

John Maelzel, Master Showman of Automata and Panoramas

JOHN NEPOMUK MAELZEL, the son of an ingenious mechanician and organ builder, was born on August 15, 1772, in Regensburg, Bavaria. Thoroughly trained in the theory and practice of music, he became the best pianist in Regensburg at the age of fourteen. After teaching music for a few years, he moved to Vienna in 1792, where he occupied himself not only in scientific and mathematical studies, but with mechanical experiments on musical instruments, a field which had become promising after musical clocks were introduced in the eighteenth century.¹

Maelzel invented an orchestral automaton that was composed of all the pieces of an entire military band and for which Albert, Duke of Saxe-Teschen, paid 3,000 florins in 1803. In 1806 another instrument of the same kind, with clarinets, violins, violas and violoncello added, was also completed by Maelzel. This instrument was enclosed in a large cabinet case and played compositions by Mozart, Haydn, Cherubini, Crescentini, and others. It was exhibited with much success locally, and was later taken to Paris where it was christened the "panharmonicon." It received tremendous popularity in Europe, and later toured America where people gladly paid one dollar to hear it perform.²

In 1808 Maelzel produced another invention — an automaton Trumpeter. The Trumpeter was life-size, with lifelike movements, and was dressed in national costumes that could be quickly changed

¹ *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1888), IV, 171-172; *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York, 1955), V, 500-501; *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig, 1884), XX, 157-158.

² *London Times*, June 2, 1814; *New York Post*, Oct. 15, 1811; *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* (Boston) (February, 1837), this issue hereinafter cited simply as *American Magazine*; Conrad W. Cooke, "Automata Old and New," *Sette of Odd Volumes* (London, 1893), No. 29, 80, New York Public Library; *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, V, 500.

to represent different countries. It was a complicated mechanism producing purity of sound and clarity of articulation, all in perfect time. In his exhibitions, Maelzel would lead the Trumpeter, attired in the full regimentals of an Austrian dragoon, out of a tent. When Maelzel "pressed the left epaulet of the figure," it sounded Austrian cavalry calls, and played "a march and an allegro by Weige, which was accompanied by a full band of living musicians. The figure then retired" and quickly reappeared dressed in the French Guard uniform. It was wound up again on the left thigh, and another touch on the shoulder brought from the Trumpeter "all the French cavalry calls, the French cavalry march, by Dussek, and one of Pleyel's allegros, again accompanied by the orchestra." The Trumpeter and panharmonicon were so popular and so impressed the Austrian Emperor that Maelzel won the title of Court Mechanician, and as such he continued his inventive work in the Schönbrunn royal palace. Other honors also came to him. A gold medal carved by Loos and presented to him by the King of Prussia, for example, was cherished by Maelzel throughout his life.³

The Bavarian mechanician made friends with the leading composers of his time, especially with the almost deaf Ludwig van Beethoven, for whom he made ear trumpets, and with whom he co-operated in composing some military music. Soon Maelzel began working on the century-old problem of the chronometer, a device for measuring the rapidity and duration of time in musical compositions, which was also helpful in his own musical automata and in the music for his later panoramas. His metronome improvements were a universal contribution to the field of music.⁴

Maelzel, who had been in Moscow in the epic days of October, 1812, conceived the idea of a really beautiful and striking exhibition, the Conflagration of Moscow. Before the end of 1813, while his memories were yet fresh, he completed this war spectacle and opened its exhibition in Vienna where it was well received. The spectacle pre-

³ *Saroni's Musical Times* (N. Y.) (Apr. 24, 1852); Daniel W. Fiske, ed., *The Book of the First American Chess Congress* (New York, 1859), 474, 475.

⁴ Alexander W. Thayer, *The Life of Ludwig van Beethoven* (New York, 1925), II, 384-387; Rosamond E. M. Harding, *Origins of Musical Time and Expression* (London, 1938), 22-28; Clarence G. Hamilton, "The History and Uses of the Metronome," *The Etude* (June, 1911); *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (London), III (1821), 302-305; Anton Schindler, *The Life of Beethoven* (Boston, 1870), 358.

sented a view from the Kremlin of the burning city of Moscow at the moment when the Russians were evacuating the city and the French army led by Napoleon was entering. The vanguard with its artillery headed the French columns and was followed by a regiment of *voltigeurs*, the Imperial footguard, and regiments of flying artillery with their ammunition and baggage wagons. Regiments of cuirassiers were among the other units shown.⁵

The Moscow panorama was not a separate show in itself, but rather a climactic conclusion to other exhibits. It combined in one production the arts of mechanism, music, and painting, all of which Maelzel was interested in during its invention. He had opened his Art Cabinet in Vienna, exhibiting there a collection of the pictorial arts, as well as sculpture and mechanisms: "There were marbles, bronzes and paintings and a variety of contributions, scientific or curious, from various artists." Among these were his own Trumpeter, playing French cavalry marches, signals, and melodies which Maelzel himself accompanied on the pianoforte, and the encased panharmonicon, with its grouped instruments of the common band, now functioning automatically by means of powerful bellows, the keys being touched by pins on revolving cylinders, as in the later hand organs or music boxes.⁶

Maelzel did not confine his exhibitions to Vienna, but traveled about Europe displaying his Trumpeter and other mechanical works. In 1817, he turned his attention to the famous mechanical Chess Player which he had acquired earlier. The Chess Player, invented by Baron Wolfgang Ritten von Kempelen in 1769, had long astonished and delighted the whole of Europe.⁷ Kempelen had refused to explain publicly the *modus operandi* of his automaton, and stated only "that the machine was a *bagatelle*, which was not without merit in point of mechanism, but the effects of it appeared so marvellous only from the boldness of the conception, and the fortunate choice of the methods adopted for promoting the illusion." Nothing had been overlooked to conceal its secret workings. The visible movements of the figure, suggesting a directing force or human

⁵ *Ariel* (Phila.) (Nov. 26, 1831); Thayer, II, 251-252, 255; Playbill of Maelzel's exhibition, Phila., 1834, Library Company of Philadelphia (Lib. Co. of Phila.)

⁶ Thayer, II, 251.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 252; *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, V, 500-501.

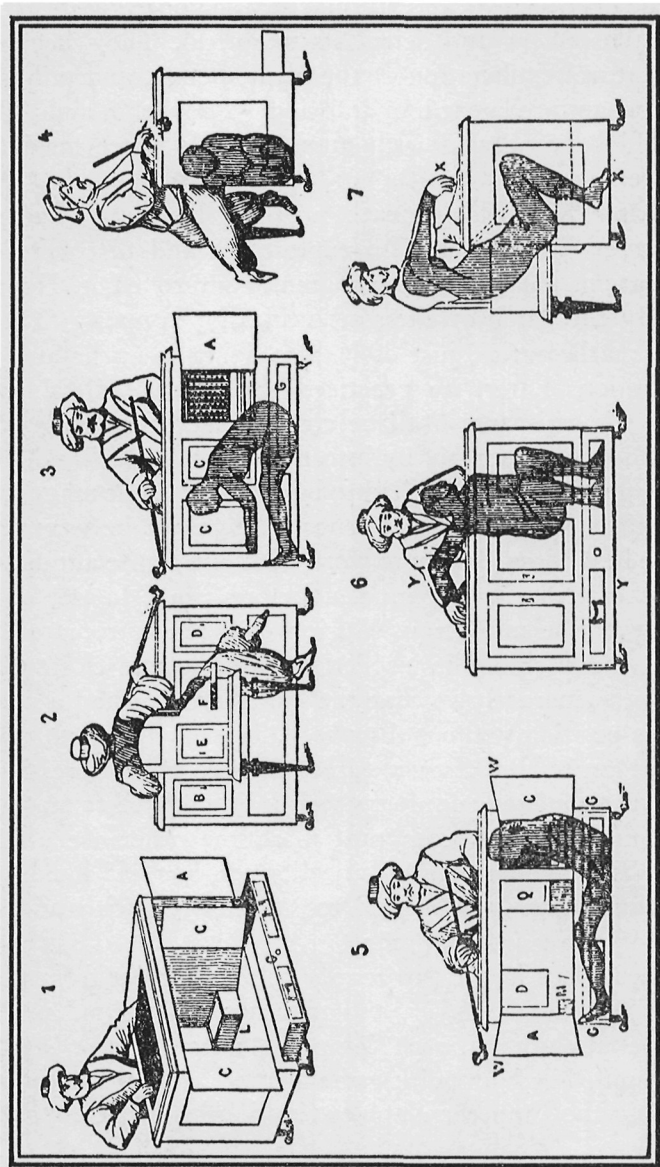
intelligence in the mechanism, was a popular sensation in the Old World, but the deep secrecy and the mystery surrounding its exhibition made philosophers and scientists skeptical. They began to search for a natural explanation of the phenomenon, and published accounts of how an intelligent human being—a boy, thin and tall, or a dwarf—could be concealed with maneuverable space inside the chest or figure.⁸

Not long after Kempelen's death in 1804, his family had sold the Chess Player to Maelzel, who explored it and discovered its mode of operation. He repaired and greatly improved it. Next he began to study the game of chess scientifically, applying to it his knowledge of mathematics, just as he was doing in music and mechanical invention. Later, he practiced the game endlessly with amateurs and his assistants until he could survey the whole scene at a glance and move instantly by intuition, rather than by deliberately thinking out each play. He had to be a master of the maneuvers, not just a pastime player. To ensure successful games, he secured the services of the best chess players to work with him in the automaton. Being no less careful than Kempelen before him, Maelzel undertook to maintain the mysterious illusion of a real automaton. He displayed the chest for public inspection, opening and closing each of its four doors separately so that the hidden player had a chance to readjust his position without discovery. The machine was wound up frequently, especially after a game, to give the impression of mechanical causation, and running wheels inside tended to mask any unavoidable human movements that might be otherwise audible. The movements of the automaton's head, eyes, lips and hands, and its sounds, were adroitly managed to synchronize with and correspond to the progress of the game.⁹

Maelzel started out in 1805 to reap a golden harvest from public exhibitions of the Chess Player, and to usher in a second brilliant career for the already famous Kempelen automaton created in the image of man. The high point came in 1809 when the automaton "played against the Emperor Napoleon during his last campaign in

⁸ *American Magazine*; R. Shelton Mackenzie, ed., *Memoirs of Robert-Houdin* (Philadelphia, 1859), 162-172; Albert Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions* (New York, 1898), 362-367, 370-373.

