motif of the object's appearance.

Comment: This will also vary greatly from object to object, but it should be quite obvious just looking at it and analyzing the overall design.

Format: This does not have to be summarized in one or two words. Multiple entries are also possible.

Examples:

- Autumn
- Ballet
- Shades of green
- Family/New baby
- Christmas

4. Style (NR)

Definition: Similar to theme, any notable craftsmanship design the item has.

Comment: This can refer to an era-related style, or a design associated with a certain culture, etc. Certain entries may also function as a theme, and therefore should not be included a second time.

Format: Multiply entries are possible.

Examples:

- Modern
- Antique or Vintage
- Oriental
- Russian

5. Tune (NR)

Definition: The name or title of the piece of music that is played by the object, if known or somehow identifiable. This also includes musical notes played by the chiming of a clock.

Format: Properly capitalize all titles.

Examples:

- Rock-a-Bye Baby
- Edelweiss
- Pop Goes the Weasel
- You Light Up My Life
- What A Wonderful World

6. Purpose (NR)

Definition: Any additional function the item may perform aside from making music.

Format: Multiple entries are possible.

Examples:

- Decorative
- Jewelry box
- Non-specific storage
- Children's toy
- Clock

7. Other Moving Parts (NR)

Definition: Extraneous moving parts that are not necessary to producing the music but add to the overall appearance or function of the item.

Comment: Multiple entries are possible.

Examples:

- Revolving horses on a carousel
- Revolving figurine(s)
- Extra drawer(s)
- Clown or other character that bursts out of the item

8. Option to Personalize (NR)

Definition: Characteristics or features that can be changed or added to personalize the object in some way. Usually decorative in nature.

Examples:

- Space for engraving
- Built in picture frame
- Specially requested tune or song that it plays

9. Condition (R)

Definition: A short description of the object's condition.

Comment: This is intended to give the purchaser a general idea of what to expect.

Format: Multiple entries are possible.

Examples:

- New
- Used
- Gently used
- Slight cosmetic damage
- Some damage
- No cosmetic damage, functional issues

10. Country of Origin (R)

Definition: The name of the country that produced the item.

Comment: If unknown, label it that way.

Format: The country name must be spelled out. Abbreviations are not allowed.

Examples:

- United States
- Greece
- Ireland

11. Production Date (R)

Definition: The date, or date range in which the item was produced.

Format: Will depend on the information available. Use as much detail as possible. See examples below:

- Month (written out) Year (yyyy)
- Year (yyyy)
- Rough estimate (c. yyyy)

12. Price Category (R)

Definition: The specified price range for the item of the choices below. Rough estimates are allowed.

Format: The entry will be a certain number of dollar signs based on the specific amount. Categories are listed below:

- \$ equals between 0 and 50 dollars
- \$\$ equals between 50 and 100 dollars
- \$\$\$ equals between 100 and 250 dollars
- \$\$\$\$ equals between 250 and 350 dollars
- \$\$\$\$\$ equals more than 350 dollars

Instances

Attribute	Instance 1
Musical Mechanism	Wound by a key
Shape	Snow Globe, Castle
Decorative Theme	Disney's Beauty and the Beast
Tune	Beauty and the Beast
Purpose	Decorative, Children's Toy
Condition	Used, Some damage
Country of Origin	United States
Production Date	c. 1991
Price Category	\$\$\$

Attribute	Instance 2
Musical Mechanism	Triggered by opening the lid
Shape	Rectangular box
Decorative Theme	Rustic Wood
Style	Vintage
Tune	I Can Only Imagine
Purpose	Decorative, Non-specific storage
Option to Personalize	Built-in picture frame
Condition	New
Country of Origin	United States
Production Date	2017
Price Category	\$

Attribute	Instance 3
Musical Mechanism	Triggered by opening the lid
Shape	Rectangular box
Decorative Theme	Ballet
Style	Modern
Tune	Sugar Plum Fairy
Purpose	Decorative, Jewelry box
Other Moving Parts	Revolving ballerina figurine
Condition	Gently used
Country of Origin	United States
Production Date	2015
Price Category	\$

