

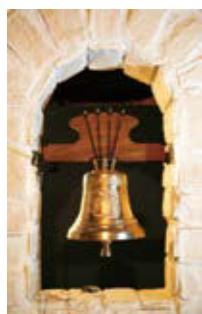


Kevin Bonnaud is hiEurope's France correspondent. He reports on new and unknown places for you to discover.

Ringing Easter Bells

文 /Kevin Bonnaud 图 /Yannick Perrin

In France, bells, not bunnies, deliver chocolate eggs on Easter Sunday. And thanks to the craft of the Paccard Foundry, these bells sound as beautiful as a musical instrument.



Going to Paccard's Foundry and Museum on Easter Monday is quite an experience. Music enthusiasts are charmed as they hear soprano vocalist Anne Paccard performing sacred, classical and modern French songs accompanied by the museum's 20-bell carillon. "As a musician, I find it very interesting to play with such a singular harmonic instrument. It has warm and beautiful tones because of the perfectly tuned bells. It's remarkable for an instrument made of metal," Anne Paccard, also director of the museum, told hiEurope.

Unique Music

The extraordinary sound of these carillon bells comes from a meticulous tuning technique. In the factory, founders use a tuning fork and a 4-teeth instrument to remove metallic pieces, refining the bell's shape to make its tone as perfect as possible without changing the note. "The



tuner must find a balance between the note of the bell, its harmonic notes and multiple intervals. This perilous exercise can last several days as each bell reacts differently," says James Corbex, the museum's officer.

Because of this very rare expertise, the foundry makes bells for prestigious philharmonic orchestras throughout the world, starting with the percussionists of the Paris National Orchestra. No wonder the foundry's nickname is 'Stradivarius Bell'.

The workshop next to the museum is full of bell molds stored on shelves, golden bells on wooden bases ready to be dispatched, furnaces and cranes to lift the heavy bells. One worker is preparing a mixture of clay and crushed brick, another one is gently unmolding a bell with a hammer as if peeling an egg.

This gives visitors some clues about the traditional process which starts with the molding. "Any bell is made of three molding elements nested together. There's an empty core made of sand and cement, a fake bell with beeswax molds for decorations and inscriptions and the exterior shell made of twenty layers of clay", James Corbex explains to hiEurope. When the molds are heated, the clay dries and the wax melts. Then comes the spectacular volcano-like 1200°C fusion tourists can admire in real time, when a mixture of copper and tin is poured into the mold through a steel frame. In the end, founders unmold the bell, clean it with a high-pressure sand-blast and polish it with grinding and metal belts.

Around 450 build-to-order bronze bells are produced here every year. Most of them are exported all over the world, including China. "We recently made a 49-bell carillon to be set up in Chongqing City Central Park", Anne Paccard told hiEurope.

World Records

The story here began in 1796 when Antoine Paccard, mayor of the neighboring small town of Quintal, volunteered to help with the casting of the first bell. He must have liked the



job, because once the bell was finished, and Paccard had completed an apprenticeship, he began the Paccard bell casting legacy by opening the first bell foundry right in Quintal. Paccard's craft was passed down the generations, and

in the end, the foundry became world famous for the construction of monumental bells for churches and public squares, breaking a series of world records. The 33-tonne' World Peace Bell in Newport, Kentucky is the world's biggest swinging bell, for instance. "The three bells of 6, 10 and 19 tonnes for Markham's Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Toronto, Canada hold the record of the world's weightiest ring," Anne Paccard adds. Other prestigious projects include Chambery's 70-bell carillon, which is Europe's largest, and France's largest bell known as La Savoyarde, located in the Sacré-Coeur Basilica in Montmartre, Paris. This 19-ton bell, transported by thirty horses in 1895 was the official contribution of the former Duchy of Savoy, 35 years after it became part of France.



Chocolate Bells

Flagship of the region, the iconic bell of France has inspired a pastry chef from Annecy's pastry and chocolate shop Au Fidèle Berger to create a chocolate treat known as Annecy Bells. "It's a 20-g white or dark chocolate delicacy filled with hazelnut ganache and Grand Marnier scents", says Laurent Baud, the pastry chef of the bakery. Annecy Bells are sold all year long, though chocolate addicts may want to wait for the Easter season when the chocolate Annecy Bells are extra big.



www.paccard.com