⁹ *Ariel* (Oct. 13, 1831); Fiske, 424, 430-431; *American Magazine*.



THE AUTOMATON CHESS PLAYER

From Albert Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions*, 371.

Austria, when Mr. Maelzel had the honour of exhibiting [the] various mechanical contrivances at Schoenbrunn, by his desire." The automaton was shown again in the European capitals, and again the people "gazed with feelings of partial awe and entire amazement upon a carved image" that appeared to have human brains in its wooden head. Sometime after 1809, Eugène Beauharnais, stepson of Napoleon and Viceroy of Italy, witnessed "the wondrous exhibition of the Automaton, and was so bewitched by the mystery, that he bought the whole affair—mechanism, mystery, Maelzel and all—for thirty thousand francs." The Viceroy afterward left for service in Russia, and before long the famous piece fell into disuse. In 1812 a visitor "saw the Automaton abandoned . . . to inglorious repose, in the *Casa Buonaparte* at Milan."¹⁰

After several years of working on other inventions and exhibiting them on the Continent and in England, Maelzel returned to Munich in 1817. There he found Eugène Beauharnais, now Duke of Leuchtenberg, and negotiated with him for the repurchase of the Chess Player for thirty thousand francs, with some arrangements to have it exhibited only in Europe until paid for in full. The machine, after being put in good repair and improved, was taken to Paris for exhibition during the winter of 1817-1818. There Maelzel succeeded in giving it the "powers of speech," a feature that Kempelen had worked on, but had failed to accomplish satisfactorily. The figure could roll its eyes, move its hands, turn its head, and say in French, *échec et mat* (checkmate). The exhibition received considerable patronage from Parisians. M. Boucourt, a champion chess player, was employed to enter the machine daily, but because of excessive fatigue two substitute players, M. Alexandre and M. Mouret, were also employed.¹¹

Maelzel went to England with his chess specialists. In London they were joined by William Lewis, another champion with a scientific knowledge of the game, who always had at hand printed illustrations of all the chessboard maneuvers. The Chess Player and the Conflagration of Moscow were reassembled and staged in a great

¹⁰ *London Times*, July 5, 1819; Fiske, 400, 425, 431; Thayer, II, 232-233; *Public Ledger* (Phila.), Dec. 4, 1840.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1840; F. J. Fétis, *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens* (Paris, 1878), V, 397; *American Magazine*; *Magasin Pittoresque*, II (1834), 155.

English exhibition that duplicated all the excitement these automata had created on the Continent. On December 25, 1818, Maelzel advertised four daily performances of "Kempelen's celebrated Automaton Chess Player and Maelzel's Trumpeter," at No. 4 Spring Garden. During the afternoon show, the chess automaton played "several curious and scientific ends of games," while there was an offer to "commence a game with any antagonist in the evening." Admission was 2s. 6d. On January 5, 1819, the 2:30 P. M. performance was discontinued, and on February 11 the public was informed that the preparations required for "a grand exhibition of an entirely novel nature, invented by Mr. Maelzel, oblige him to limit the . . . performances of the automaton Chess-Player and Trumpeter" to three o'clock on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays only. At that time, "to satisfy the eager demands of the public, a game will be commenced against any opponent." The attraction continued in Spring Garden through March, with crowds increasing in expectation of the novel Moscow spectacle, for which the producer was unable "to procure a room sufficiently large for his Grand Exhibition." On March 29 there was added to the show "the appearance of real life, produced by a disposition and effect of light and shade, entirely new; Hebe, the Goddess of youth, presenting Nectar to the Duke of Reichstadt, son of Napoleon-Jove."¹²

On May 17 the Conflagration of Moscow was at last put on, accompanied by music mechanically produced and of a very high order. This moving mechanical panorama continued through June, impressing the spectators "with a true idea of a scene which baffles all powers of description."¹³

Maelzel probably remained in England during part of 1820. His Moscow spectacle was popular, but the Chess Player was preferred by the intellectuals, who tried to solve the mystery of the mechanism with "as intense an interest as when first produced in Germany." More pamphlets appeared on the subject. In *An attempt to analyze the automaton chess-player of M. Kempelen*, Professor Willis, a Cambridge mathematician, suggested that an ordinary-sized man was concealed in the interior. Charles Gottlieb wrote *Letters on the Autom-*

¹² *London Times*, Dec. 25, 1818; Jan. 5, Feb. 11, Mar. 24 and 29, 1819.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Apr. 29, May 12 and 31, June 7, 1819; *Saroni's Musical Times* (July 20, 1850); *Bulletin of the American Art-Union* (N. Y.) (July, 1850).

aton Chess Player, supporting the possibility of the mechanism performing mental functions. Dr. David Brewster, in his *Letters on Natural Magic*, restated earlier theories that the Chess Player was worked by natural magnetism and by a human being hidden inside. While this problem was being aired by scientists, the chess specialists operating the automaton became dissatisfied with their employment. Their quarrels and threats of exposure brought new troubles for Maelzel. These difficulties, combined with his fears of losing his patronage, are said to be reasons for his bringing the exhibition to America.¹⁴

Two other problems disturbed Maelzel's peace of mind. The showing of the Chess Player in England, contrary to agreements, brought rebukes from Eugène Beauharnais. Moreover, the installment payments for the machine were not on time, or regular enough. Legal proceedings were started for a full settlement, and in the course of the testimony, which was published, the secret of the hidden chess players was exposed. Maelzel, however, retained possession of the automaton. The exhibition returned to Paris, probably later in 1820, and was shown in Amsterdam in 1821 with good patronage, although not quite equal to that received in London or Paris. Maelzel's itinerary during the next four years is not entirely clear, but he continued to travel about Europe exhibiting his mechanisms.¹⁵

Seeking new opportunities in America, Maelzel left France on December 20, 1825, on board the packet *Howard*, and landed in New York on February 3, 1826. *Ship News* announced the arrival of "Mr. Maelzel, Professor of Music and Mechanics, inventor of the Panharmonicon, the Musical Time Keeper, &c." He had left behind the panorama of Moscow, but had brought with him the Chess Player and other automata. After two months of preparation in New York, his exhibition opened in the assembly room of the National Hotel, 112 Broadway, just opposite City Hall, on April 13, with two performances daily at noon and at 8 P. M. The exhibit was to run about three months, until July 5, and was to feature the Chess Player, offering end games long enough to show the powers of

¹⁴ *Quarterly Review* (London) (June, 1849); *American Magazine*; Fiske, 423; Fétis, V, 397.

¹⁵ Fiske, 424-427; *American Magazine*; *Biographie Universelle, Ancienne et Moderne* (Paris, 1811-1862), XXVI, 13-14; *Revue Encyclopédique* (Paris), XVI (1822), 405-406. Eugène Beauharnais died in 1824.

the machine, but not so long that they would fatigue the viewers; the Trumpeter, playing a number of marches by master composers; and the slack-rope dancers. Admission was fifty cents. Private games with amateur chess players were solicited, and musical interests were encouraged by inviting professors, teachers, and musicians to use Maelzel's metronome for instruction and performances.¹⁶

The traveler Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, who had earlier seen some of Maelzel's automata in Europe, now visited the exhibition in New York, and wrote that "The Automaton represents a Turk, sitting behind the table, with a chess board before him, a table with another chess-board stands opposite" for his opponent. "When the Automaton is to make a move, a noise of wheels is heard in the table, and at the same time the Turk lifts his left hand, which rests on a cushion, opens his fingers, takes the piece, makes the move, closes his hand, and places it on the cushion again. If his antagonist makes a false move, the Turk knocks with his right hand on the table in anger, shakes his head, and expresses his indignation by a sound. When the Turk gained a game, Mr. Maelzel wound up the machine like a clock, by means of a handle at the table, then the Turk took a knight and placed it successively once in every square. . . . Whilst the Turk plays the game, Mr. Maelzel stands by"—but the Duke failed to discover "in what manner he directs his movements." After the game, continued Duke Bernhard, he "showed us a small figure made of pasteboard, and representing a violoncello player, which moves his head and both hands. Mr. Maelzel plays several pieces on the piano, and the same figure accompanies him with his violoncello, keeping exact time. He then showed us a trumpeter as large as life, who plays several pieces with the trumpet in a masterly manner, and with his trumpet accompanies Mr. Maelzel, who plays the piano."¹⁷

The press described both the fame of the Chess Player for the past fifty years and its mysterious powers that had baffled European scientists. American curiosity was aroused, and the chess game became a sensation. The first audiences in April averaged about one

¹⁶ Fiske, 428; George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York, 1928), III, 224, 368; *New York Post*, Apr. 11 and 12, May 1, 19, and 26, 1826.

¹⁷ Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, *Travels through North America in 1825 and 1826* (Philadelphia, 1828), II, 197-198.

hundred people; in May the hall was filled, and sometimes two hundred were turned away for lack of seats. The proprietor cultivated the good will of leading citizens and occasionally made donations for charitable purposes. His receipts during three months were twelve thousand dollars, which so impressed the proprietor of the National Hotel where Maelzel lived that he offered the showman nineteen thousand dollars for his Chess Player.¹⁸

Maelzel left New York on July 5 for his first visit to Boston. After the summer heat, he opened in Julien Hall at Milk and Congress streets on September 13 for a run until October 28. At this time the hidden chess player was William Schlumberger, a tall, slender man, who had come from Europe especially for this purpose at a salary of fifty dollars a month. He played full games with New England's best chess players and won them all, except for a few that Maelzel gave to players by courtesy of a first move, or by occasional blunders inside the machine. A mere youth, Benjamin D. Green, was given a chance, won a game, and became known for years as "the man that beat the Automaton." On one occasion, Schlumberger nearly exposed himself by making an audible sound, but Maelzel quickly moved the chest to distract attention.¹⁹

On December 26, 1826, Maelzel made his initial appearance in Philadelphia, a city which he was to use frequently in the following years for his headquarters. He rented the old Lailson's Circus building and M. Labbe's Dance Hall, which he repaired at considerable expense for his exhibitions. In time, this place became known as Maelzel's Hall. Maelzel found a congenial environment in a state and city long known for its German settlements and traditions. A large phlegmatic German, having a special interest in people both as friends and patrons, he made many friendships among prominent citizens and men of science who were interested in his automata.²⁰

In Philadelphia, Maelzel became intimate with George Willig, the music dealer, and discussed his financial affairs with him. He frequently consulted John F. Ohl on business matters, rented a store-room from him for his automata, and traveled in his boats. He had

¹⁸ *New York Post*, May 27, 1826; *Ariel* (Nov. 26, 1831).