Attribute	Instance 4
Musical Mechanism	Clockwork driven, Wound by a key
Shape	Mantle clock
Decorative Theme	High class from another era
Style	Victorian
Tune	Westminster chimes
Purpose	Decorative, Clock
Condition	New
Country of Origin	United States
Production Date	2002-2020
Price Category	\$\$\$\$\$

Attribute	Instance 5
Musical Mechanism	Wound by a key
Shape	Dragonfly on a sunflower
Decorative Theme	Springtime, Nature
Tune	Waltz of the Flowers
Purpose	Decorative
Condition	New
Country of Origin	United States
Production Date	2021
Price Category	\$\$

Reflection

I was initially interested in this schema because I like music boxes. I had two Disney-themed music boxes growing up, one of which I still have and described as one of the instances above. As I thought about the music boxes I had seen over the years, in person or the media, I believed it was conceivable to design a schema that described the various types and designs. The introduction of this schema discusses the term 'music boxes' and the fact that it seems very narrow. It became clear that many of the items I wanted to include in the schema could not be defined as a box by any conventional means. So, I had to ensure that my attributes were inclusive enough to capture mantle clocks or a jack-in-the-box.

For better or worse, the only schema I referenced in designing my own was the provided sample document to have a baseline for formatting, etc. Creating the first handful of attributes was relatively easy because they were the most obvious; they were the kind of things I would immediately inquire about one of the items. After that, I had to think more critically about what potential collectors would want to know about them. Browsing a few resale-based sites helped give me a better idea of some other attributes I could include. It was also important to make sure that I was not excluding potential items that I wanted to encompass. To address this, I ensured that the attributes that would not apply to every object were marked as not being required. Interestingly, while I was typing a definition or a set of examples for one attribute, I would think of a refinement that I needed to make on another. Or I would suddenly skip down to start work on an entirely new attribute as another thought occurred to me. Basically, I thought this would be a very orderly process, but I found myself constantly bouncing around the various parts of the schema.

When I performed the initial test on my schema, I used the music box that I mentioned earlier that I have and the schema functioned well enough, but I was still able to make some improvements. Because I have had this object since I was very young, it has sustained some damage over the years, but it still plays beautiful music. This caused me to add the attribute entitled Condition and the examples listed for such cases to estimate the item's quality.

As I created each of the five instances detailed above, I made more refinements to my formatting, the definitions, and the examples I provided. Most notably, I had to make several changes to the pricing brackets that I created. I wasn't aware of just how expensive that various forms of music boxes could be. Another change was adding the Style attribute in addition to Theme. The two sound a little too similar, but the addition allows for the possibility to include more information, so I tried to write their definitions clearly, stated their close connection, and classified style as an attribute that was not required, unlike Theme.

One of the challenges I faced was early on in the project. I wasn't sure that I understood exactly how this was supposed to work, so my initial brainstorming of attributes did not get very far. It wasn't until I found out about the sample schema posted online that I really got a handle on how the attributes were supposed to function. Additionally, I wanted to include clear parameters on what could not be included in the schema, but that did not prove easy. The only disqualifying trait that really mattered to me was defined in the first attribute. That attribute is

Musical Mechanism, and in the definition, I included not only what it meant but what it did not mean. An object that produces music using electrical circuits or is operated simply by pushing a button should not be included.

I am quite satisfied with the final product. The schema has a decent number of required attributes, which will ensure that every object has at least a basic description, and even that will be sufficiently detailed. The remaining attributes will add to the description, of course, and are quite comprehensive of the various types of music boxes on the market and their potential features. Some may dispute my inclusion of the mantle clocks in the schema because many play much more simplistic music using chimes that have a smaller range of possible notes than traditional music boxes. I chose to include them because they shared the necessary attributes and because I feel that they have the same sense of being a part of a time when more people cared about small mechanical trinkets that could decorate their home.

If I do something like this again, I would prefer to start with a sample range of the possible items in front of me to serve as the initial source for the list of attributes. This sounds more appealing than trying to pull them out of the air with a less defined idea of the intended subject as I did this time. I also think that simply completing this schema, regardless of the quality of the final product, has helped prepare me for future encounters with similar concepts.

References

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2016, April 25). Music box. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/art/music-box>