



# Expert opinion

From **Chris Yeo**, Valuer at Clevedon Salerooms and regular expert on BBC's *Antiques Roadshow*

## Hitting the Right Note

The art world is filled with the fruits of human artistic endeavour; from ancient Greek pottery to Damien Hirst's pickled shark, via George Stubb's horse paintings and Faberge's eggs. Amongst this illustrious roll call who, however, amongst us would expect to find a monkey band?

Creating an orchestra of monkey musicians might seem like a questionable artistic choice, but monkeys tended to be a surefire hit in Europe's Age of Enlightenment. Anthropomorphized monkeys engaged in silly or mundane—but always thoroughly human—pursuits were one of the most popular subjects in sculpture and painting at the time, particularly in France and Germany.

I should at this juncture point out that the monkey orchestra in question was not composed of real apes but porcelain ones. In 1733, the

sculptor Johann Kändler became the chief modeller at the Meissen porcelain factory in Germany. One of his most admired designs were the monkey bands, witty examples of 18th-century singerie: subjects in which monkeys literally “ape” the behaviour of humans. The full orchestra is composed of twenty-four musicians and a conductor, all realistically modelled and fashionably dressed in 18th century attire.


In addition to a conductor and two female singers, the orchestra consists of musicians playing wind, string, and percussion instruments. There are also two instruments that were associated with rustic rather than courtly music: the bagpipe and the hurdy gurdy, in which the sound is produced by turning a hand crank that rotates a wheel that bows a set of strings. One of the most celebrated and eagerly collected of all the creations of the Meissen factory, the monkey orchestra was an instant success, especially after French fashion leader Madam de Pompadour ordered a set.

Our ceramic Simeon friends certainly hit the right note at auction. Five figures from a later edition of the orchestra were recently the focus of some spirited bidding at Clevedon, selling for a tuneful £1,400.



Staying with the musical theme, I'm delighted to announce that very shortly Clevedon Salerooms will be teaming up with the renowned St George's Bristol, combining fine art and world-class music in an exciting new partnership. ■

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**BRISTOL VALUATION DAYS\*** Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> October, Stoke Lodge, Shirehampton Rd, BS9 1BN, 10am–3pm

\*Join **Chris Yeo** and **Izzie Balmer**, as seen on BBC's *Antiques Roadshow* and *Antiques Road Trip*, along with our valuation team.

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