¹⁹ Fiske, 434-435, 439-442.

²⁰ Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia* (Harrisburg, 1932), III, 858; Antonio Blitz, *Fifty Years in the Magic Circle* (Hartford, Conn., 1871), 168.

dealings with Joseph J. Mickley, a young pianoforte manufacturer, who repaired the upright piano used in Maelzel's exhibitions. Mickley, a German Moravian, was a frequent guest at the exhibition hall and knew about Schlumberger's training for the hidden chess game. Vezin, the professional chess player, was another good friend of Maelzel's. Artists and artisans also knew the showman and were employed by him to work on various parts of the mechanisms, but only Maelzel knew the relationship of all the parts to each other.²¹

His first exhibition season in Philadelphia lasted three months. The hall was opened twice daily, at noon and in the evening. The Trumpeter, dressed in the uniform of the French Lancers, "performed with distinctness and precision unattainable by the best living performers. . . . In double tonguing, his superiority is particularly manifested, not only in the clearness of the tones, but also in the number of the notes which are sounded. All of the sounds are actually produced in the trumpet, there being no pipes whatever within the Figure. The pieces he plays were written expressly for him by the first composers." In the chess game, the Turk, seated in his chair behind his desk, was pushed onto the stage on which was placed a chess table. After saying "échec" and rolling his eyes searchingly for a contestant, fearfully exciting the children present, the Turk proceeded to play both full and end games. The automaton lost an end game to Daniel Smith and one full game to a Mrs. Fisher on January 30 and 31, 1827. The record of the latter game, preserved in full by the Philadelphia press, shows that there were thirty-nine moves before Maelzel declared the Turk beaten.²²

From Philadelphia the show went to Baltimore, where it opened at Fountain Inn Hall on April 30. In May, Charles Carroll, one of the remaining signers of the Declaration of Independence, played a game of chess with "his Turkish Majesty," and the people "were delighted to see it terminate as it ought in the defeat of the latter." But Maelzel met with an untoward event in Baltimore, the discovery of the secret of the hidden chess player. Two curious youths peering into a dressing room window saw the slender Schlumberger crawling out of the Chess Player's desk after the lid was removed. The boys lost no time in relating the incident to their parents, and the news

²¹ Fiske, 432, 444-446, 466-467.

²² Maelzel's playbill, Union Building, Phila., 1836, Lib. Co. of Phila.; Fiske, 446-447, 484.

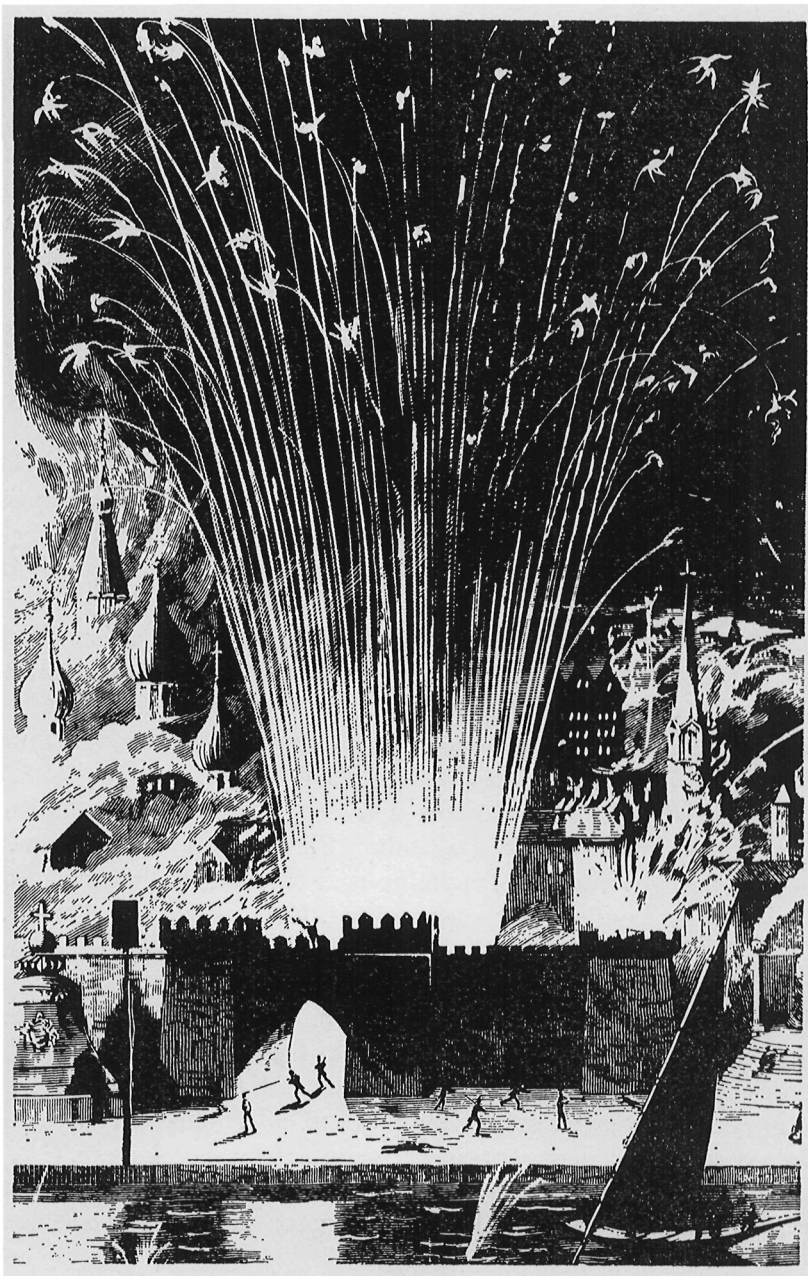
spread rapidly. The *Baltimore Gazette* came out with a sensational story of "THE CHESS-PLAYER DISCLOSED." Though somewhat skeptical, the press in other cities also reported the exposé. Maelzel, accustomed to controversy, at first treated the furor casually, but, fearful that his business would suffer, announced on June 5 that "the CONFLAGRATION OF MOSCOW, which has elicited so much admiration in Amsterdam, Paris and London, would be exhibited in a short time, in addition to that of the *Chess Player*."²³

Competition created another problem for Maelzel's Chess Player. The two Walker brothers from Connecticut had made a player, and had exhibited it in New York during May and June, 1827, terming it an American chess player, a "Jonathan" invention. Maelzel's challenge to the Walkers for a fifteen-game match between the German and American machines for a stake of \$3,000 was not accepted, and his offer to buy the new machine was declined. Maelzel drolly commented on the situation. In his own country, he recalled, the Germans wondered and said nothing when he showed his automaton. In Paris, the French exclaimed, "Magnifique! Merveilleux! Superbe!" The English set themselves to prove whether it was or was not a mere mechanism. But in America, the ingenious Yankees first explored it, then proposed to make one for \$500, and within a few months had produced a chess player.²⁴

The Conflagration of Moscow arrived in America in 1827 and before long was exhibited in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston. A description of the parts and make-up is in Maelzel's inventory of the shipping boxes containing the panorama. First of all, there were the "groundwork of Moscow" and the frames of "large churches, castles, Kremlins &c., to be placed in front" of the stage, with movable "parts which blow up" and fall down. There were separate parts of buildings, like crosses for churches and flags for the Kremlin. The façades of the buildings were represented in painted light materials and gilded frames, with several supports to hold them up. There were also "six smaller scenes, representative of castles, houses, etc."; "one large transparency painting, representative of fire and smoke, in the distance"; and "one large back curtain, or background scene, or

²³ *New York Post*, May 26, 1827; Fiske, 452, 453.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 454, 456-457; *New York Post*, May 28 and June 11, 1827; *Niles' National Register* (Baltimore), June 2, 1827.



THE BURNING OF MOSCOW

From Albert Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions*, 363.

painting representative of the flames and city in the distance," with the moon in the sky. Among the parts was "one engraving of Moscow," probably used originally to produce the scene and later to re-assemble the parts in the show.²⁵

Special features toward the front of the stage included the long Russian causeway and two military bridges. The causeway, with its parts and supports locked together, was firmly fastened on the left side of the stage. On this road were one hundred and eighteen Russians in blocks or units hooked together, fixed in a groove and pulled by a cord that moved over and back under the roadway by means of a hand crank. Over the larger of the two bridges moved one hundred and thirty divisions of the French Grand Army, with their musicians, snipers, cavalry, infantry mines and cannons. These displays were also pulled across grooved boards on the bridge. The operational directions called for care in keeping the many figures straight on the boards and for precaution in preventing them from turning over while moving along.²⁶

The din of war was produced by hand machines. A musket machine had twelve springs to force striking hammers. Cannon drums were struck with the fist in a sparring glove, and pots of burning charcoal gave off awesome smoke effects. An "iron explosion machine" contained about a peck of stones, and on being cranked created a noise like the crash of falling buildings and the explosion of gunpowder. There were table bells, glass bells, and Chinese gongs to represent church bells and various other city sounds. Hand organs with bellows and a collection of cylinders provided the two types of martial music used—the Turkish or Oriental pieces, and the western trumpet music. A trumpet machine, with twelve trumpets in it, was capable of playing a dozen tunes. A hand organ supplied the sounds of the cymbals and bass drums. A whistle or call signal to the organ player in an adjoining room prompted him "to go from the Trumpets to the Turkish music, or, from the Turkish music to the Trumpets," as the occasion demanded.²⁷

²⁵ Maelzel's legal documents on the sale of his exhibition, dated Boston, Aug. 22, 1828; Parts of "The Mechanical Panorama of the Conflagration of Moscow . . .," Nos. 17, 18, 19, 24; "Inventory of boxes, cases, &c., with their contents," Nos. 1 and 2; "List of fixtures, &c., used in the exhibition and contained in the boxes, &c.," American Antiquarian Society.

