



# Mechanics Alive!

A Cabaret Mechanical Theatre exhibit at Explora

by Vance Bass • Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA • Photos by Marc Horovitz except where noted

Explora, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, (<https://www.explora.us/>) is a hands-on science center and children’s museum focusing on Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM). Amon Haruta is the Director of Project Management at Explora and Sheldon Hamilton is the Communications Coordinator (**photo 1**). Neither of them knew anything about automata when they started in those positions, but they were soon converted to fans when a collection of automata from Cabaret Mechanical Theatre came to Explora.

Explora’s Executive Director, Joe Hastings, had spent many years working at the Exploratorium in San Francisco before coming to Albuquerque, so he had a previous connection to Cabaret and automata. Automata have been featured at the Exploratorium many times in exhibits, workshops, and artist-in-residence programs. When



Mechanics Alive! sign as it appeared at the original Explora exhibit of automata from the Cabaret Mechanical Theatre.—Photo: Vance Bass

Cabaret put together a traveling automata exhibition called Mechanics Alive!, Explora was chosen to be the exhibit’s home base. Thus, Amon and Sheldon got a lot of personal exposure to some legendary automata and their makers. And so, of course, they became fans of automata.

I visited Explora with Marc

Horovitz to see Mechanics Alive! shortly after the museum reopened in June, 2021, having been closed for over a year due to the COVID pandemic. Amon and Sheldon gave us a tour of the exhibition and the rest of the museum. Amon told us that, when the exhibition arrived in 2019, two automata were set up

in the lobby, under a large sign announcing the show (see the **lead photo**), while the rest were placed around the museum to surprise visitors. Later, most of them were moved to a specially built area in the center of the museum. This central display is a wonderland for automata fans, featuring new or familiar pieces