²⁶ Parts of "the mechanical panorama . . .," Nos. 2, 3, 20-21; "Inventory of boxes . . .," No. 9; "List of fixtures . . .," Nos. 64-68, 73-78, *ibid*.

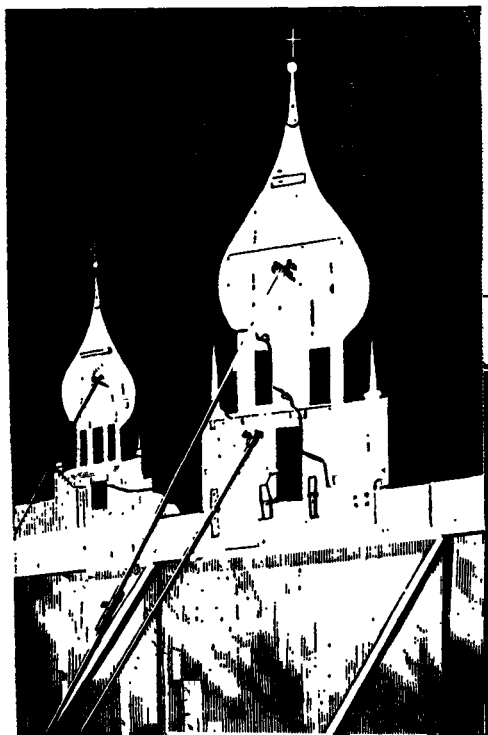
²⁷ "Inventory of boxes . . .," No. 3; "List of fixtures . . .," No. 81; Parts of "the mechanical panorama . . .," Nos. 9-15, *ibid*.

There was a moon apparatus to cast a mellow silvery light on the peaceful scene of Moscow before the fire, and to discolor the sky with weird dim light during the fire scene. The equipment for lighting the fire scenes in the city consisted of sixteen lanterns, twenty-five Argand lamps, six candlesticks with springs, snuffers, and trays, forty half-circular patent lamps with reflectors, nine square and six oblong lamps, and thirteen common japanned lamps with stands. Seven lamps with tins over them were placed above Moscow, at the upper part of the proscenium. Colored lights were amply provided for by twelve red glasses, eight sheets of stained glass for the large lamps over the front of Moscow, and four other sheets of a purple-red color. A row of lamps with cases and glasses were placed on counters behind the castles, churches, and the Kremlin, which reflected light on the passing Russians. There were double fire screens extending across the stage, meeting in the center, "which, by being gradually withdrawn . . . exhibits the appearance of the fire spreading 'from the center to the extremities of the city.'" Great precautions had to be taken to prevent destructive fires in the hall, while at the same time maintaining the illusion of flames in the scene. In front of the stage was a silk curtain that was raised to open the exhibition, and a "green woolen cord" to keep the audience from the stage.²⁸

The numerous and complicated parts of the Moscow panorama had to be organized and integrated into working units so that a single mechanical and artistic spectacle could be produced. It was not staged by professional actors visible on the stage, but by special automata manned from the background. Sometimes it required at least fifteen persons to handle the series of mechanisms for the show. Helpers were recruited locally shortly before the exhibition started. Young boys and girls were usually glad to accept such jobs. After brief instructions on operating the separate simple functions of a complicated total machine, these young people "made it move like clockworks." One person struck a large Chinese gong "at solemn intervals" to imitate "the tolling of the great bell in the Kremlin." Another worked a hand organ to represent "the magnificent instrument in the cathedral performing its own requiem. In the midst of the city there was a high bridge of nearly a dozen arches," and, hid-

²⁸ Parts of "the mechanical panorama . . .," Nos. 2, 4, 8, 15, 16; "List of fixtures . . .," Nos. 62 and 89, *ibid.*

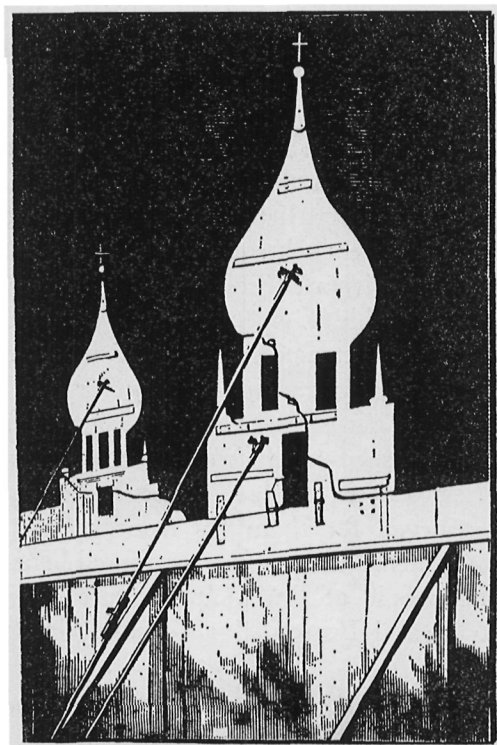
den "on a low seat beneath one of the abutments," another person slowly "turned a crank to make an interminable army of artillery, infantry, and cavalry cross the bridge. As the successive units reached the farther side," another worker carried them around to the person stationed on the near side, who "placed them again on the moving belt." At intervals Maelzel "stepped to an ingenious machine of his own invention, gave the crank a few quick turns," and produced a perfect imitation of infantry platoon firing. "All the domes and spires had hinges in their backs, and as the illumination increased, one after another they were toppled over into the flames." At the close, colored flames from some chemical substance shot up,



SCENES READY FOR LOWERING

From Albert Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions
and Scientific Diversions*, 362.

den "on a low seat beneath one of the abutments," another person slowly "turned a crank to make an interminable army of artillery, infantry, and cavalry cross the bridge. As the successive units reached the farther side," another worker carried them around to the person stationed on the near side, who "placed them again on the moving belt." At intervals Maelzel "stepped to an ingenious machine of his own invention, gave the crank a few quick turns," and produced a perfect imitation of infantry platoon firing. "All the domes and spires had hinges in their backs, and as the illumination increased, one after another they were toppled over into the flames." At the close, colored flames from some chemical substance shot up,



SCENES READY FOR LOWERING

From Albert Hopkins, *Magic: Stage Illusions
and Scientific Diversions*, 362.

producing "a weird and ghastly glow, exhibiting all the colors of the rainbow."²⁹

When this show arrived in America, Maelzel brought it to Baltimore for its first exhibition on October 2, 1827. The price of admission was one dollar, with the entire receipts from a capacity house of two hundred people going to the Baltimore General Dispensary. The exhibition began with the Chess Player, included the Trumpeter and the slack-rope dancers, and concluded with the Conflagration of Moscow. "The gradual progress of the fire, the hurrying bustle of the fugitives, the eagerness of the invaders, and the din of warlike sounds," all tended "to impress the spectator with a true idea of a scene which baffles all powers of description." All watched "the representation so ingeniously accomplished," and admired "the skill of the artificer" in conveying to the audience the human sufferings from such a catastrophe.³⁰

It was not until January 5, 1828, that newspaper advertisements announced this fascinating show to Philadelphians. Until April 26, it was performed at 48 South Fifth Street, with two performances being given daily at noon and 7 P. M., for fifty cents admission. The show included the amusing little bass fiddler theater and the Trumpeter. Next came the slack-rope dancers, which performed surprising feats of agility without disclosing their mechanism. Several of these puppets were able to speak, saying "mama," or "papa," or "oh, la, la." The main attraction, of course, was the Conflagration of Moscow, the thrilling sight which brought crowds to the theater. An atmosphere of "the perfection of politeness and amiability" prevailed toward the audiences, including the colored people who were given opportunities to attend. Maelzel was so fond of children that he "invariably reserved for them his front seats and distributed sweet meats among them." Sometimes he offered benefits for orphans and widows. The people of Philadelphia were gratified, and, like those of New York and Boston, "paid heavy tribute to the magnificent display."³¹

²⁹ Rossiter Johnson, *The Grandest Playground in the World* (Rochester, N. Y.: Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series, 1918), VII, 85-86.

³⁰ *Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, Sept. 29 and Oct. 2, 1827.

³¹ *Ariel* (Nov. 26, 1831); Fiske, 432, 457; Maelzel's "Inventory of boxes . . .," Nos. 1, 7, 12; *National Gazette* (Phila.), Jan. 17 and 23, Apr. 19, 1828; *Public Ledger*, Dec. 23, 1844; Maelzel's playbill, Phila., 1836, Lib. Co. of Phila.

On his way to Boston, Maelzel stopped at New York and found the Walker brothers still exhibiting their chess player, which Maelzel publicly announced was not his own superior machine. Competition between him and the Walkers may have been somewhat allayed by his employment of one of the brothers as a cashier. About this time, D. A. Balcom, another Yankee mechanical genius, made plans to copy the Chess Player, but he seems to have been deterred when Maelzel commissioned him to make an American whist player, completed in 1828. Maelzel opened his second exhibition in Boston's Julien Hall on June 3, edifying New Englanders for the first time with the Moscow spectacle. They watched with admiration the opening "view of a burning city, in which the rising of the flames and smoke, the glare of the flames, the hurried retreat of the inhabitants, are most accurately represented. Soon after the distant cannonade is heard, the troops are seen to advance, the fire gradually spreads from the center to the extremities of the city, the confused sounds of music, the tolling of bells, the discharge of musketry are heard, and the exhibition closes with the explosion of a mine and the falling of the Kremlin." Good patronage continued into the summer until hot weather brought the show to a close on July 27. Meanwhile, Maelzel had advertised that after July 19 "the mechanical panorama of the Burning of Moscow will be for sale at a reasonable price, to any one or company that may wish to purchase it."³²

In August, John Lilley, Samuel Curtis, and Washington P. Gragg of Boston purchased Maelzel's exhibition for six thousand dollars. The sales contract, drawn up by Maelzel on August 22, transferred the ownership of the bass fiddler, the speaking figures, the slack-rope dancers, and the mechanical panorama of the burning of Moscow, together "with all and singular the machinery, apparatus, goods, chattels, stuffs, furniture, implements, lamps, paintings, tools, instruments, images, articles and things of every description, name and nature whatsoever, therewith connected, or thereunto, appertaining or belonging." Maelzel, who retained the ownership of the Chess Player and Trumpeter, agreed to let the exhibition continue under the prestige of his own name without disclosure of the sale. He was personally to conduct the exhibition for two weeks, and "to teach and instruct said purchasers or their agents in the art or mystery of

³² *Boston Advertiser*, July 3, 9, 12, 19 and 26, 1828; Fiske, 457; Fétis, V, 397.

managing and conducting all and singular the articles of exhibition," and to give possible help later in running or repairing it. He agreed not to offer direct competition in the same places of exhibition in this country, though he reserved the right to reproduce the rope dancers and show them in Charleston, South Carolina, and New Orleans, and offered prior rights for purchasing his new carrousel and other automata when for sale, or when he should leave the country.³³

Accordingly, Maelzel reopened his exhibit in Boston on August 25. On September 1, the public was thanked again for its generous patronage and the show closed, soon to reopen, however, under its new owners. Free of responsibility, Maelzel embarked for Europe on September 11, 1828.³⁴

He remained in Europe about six months, collecting new mechanisms for exhibition in America. When he returned to New York on April 13, 1829, he found that the owners of his former exhibition had brought it to that city, where it opened on May 18 in Tammany Hall. Some arrangements were made to co-operate in advertising Maelzel's former and present shows. There were the usual notices in the press, as well as handbills and posters to be distributed on the streets, along the water front, and posted in boats and ships going from New York to Providence, New Haven, Newark, Poughkeepsie, Albany, and other places. This was the first time New Yorkers had witnessed the Moscow panorama, "one of the most ingenious deceptions ever seen." Spectators had the feeling of actually seeing a town "given up to pillage and the flames."³⁵

Maelzel's new show opened at 223 Broadway, opposite the Park Theater, with hours of exhibition from 11 to 3 o'clock and from 5 to 10 P. M. daily. It featured the new "diorama of the Cathedral of Rheims, with the Melodium, a new musical instrument, and the Invertible Diligence." The diorama, showing the nave of the cathedral with its rows of painted arches and stained glass windows, was produced by Charles Ciceri, the celebrated Parisian scene painter, and contained moving figures added by Maelzel. The melodium, also built by Maelzel, played two pieces by such composers as Rossini and Cherubini every half hour. The French dili-

³³ Maelzel's panorama sales contract, I, 3; *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, LIII (1943), 155-156.

³⁴ *Boston Advertiser*, Aug. 22 and 25, Sept. 1 and 13, Oct. 3, 1828; Fiske, 458-459.

³⁵ *New York Post*, May 18, 20, and 30, 1829; Odell, III, 427-428; John Passarow to W. P. Gragg, ¹New York, July 20, 1829, *American Antiquarian Society*; Fiske, 459-460.

gence was made by Baer of Strassburg. Maelzel's old and new shows were both well received in New York where they continued their joint operations, although in separate halls, until July, when the Moscow panorama was taken to Albany.³⁶

The new exhibition was still in New York City in September, when the dioramic and mechanical theater, chiefly for children, was added to its repertory. Maelzel had "several neat and elegant automata" in this amusing little theater. The puppets varied from time to time, but were listed in one playbill as follows: "1. The amusing little Shoemaker, from Paris. 2. The French Oyster Woman—who bows to the company, . . . opening and presenting her oysters to the audience [which proved to be sugar plums to the delight of the children]. 3. The Old French Gentleman of the Ancient Regime, who drinks [to] the health of the company with great glee. 4. The Little Troubadour, playing on several instruments. 5. Punchinello, will go through his comical attitudes in imitation of the celebrated Mazurier."³⁷

Maelzel added to the cathedral diorama "a grand procession of Priests, Choristers, the Bishop and his attendants, &c., who, at its close will pass with slow and solemn steps through the cathedral," being "arrayed in all the splendor of sacerdotal pomp" and forming altogether "a most imposing spectacle." This exhibition had cost a great deal to produce, and Maelzel lost money on it. It was unsuccessfully offered for sale on September 15, together with the American whist player and some other automata suitable for public exhibition. Maelzel remained in New York for another season, and added the carrousel spectacle on January 28, 1830, which he produced on a plan and scale comparable to his former Moscow panorama.³⁸

On June 2, Maelzel presented his revised program in Julien Hall, Boston. The mechanisms on display were the Chess Player, mechanical theater, Trumpeter, slack-rope dancers, and the melodium. The feature of the program was the new carrousel or grand tournament, presented in three acts in which were displayed "with grace and accuracy various feats of horsemanship and dexterity as performed at the ancient European Courts, together with many of the most difficult evolutions of the circus. During the performance, a splendid

³⁶ *New York Post*, May 11 and 18, June 10 and 26, 1829; Odell, III, 428.

³⁷ Maelzel's playbill, Phila., 1836, Lib. Co. of Phila.; *New York Post*, Sept. 10, 1829.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept. 10, 11, and 16, 1829.

Landscape and Fountain [were] exhibited by Sunset, when the surrounding atmosphere is illuminated by the declining orb. To conclude with the Physioramic Pyrotechnicon; or Pyric Fires, representing a variety of Fanciful and tasty designs—and so arranged as to produce a very pleasing effect.” The ingenious inventor of the pan-harmonicon and Conflagration of Moscow was again well received in Boston, where he donated the receipts of his first performance to the Massachusetts Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary. The show attracted great numbers of spectators, who were pleased with the music of the melodium and amused by the carrousel spectacle in which “the movements of animals and of men and women are imitated. . . . The figures all [performed] their various movements without any visible external agency, and [had] the appearance not only of living beings, but of beings possessed of remarkable strength and agility.” The show closed on July 16 for a return visit to Philadelphia.³⁹

After a brief suspension of the schedule for the hot weather, the exhibition opened in the City of Brotherly Love on the last day of September for a daily run until December 1, 1830. Patronage was good until the latter part of November, when the admission was reduced to twenty-five cents.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, John Passarow, the manager for the Boston Company, had purchased a share in that exhibit. He learned to handle the rope dancers and to play the pianoforte, though he continued to employ a regular pianist at six dollars a week. Passarow took his show to Knickerbocker Hall in Albany in August, where he produced the Moscow spectacle in a novel arrangement of two parts. First, he showed the evacuation of “the city of Moscow, by moonlight, as on the evening previous to the conflagration; the random guns are heard in the suburbs; the alarm bells ringing in every quarter; the inhabitants evacuate the city, etc.” The second part was the regular spectacle of the conflagration. Passarow sent notices and articles to the press in Albany and Troy, and put up a thousand posters in Albany and hundreds in Troy. He made arrangements for boat service from Troy to Albany, and distributed handbills in surrounding

³⁹ Maelzel's playbill, Phila., 1836, Lib. Co. of Phila.; *Boston Advertiser*, June 12, 1830; E. G. Robertson, *Mémoires Récréatifs, Scientifiques et Anecdóticos* (Paris, 1840), II, 263–264.

⁴⁰ Maelzel's playbill, Phila., 1836, Lib. Co. of Phila.; *National Gazette*, Sept. 28, Oct. 5, Nov. 13 and 25, 1830; Fiske, 460.

towns. Crowds of visitors, more than half of them women, were attracted during the first week. The mayor of Albany, the family of the New York secretary of state, the judges and other distinguished guests were present, but the receipts for the first three nights were only \$47.50, \$37.75, and \$54.00.⁴¹

There was no lack of problems for the new manager. Four girls who were employed to handle the automata failed to appear, and others had to be trained just before the show started. Later audiences were not as large as expected, and on occasion Passarow did not even open the hall, "thinking it best to shut up than to perform to empty benches." His assistants, furnished by Maelzel, reported that the management was badly handled and the show inadequately promoted. Schlumberger complained that the appeal of Moscow was less effective because of the recently added evacuation scene. Distrust and suspicion centering about Maelzel began to arise, and he was privately denounced for maneuvering to use certain mechanisms after having sold them and for bargaining to sell still others contrary to contract. Competition by D. A. Balcom of Norwalk, Connecticut, and by some rope dancers at the Philadelphia museum discouraged Passarow. Before closing on September 26, attendance had fallen off so greatly that the receipts for a whole week were only \$94.50. The new manager left Albany for New York City, planning a tour in the South.⁴²

In New York, Passarow tried in vain to persuade Maelzel, who was still in the city, to unite the two shows. Sometime after November 16, Passarow finally booked passage and freight on board the brig *Shamrock* for New Orleans, at a cost of sixty dollars, about half the charge on the regular packet service. He expected to arrive in New Orleans on December 1 and to open within a week with much *éclat*, in the French style. His experience in New Orleans was disappointing. It was difficult to find a good show place, expenses were heavy, and patronage only fair. All thought of making a fortune on the show was vanishing.⁴³

⁴¹ *Albany Argus*, Aug. 10 and 13, 1829; Passarow to Gragg, New York, July 20, 1829, and Albany, Aug. 6 and 16, 1829; Passarow's memorandum of purchase of share in Maelzel's exhibition, dated June 11, 1829, American Antiquarian Society.

⁴² Passarow to Gragg, Albany, Aug. 12, 16, and 20, Sept. 2, 5, 22 and 26, 1829, *ibid.*

⁴³ Passarow to Gragg, New York, Oct. 24 and Nov. 16, 1829, and Nashville, Tenn., May 27, 1830, *ibid.*; *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, LIII (1943), 155-157.

Passarow went next to Nashville, Tennessee, after being detained three weeks because of low water in the river. He opened on May 24, 1830, but did not attract good business. Receipts declined during the first three nights from \$105 to \$26. The best he could hope for was to clear expenses while trying to solve his financial difficulties. Disillusioned with Maelzel's contrivances, and despairing of making any money by them, Passarow advised the other owners in Boston to "TRY TO SELL TO HIM AGAIN THE WHOLE CONCERN, at almost any price within the bounds of reason. Engage to deliver everything to him in good order, and if possible get rid of the property. . . . *Do this by all means IF POSSIBLE*," he urgently repeated. To add to its woes, the Boston Company was threatened with more competition. A copy of the Moscow panorama appeared in the Albany State Museum in March, 1830, and remained there until the end of June. In the meantime, Passarow planned to continue on his itinerary and "go to Louisville, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and so [on] to one of the Atlantic cities." After this tour, the Boston Company went aground with its Moscow panorama; "from ignorance of its complicated machinery, they suffered it to fall into decay, from which Mr. Maelzel received it, and again added it to his collection."⁴⁴

Maelzel's exhibition reopened in Philadelphia in October, 1831, featuring the wonderful but savage Chess Player, the sweet melodium, the dexterous rope dancers, and his masterpiece, the Conflagration of Moscow, which, in the hands of its producer, was still "the most magnificent display of art." Philadelphia viewers watched the unequaled scenes of horror—"the mournful ringing of an hundred alarm bells—the blazing masses of the city—the entry of long and almost endless columns of troops—the half suppressed outcry of distracted population—the fearful appearance of the night, with the strange and awful coloring of the moon," then "the entry of the various regiments of the French army—cavalry, infantry and artillery, accompanied by the shrill notes of the trumpet," all "exquisitely conceived, and [giving] an animation to the whole impossible to be described." It was the experience of the sublime in tragedy. The scene was so impressive that spectators remembered it

⁴⁴ Passarow to Gragg, Nashville, May 27, 1830, American Antiquarian Society; *Albany Argus*, Mar. 24 and 30, 1830; *Ariel* (Nov. 26, 1831); Paul McPharlin, *The Puppet Theater in America* (New York, 1949), 100-101.

for a lifetime. Mrs. E. D. Gillespie in later life told of seeing it as a child. "The city was before us, closely built up and the houses all aflame. We quivered at the sight; saw men, women and children making their escape from the burning buildings, with packs of clothing on their backs. The scene was terrible, and so realistic that when we went to bed after returning from the spectacle, we hugged each other and rejoiced that our house was not on fire. No juggler, no show, that I have seen since," she concludes, "has ever moved me as Maelzel's puppets did." The exhibition continued until November 26 when an engagement in Cuba caused Maelzel to leave Philadelphia for Havana. It is uncertain whether he took the Moscow exhibit with him since he was then advertising it for sale at three thousand dollars.⁴⁵

The Moscow scene, for all its tribulations, was not defunct or becoming passé; it had not run its course. It had a genuine appeal to elemental human nature and could be seen repeatedly not only with ordinary interest, but also with heightened emotions. When Maelzel was about to leave Philadelphia, editors hoped that he would return soon, saying they could "visit his exhibition once a month without fatigue." Others felt the same, and it was because of this common reaction that he succeeded in repeating his itinerary in the same cities year after year. He had "visited all the principal cities in the United States, each four times, and has been patronized to an extent beyond all example in the history of similar exhibitions." His show was to continue as a perennial attraction for many years to come.⁴⁶

Maelzel's colorful personality was also a continual attraction. He understood the public, knew how to arouse their interest, and appreciated their response to his efforts. Moreover, he displayed taste and refinement in his shows without regard to expense. He was "considered an acquisition in any place, independent of the rational amusement he affords. He is very liberal with his money—frequently gives benefits to charitable societies—not the bare *profits* of a night, but the whole *proceeds*, expenses and all. His fondness for children is well known. He is careful to reserve the best seats for the juveniles, to whom he is always very particular to show every possible attention.

⁴⁵ *Ariel* (Oct. 1, 1831); Mrs. E. D. Gillespie, *A Book of Remembrance* (Philadelphia, 1901), 61-62; McPharlin, 101.

⁴⁶ *Ariel* (Oct. 13 and Nov. 26, 1831).

Besides this, he invariably has refreshments handed round to them, and them only," the adults merely looking on approvingly. "In summer, his little female waiters, dressed in white, with chaplets of flowers gracefully interwoven in their hair, were nightly employed in handing round whole oceans of lemonade to the two front benches of little ones." This was all done with admirable propriety and order.⁴⁷

Maelzel was back in the United States in 1832, the cholera year, opening on May 14 in Masonic Hall on Broadway, New York, with the Moscow spectacle again the feature. In the following year, 1833, the exhibition came to Concert Hall, Boston, on May 27, for a period of three months. Even after his repeated visits to the city, people attended the show with fresh excitement and enthusiasm. The press announced his coming "to renew our admiration of his mechanical skill, and inexhaustible ingenuity—to increase our wonder, puzzle our thoughts" as to how "he wields such despotic powers over inanimate materials, giving speech to images, and intellect to an automaton." They were to see again "that grave and thoughtful man, the Chess Player—the admiration of the world, and the wonder of philosophers." They were to listen to "the thrilling notes of the Trumpeter, witness the astonishing feats of his rope dancers," and be "amazed at the Conflagration of Moscow."⁴⁸

In the exhibitions, the Chess Player was as exciting as it was when it first arrived in Boston in 1826, and, despite exposés, people were still wondering how it worked. On June 18, one lady suggested that the figure be covered, so that if a man was hidden inside he could not see the chess board. Maelzel willingly complied, elaborately wrapping the figure up, and then inviting a challenger to step forward. "A buzz now arose throughout the hall; the curiosity of the spectators was on tiptoe," for "all were indeed anxious to see if the automaton could perform in this novel condition." A deep silence fell upon the spectators when the game commenced. The result was another striking victory for the machine, and renewed awe for the powers displayed by it. Interest mounted, and the show continued until August 23, closing only after the artist had donated the receipts of a performance to the mayor of Boston for charity.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Thayer, II, 252; *Ariel* (Nov. 26, 1831).

⁴⁸ *Boston Transcript*, May 25, 1833; *New York Post*, May 11, 1832.

⁴⁹ *American Magazine*; *Boston Transcript*, June 1, July 22 and 29, Aug. 2, 22, and 23, 1833.

Maelzel had two exhibitions running during 1834, one operated by him personally and another by an agent, or, possibly, by a new owner. His personal show, consisting of the Chess Player, the Trumpeter, the mechanical tournament, the diorama of the Cathedral of Rheims, and the melodium, opened in Philadelphia at the Masonic Hall on March 15 and continued there until May 31. As usual the exhibits attracted much admiring comment, and were even considered "superior to all his former displays in our city. There are more wonders; there is greater variety." "Mr. Maelzel's metronome or musical time-keeper" was again made available to patrons interested in musical education. A performance was donated to expatriated Poles. On leaving Philadelphia, Maelzel went south, where license fees were paid in Richmond on August 31, September 15 and 20, and in Charleston on November 30. While the show was in Richmond, Edgar Allan Poe, editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, joined the illustrious company of expositors of the hidden Chess Player. In this same year, Mouret, a former player in Paris, revealed his secrets, which were published in the French *Magasin Pittoresque*.⁵⁰

Maelzel's other exhibition opened in New York at Masonic Hall on May 22 and remained there until July 5, while people defied summer heat of ninety degrees to watch the Conflagration of Moscow. They saw the little puppet child from whose waxen lips came two words, "mama" and "papa." The rope dancers went through their surprising feats, fearlessly turning somersaults and whirligigs for the amusement of the children. This show later went to Albany, and came to Washington Hall, Philadelphia, in September. Its playbill divided the performance into four parts—the Little Bass Fiddler, Speaking Figures, Automaton Trumpeter, and the climactic feature, the Conflagration of Moscow.⁵¹

Maelzel's Moscow spectacle encountered an American-made counterpart in Philadelphia in 1834. This rival was probably an outgrowth of the panorama that had appeared in Albany in 1830. Existing playbills signed by J[ohn] R[owson] or J. R[ussell] Smith,

⁵⁰ *National Gazette*, Mar. 24 and May 12, 1834; *Southern Literary Messenger* (April, 1836); *Magasin Pittoresque*, II (1834), 155; Fiske, 423-424, 462-463.

⁵¹ *New York Post*, May 21 and 23, June 27, July 3 and 27, 1834; *National Gazette*, Sept. 5, 1834; Fiske, 463; *Albany Argus*, July 23, 1834; Maelzel's playbills, Washington Hall and No. 48 S. Fifth St., Phila., Lib. Co. of Phila.

Jr., advertised the new show at Odd Fellows' Hall, or the Adelphi Saloon, in August, 1834. It was presented in four parts: "First, a panoramic view of the Fairmount Water Works. Second, a panoramic view of the Public Landing Place at Cincinnati, Ohio; Steamboats, Canal Boats, &c. are seen crossing. Third, the Fantocini Automata," performing, with natural and graceful motions, exercises with a balanced pole, a juggler with his balls, a sailor dancing a hornpipe, the rope dancers, and an old soldier capering in a comical dance until he loses his limbs and head. The show concluded with the "Grand panoramic Spectacle of the Conflagration of Moscow," showing the "hurried retreat of the inhabitants, and the Triumphant Entry of the Troops of Napoleon! The View of the City is taken from a correct sketch and engraving by one of the first artists in France." In the description of this conflagration there are characteristics similar to Maelzel's panorama.⁵²

In June, 1835, Maelzel announced the opening of his Moscow panorama at Concert Hall, Boston, for the last time under his personal management in the United States. Again, "having disposed of the entire panorama," he reported that it was to be "delivered to the company of purchasers" immediately after the showing. He seems to have added to his exhibition some of the mechanical and musical automata by the celebrated French mechanician Maillardet, and such other automata as the juvenile artist, musical lady, tight-rope dancers, magician, walking figure, hummingbird, and mechanical animals. These pieces were also taken to Philadelphia later in the same year. Two of Maelzel's shows were on tour in the South. The Chess Player and accompanying automata were at Washington from November 27, 1835, to January 16, 1836; and the Conflagration of Moscow, with its associated pieces, was at Richmond from December 10, 1835, into January, 1836.⁵³

Maelzel opened his exhibition next in the Union Building, Philadelphia, on April 25, 1836, without his usual Moscow scene, which was replaced with his carrousel or the grand tournament, together with the mechanical theater, slack-rope dancers, the melodium and

⁵² J. R. Smith, Jr.'s playbill at Odd Fellows' Hall, Aug. 5, 1834, and playbill of Conflagration of Moscow, Phila., 1834, Lib. Co. of Phila.; Jackson, IV, 963.

⁵³ *Boston Transcript*, June 24, 1835; *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), Nov. 27, 1835; Maelzel's playbill, American Museum, Phila., Sept. 18, 1835; Fiske, 463.

the Trumpeter. He employed the services of the famous European magician and comedian Signor Antonio Blitz, who was cautioned against inciting tumultuous laughter, since genteel amusement was more in keeping with the intellectual and scientific appeal of the exhibition. Patronage was good as usual.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the new owners of the Moscow panorama were in Washington from April 12 to May 7. Maelzel's "truly sublime exhibition" was advertised in October at Congress Hall, Boston. It was offered as "an intellectual feast" for "all admirers of science." Another copy of the Moscow spectacle, probably the one shown earlier by J. R. Smith, Jr., came to the American Museum, Philadelphia, with Harrington, the entertaining ventriloquist, adding his talents to the show. In December, 1836, this show was still on view at the museum, together with "Fletcher's Ancient Statuary," and, at another time, "Dr. Valentine's Yankee Eccentricities."⁵⁵

The show continued during the holidays, with Welden, the American magician, providing entertainment. Large, fashionable audiences attended the performances through January and into February, 1837. Then in March Harrington rejoined the show with his automaton fortune teller. In April, Chappell, the phrenologist, rendered his services along with a melodium that played various overtures. The exhibition of this Moscow panorama came to a close on May 12 and did not resume until September 27, when Connel, another ventriloquist, performed with it. A dioramic scene of India and a mammoth turtle were added attractions. The show played through October, and was joined by "Negro Albinos" in November. Early in December, the vocalist Friend and the magician P. Desage performed with it. On Christmas Day, 1837, there were four performances of the Conflagration of Moscow, with such realistic effects that spectators felt they were gazing upon the real war scenes.⁵⁶

The original panorama of Moscow sold by Maelzel came to Masonic Hall, Philadelphia, on June 22, 1837, for a month. Its merits were

⁵⁴ Blitz, 167-171; Jackson, I, 299-301; *National Gazette*, May 14, 1836; *Public Ledger*, May 13 and 25, 1836.

⁵⁵ *National Intelligencer*, Apr. 9, 12, and 25, May 2 and 7, 1836; *Boston Transcript*, Oct. 24, 1836; Maelzel's playbills, Union Building, Phila., Dec. 12, 1836, and American Museum, Phila., n. d., Lib. Co. of Phila.; Fiske, 468-469.

⁵⁶ *Public Ledger*, Jan. 2, 10, and 20, Feb. 9 and 15, Mar. 15 and 28, May 12, Sept. 27, Oct. 21, Nov. 11, Dec. 2, 4, 21 and 23, 1837.

well known by crowds of admiring spectators, who had already seen it many times. Unlike some other popular exhibitions, the press called it "a true picture of a real and terrific scene," one which filled the mind "with the pure principles of patriotism and philanthropy, to infuse a love for [the] sublime in nature and in art." Its new proprietor increased the attractions of the show by engaging Herr Schmidt, a noted artist from Vienna, to "introduce his much admired pyric fires, or mechanical fire works."⁵⁷

After eleven years of successful operations in America, Maelzel was now ready to explore new patronage in Cuba and the other Caribbean islands, and later in the main cities of South America. The Chess Player had aroused a great interest, but the initial curiosity was subsiding somewhat, because of too frequent exhibition and especially because so many investigations had publicly revealed its secrets. However, the charms of that "grand and appalling spectacle of the Conflagration of Moscow" remained a perennial sensation, a climax to the show that always overwhelmed its viewers. Since the original panorama was in the hands of new proprietors, Maelzel suspended his exhibitions in order to make a new Moscow scene on a grander scale. He rented the Adelphi Building in Philadelphia, where he kept all kinds of mechanics at work during the summer and autumn of 1837. To superintend and expedite the project he occupied private rooms in the same building. Maelzel, working steadily and with an absorbing interest, produced a Panorama of Moscow "nearly twice as large as the one first constructed" in Europe, and "upon which he made considerable improvements." Then "after he had consumed \$5,000" upon the project, "he was obliged to procure some advances of money, from his old friend, Mr. [John F.] Ohl, for the rest of his outfit." In striving for perfection in the mechanism, "his excessive particularity had tormented his mechanics and artists, with undoing and doing over their work," so that the time spent on the Moscow scene encroached upon the best show season in Havana.⁵⁸

In preparation for the Cuba journey, Maelzel "took into pay an experienced exhibitor by the name of Fischer" to carry out the grand scheme for the new panorama; Mrs. Fischer was employed to perform services for the staff. "The system was carried into execution,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, June 22 and July 18, 1837; Fiske, 468-469.

⁵⁸ *American Magazine; Public Ledger*, Dec. 23 and 28, 1844; Fiske, 468, 471-472, 477.

by way of rehearsal, in the Adelphi Building, for some time before the embarkation for Cuba." The final work delayed the sailing date for a week, and even then Maelzel was "obliged to pack up his Moscow with some details still unfinished." He sailed from Philadelphia on November 9 in the brig *Lancet*, a vessel owned by his friend Ohl. His new exhibition finally opened in Havana after the carnival season had already started.⁵⁹

Patronage was good for a while, but the effects of the economic depression of 1837 were evident and during the latter part of the season the exhibition proved to be a disastrous failure. To add to his troubles, Maelzel's long-time friend and indispensable assistant, the hidden chess player William Schlumberger, died of yellow fever. The show was now at a standstill. To go on to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as planned, seemed impossible under the circumstances, and by spring Maelzel was corresponding with William Kummer, his assistant in Philadelphia, to contract for a return exhibition there. Signor Blitz saw Maelzel in Cuba and reported that the "venture terminated most unfortunately, for his business failed, his exhibitions were less attended, while his pecuniary matters became desperate and gloomy." The artist was now sixty-six years of age, "reduced in circumstances and involved in debt," facing "obstacles unknown to him before; his pride and spirit could not battle with the change." He secured passage for Philadelphia in the brig *Otis*, which sailed from Havana on July 14. But misfortune followed him; he fell ill, and was found dead in his berth on July 21, 1838. Maelzel was buried at sea with a four-pound shot tied to his feet to take his body to the bottom.⁶⁰

News of his death was received in Philadelphia with a universal feeling of regret. Joseph R. Chandler, editor of the *United States Gazette*, reported that "Maelzel, whose fame is connected with the reproduction of the automaton Chess Player, died recently, on his passage from Havana to this city." He was noted for his ingenuity in breathing apparent "life and thought into the works of his own hands." All would miss the "kindly smile that he had for children" and "the furrow of thought that marked his brow as he inspected the movements of the famous Turk." All hoped he had gone "where the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 464-465, 468.

⁶⁰ Blitz, 170-171; Jackson, III, 858; Fiske, 467, 470-475.

music of his harmonicons will be exceeded, but his body will rest beneath the blue waves of the Atlantic till the 'last Trumpet' shall sound for the convocation of quick and dead." In the years following, many thousands could call forth affectionate memories of Maelzel's personal friendships and appealing exhibitions. He had won the hearts of the rising generation in America with cherished experiences that were to be related with pleasure in old age. His generous philanthropy, and his amiable, obliging disposition had won for him the gratitude of every community he had visited. His unsurpassed genius for mechanism had brought him the favor of royalty in Europe and of the people in America. In his exhibitions he had gained the respect and dignity enjoyed only by the master painters, great composers, and ingenious inventors who make contributions to world culture. He was "distinguished for his skill in mechanics, his taste for the fine arts, and the extraordinary inventive faculties of his mind. Some of the most beautiful and splendid of automatic machines are the creations of his genius," and none "attracts so much attention as that which he possesses."⁶¹

John F. Ohl, Maelzel's wealthy friend who had financed the production of the final Panorama of Moscow, became the legal administrator of the showman's property, and the press soon gave notice that in September Maelzel's automata would be sold. The advertisement of the sale read as follows:

T. WM. L. FREEMAN,

No. 8 south Third st.

Notice—The Estate of Maelzel.

Persons at a distance are informed that the valuable exhibitions of the late Mr. Maelzel, will positively be sold on Friday morning, the 14th inst. at the store No. 229 south Front st. by order of the Administrator.

. . . the effects of the late Mr. Maelzell, all of which are carefully packed up in their respective cases and boxes, and properly assorted . . . having been recently exhibited in Havana . . . and carefully packed up under his directions, and consequently supposed to be in perfect order for exhibition here [are as follows]:

⁶¹ *United States Gazette*, July 31, 1838; *American Magazine*; *Cincinnati Gazette*, Aug. 7, 1838; *Niles' National Register*, Aug. 4, 1838.

The Automaton Chess Player,
Do Trumpeter,
Do Rope Dancers and Speaking Figures,
Six or 7 Automaton Figures for the small theatre,
The Whist Player,
The grand Panorama of Moscow,
The Carousal or Tournament,
The Pyric Fire,
A Piano.

JOHN F. OHL, Adm'r.

At Freeman's sale the Chess Player brought \$400; carrousel, \$200; fireworks, \$250; whist player, \$40; Trumpeter, \$675; rope dancers, \$225; seven small figures for theater, \$160; organ, \$35; piano, \$55; and Panorama of Moscow, \$900. The total amounted to \$2,940.⁶²

Although Maelzel had died, he was not forgotten, and his inventions survived to influence American culture. The names of all the purchasers of his automata are not known; the most valuable items were bid in by the administrator. The Chess Player was later acquired by a group of Philadelphians headed by John Kearsley Mitchell, the noted professor of medicine at Jefferson College. During 1839 and 1840, Dr. Mitchell's group reassembled the many parts and, with the help of Maelzel's assistants and from published descriptions, rediscovered the *modus operandi* of the Chess Player. It was then operated, first privately and later publicly, with William Kummer and Lloyd P. Smith, later librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia, as the hidden chess players. Dr. Mitchell himself entered the automaton to try its operating procedure. The Turk was finally deposited in the Chinese Museum, where the Charles Willson Peale and Nathan Dunn collections were housed.⁶³

On December 4, 1840, the museum advertised the public exhibition of the famous Maelzel and Kempelen Chess Player, which, it was stated, in the course of its innumerable exhibitions during three quarters of a century "has been seen by more eyes than any terrestrial object ever exhibited." The Turk had encountered the great men of history, had "played with Dr. [Benjamin] Franklin, conquered Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington, Blucher, and all the grandest military chieftains of his time." The most eminent chess

⁶² *United States Gazette*, Sept. 13, 1838; *Public Ledger*, Aug. 22 and Sept. 18, 1838.

⁶³ Fiske, 476-484.

players of America, it was reported, had all been its victims. Some public interest continued even after all its secrets were well known. Dr. Mitchell took his college class to the museum and showed them the workings of the curious manikin. Then the Turk was allowed to retire to his little niche in the museum, where he remained almost forgotten until July 5, 1854, when the National Theater and the Chinese Museum burned and the historic mechanism was destroyed.⁶⁴

Maelzel's Trumpeter was bought by a Philadelphia gentleman, who permitted Signor Blitz to exhibit it at the Great Central Fair on Logan Square in 1864. This German musical mechanism had its American counterpart. While it was in Cuba in 1838, a native in-



ANTHONY FAAS'S AUTOMATON BAND

From Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia*, III, 859.

ventor had produced another automaton said "to surpass Maelzel's famed Trumpeter," being "capable of executing the most difficult pieces of music with great brilliancy." It was exhibited in New York and Philadelphia. Anthony Faas, the Pennsylvania accordion maker, was not satisfied with its performance and spent the next twelve years working in secrecy to create a better instrument. Overcoming many technical difficulties, and even police suspicions that he was counterfeiting money, Faas produced a Trumpet Band of nine automata as large as life, consisting of two flutists, one clarinetist, two trumpeters, three bass horn players, and a bass drummer, all operated by bellows. This band was completed in 1851, and was pro-

⁶⁴ *Public Ledger*, Dec. 4 and 8, 1840; Jackson, III, 858.

claimed to be an improvement on Maelzel's work. It was exhibited as a "wonder of modern times" and received great ovations.⁶⁵

The purchaser of the slack-rope dancers was not reported, but one of the figures turned up twenty years after the sale in Thiodon's traveling "Theater of Art," and was shown in New England from 1858 to 1860. An editor in Hartford, Connecticut, who saw this "most miraculous piece of mechanism," described it as "a figure about the size of a two year old child," that performed without any visible connection with the rope. It "vaults, swings, stands on its head, hangs by one hand, suspends itself by the feet" and does all the other feats and contortions of "the living men upon the 'flying cords.'" The other one of Maelzel's two dancing show pieces was in storage in a worn-out condition after thirty years of service. No mechanic had been found who could put it in order, so intricate and complicated was its machinery.⁶⁶

The mechanical Conflagration of Moscow was retained temporarily by the administrator. Both Maelzel's original productions and those made in imitation had their influence on the theatrical world, for they appeared on the stage over a long period of time. The competing native panorama of Moscow continued playing at the American Museum in Philadelphia during 1838, while Maelzel was in Cuba, and also in 1839. It was always the climax of a show that had special live entertainment, usually comical, as its prelude. By January, 1838, the magician Desage was approaching the end of his performances with it. Dr. Harrington returned in April, 1838, and was still with the show in July. Then Dr. Valentine, the comic lecturer, took his place in September, with Canderbeck giving musical imitations on a German harp and violin. Finally, Mr. Skelline, another ventriloquist and humorist, performed early in 1839. Along with the live entertainers were "dioramic scenes of great interest and beauty," including the "Grand oriental scene: View of the city of Gaza" with a procession, in imitation of John Martin's artistic work; "a new drop scene, by Russell Smith, Esq. View Near Athens," and his drawing of Philadelphia after John Caspar Wild's work, "embracing the Navy Yard and Buildings, and the Ship of the Line Pennsylvania at an-

⁶⁵ *Public Ledger*, Mar. 8, 1838; Blitz, 171; *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* (Boston) (June 28, 1851); Jackson, III, 858-859.

⁶⁶ *Hartford Courant*, Apr. 4, 1859.

chor." Each time, the show concluded with the Moscow spectacle. This continuous exhibition in the American Museum ended on June 20, 1839, after the museum and its contents were sold by the auctioneers M. Thomas & Sons. A new American Museum opened in November, 1839, but there is no further mention of the old Moscow panorama.⁶⁷

In 1841, New York was again enjoying Maelzel's works. In January, the magician Adrien climaxed his evening of entertainment at the American Museum with "Maelzel's beautiful and unrivalled mechanical Figures, consisting of Italian Vaulteer and Pole Dancer! Turkish Juggler! Egyptian Harlequin! &c." Two years later, the same museum was showing his hand or "barrel organ on a large scale" that played "overtures . . . very nicely." Then, at the Bowery Theater, Messrs. Welsh, Bartlett & Co., staged their spectacle, "The Invasion of Russia! or, The Conflagration of Moscow!" which concluded "with a grand Dioramic view of Moscow in Flames!" This historical drama was produced "on a scale of richness and magnificence" beyond description. The diorama of Moscow in flames, "one of the most awfully sublime scenes" ever witnessed, was "painted on several thousand feet of canvass" and was wound on and moved by rollers, rather than having its parts animated mechanically. The sight, "dazzling with splendor," was viewed nightly in the theater for more than a week in February, 1841.⁶⁸

Two competing panoramas of Moscow opened in Philadelphia for the holidays at the end of 1844. One, probably not Maelzel's, began a two weeks' run at Temperance Hall on December 28; admission was twelve and a half cents. It started with entertainment by the "Johnson Family of Ethiopian minstrels." There were three performances on New Year's Day. The press failed to give further notices of this panorama, which most likely was submerged by the other grand spectacle of Moscow that opened on December 24 in the Assembly Building at fifty cents for dress-circle seats and twenty-five cents for all others. This show was authenticated as Maelzel's celebrated original and largest spectacle, the one that had previously

⁶⁷ *Public Ledger*, Jan. 8, Apr. 23 and 24, Aug. 29, Sept. 4, Oct. 12, Nov. 3, Dec. 10, 1838; Feb. 19, Mar. 26, May 24, June 13, Nov. 22, 1839.

⁶⁸ *New York Herald*, Jan. 5, Feb. 8 and 9, 1841; Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong* (New York, 1952), I, 203.

been exhibited only in Havana in 1838. Sworn testimony showed that its machinery "was made and put together by M. Maelzel and was sold by Mr. John F. Ohl, as the administrator of M. Maelzel to Mr. [P.] L. Zaionczek." The press assured the people that "this wonderful piece of historical machinery was the last and crowning work of that great original genius and the exhibition will be of unrivalled attraction, as all Maelzel's works," and "was never before exhibited in the United States." This build-up brought crowds of fascinated visitors to the performances.⁶⁹

Zaionczek, the new proprietor, already had a reputation as a performer of gymnastic feats, and had probably been an old friend of Maelzel's. In June, 1834, he had performed in Boston and had introduced some mechanical speaking figures. In August, 1836, B. G. St. John of the American Museum in New York had engaged him for his gymnastics and his automaton slack-rope puppets. He continued his exhibition of the Moscow panorama in Philadelphia in 1845 and 1846, showing it for twenty-five cents. In January, 1845, the show attracted the most respectable audiences, including the clergy and church members of all creeds. In February and March, Samuels joined the show with his legerdemain, and this act, combined with the customary pyric fires, speaking figures, and the great Moscow spectacle, drew capacity houses. Sometimes as many as two hundred persons were unable to get seats. In October, Zaionczek reopened with the automaton fortune teller, and with Harrington performing his illusions. His show continued to the end of 1845; then, in January, 1846, an opportunity was offered "to any person having a small capital, of purchasing the splendid panoramic Spectacle of the Conflagration of Moscow . . . at a great bargain." This "Beautiful Mechanical Diorama of Moscow" was last exhibited in Philadelphia at the Apollo Saloon of the Assembly Building in March, 1846, with Samuels again as the entertaining comedian.⁷⁰

The spectacle continued its career on various tours of American cities in the 1840's, but it is difficult to identify the three or four versions reported. One of Maelzel's originals was in Portsmouth,

⁶⁹ *Public Ledger*, Dec. 23, 25, 27 and 28, 1844; Jan. 14, 1845.

⁷⁰ *Boston Transcript*, June 20, 1834; letter from Nicholas B. Wainwright, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Oct. 7, 1958; *Public Ledger*, Jan. 2 and 9, Feb. 10, Mar. 4, Apr. 22, Oct. 24, Dec. 16, 1845; Jan. 7, Feb. 9, Mar. 17, 1846.

New Hampshire, in April, 1847, accompanied by the magician W. H. Young. During the next two years it also played at Detroit, Richmond, Portland, and New Haven, as well as many other places. The Moscow panorama reached the peak of its popularity in the 1850's, as its itineraries crisscrossed America. Maelzel's original copy was shown again by W. H. Young in Washington in February, 1850, and by other showmen throughout the country until 1863. The Conflagration of Moscow was so interesting that it was adopted by the theatrical world after Maelzel's individual ownerships lapsed and became a part of the public domain of general entertainment. Thus, long after John Maelzel had laid down the general principles for its first creation at Vienna in 1813, and introduced it into the United States in 1827, American theatergoers continued to thrill to the drama of this fantastic spectacle.⁷¹

Maelzel's pioneering efforts in artistic mechanical creations had considerable influence on the panorama movement itself. His productions and exhibitions were followed by an increasing number of other mechanical panoramas and dioramas, some of them imported from Europe, but more and more being made by native talent. Popular among their subjects were Napoleon's march over the Alps, the Battle of Bunker Hill, the conflagration of Charlestown, the Mexican War, the grand funeral processions of Napoleon and of Senator John C. Calhoun, shipping on the Mississippi River, railroad travel, the operations of dams, mills, and presses, gold seeking in California, the Israelites' flight from Egypt, the creation of the world, animal life on land, in the water, and in the air. All of these productions, and others, too, were shown to American viewers by moving mechanical panoramic and dioramic devices in the several decades following the death of that master of the art, John Maelzel, the royal mechanician from Vienna.

New York, N.Y.

JOSEPH EARL ARRINGTON

⁷¹ *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, Apr. 10, 1847; *Detroit Free Press*, May 5, 1847; *Richmond Enquirer*, May 9, 1848; *Portland (Me.) Advertiser*, Feb. 19, 1849; *New Haven Register*, Oct. 30, 1849; *National Intelligencer*, Feb. 14, 1850; Playbill, Bordentown, N. J., Sept. 17-19, 1860, Lib. Co. of Phila.; Hopkins, 362-367, 370-373.