

Follow the Music Trail through the Museum to explore some of the musical instruments on display in the exhibitions and the different roles music plays in our lives.

MUSIC TRAIL

museum

National Museum of Ireland

Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

1. Uilleann Pipes

Leo Rowsome handcrafted these uilleann pipes in 1922. Píobaí Uilleann, meaning pipes of the elbow, are played by pumping air from the bellows into the bag using one's elbow. The air then travels out through the chanter, producing different sounds depending on which holes are covered. These pipes saw Rowsome through his entire trailblazing career in Irish traditional music, from founding Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in 1951 to performing for an audience of 6,000 in the renowned Carnegie Hall, New York City. Though these pipes were played continuously for almost 50 years, the leather, silver, and rich velvet from which they were expertly constructed have stood the test of time.

Location:
First floor,
top of the stairs

Museum number:
Uilleann pipes,
Rowsome, Dublin, 1922



Listen here!



Music reflects culture, providing us with a sense of belonging in our time and place. What type of music reminds you of home?

2. Slide Trumpet

This slide trumpet was produced in 1840 by the music makers Robinson & Bussell, based on Westmoreland Street in Dublin city. It was presented to Trumpet Major Wm. Cowen, as is evident from the inscription in the cartouche on the trumpet's bell. The bell is also embossed with intricate floral designs and drums, reflecting the distinguished role of trumpet major. These officers managed the ranks of trumpeters, who gave signals for daily duties and ceremonies. Trumpeters also played in the army band, both for the troops as well as for the entertainment and regulation of the public.

Location:
Soldiers and Chiefs –
The British Garrison in
Ireland, Room 15

Museum number:
DF:1986.9, Slide
Trumpet, Dublin, 1840



Listen here!



3. Hurdy- Gurdy

Location:
Curator's Choice,
Room 1

Museum number:
DF:1912.770, Hurdy-
Gurdy, Derry, 1775

The hurdy-gurdy underwent several changes to its form and reputation before being phased out of the modern musical roster. This complex stringed instrument is played by rotating the crank whilst manipulating the keys. The hurdy-gurdy began life in the Catholic Church in the medieval period and was later adopted as a popular folk instrument in the 16th century. It was then coopted for its attractively rustic character by the European aristocracy in the 18th century. Constructed from satinwood with graceful fretwork and an elegantly curved scroll, this hurdy-gurdy was produced in 1775 by a music maker named J. Quig in Coleraine, Derry, likely for a wealthy Irish patron. Through all these changes, hurdy-gurdies remained a focal point for gatherings, whether religiously or socially motivated.

Does music make you feel connected to others?
In which contexts do you feel this most?



4. Dotaku Bell

Location:
Curator's Choice,
Room 1

Museum number:
DM:1887.360, Bell,
Japan, Yayoi Period, c.
200 BCE - 250 CE

The function Dotaku bells played during the Yayoi Period (300 BCE – 300 CE) in Japan is uncertain. But given that hundreds of these bells have been found scattered around the country, there is no doubt that they were deeply significant objects, fundamental to the cultural and religious life of these ancient peoples. The delicate chevron, spiral, and cross-linear ornamentation seen on this Dotaku bell speaks to its importance for the people who used it. The sound of bells is still relevant to modern life, whether for assisting in worship, signaling announcements, or marking time.



5. Harp

Location:
Out of Storage (i),
Room 2

Museum number:
DF:1900.477, Harp,
Egan, Dublin, 1825



Listen here!

Harp playing is an Irish tradition stretching back to the medieval period. However, the wire strings and limited tonal range of the traditional Irish harp did not suit early 19th century tastes. John Egan, a harp maker active in Dublin from 1801 to 1841, revitalised the tradition by replacing the wire strings with flexible cat gut as well as adding tuning forks to increase the harp's tonal range, while maintaining the shape of its ancient predecessor. Egan's invention crystallised the harp as a symbol of Irish identity and harp playing as an Irish artform. This harp furthers the association through its decorative scheme, with gilded shamrocks glinting off a background of deep green.



Is music a part of your identity? Do the songs you listen to shape how you see yourself?

6. Guitar

Location:
Out of Storage (i),
Room 2

Museum number:
DF:1908.31, Guitar,
Gibson, Dublin, 1778



Listen here!

W. Gibson, a maker based in College Green and Grafton Street, crafted this guitar in 1778. The instrument has strings posts for 10 strings and a fret board with a scalloped edge. The sound hole has a cover made of brass depicting a cherub encircled by a variety of instruments. The body of the guitar is round, unlike the hourglass shape common today which derives from a 19th century design development by Spanish maker Antonio Torres. Though the sound would differ from that of a modern guitar, the fine craftsmanship of the instrument speaks to the abiding artistic value of music and the aesthetic value of musical instruments, as important today as it was then.

HINT: Notice the cone-shaped phonograph below the guitar.



7. Record Player

The history of the record player begins in the mid-19th century with the invention of the phonograph, a sound-recording device. After several innovations, the modern record player became commercially available in the mid-20th century. This record player was made in the 1950s as part of a stereo system, the Bush radiogram. The shelves on either side can fit LPs while music is transmitted from the record player to the large speakers below. With the walnut wood of the stereo blending seamlessly into the room, it becomes a part of the furniture, highlighting the centrality of music in modern life. Record players fell out of favour with the advent of cassette tapes and CDs. But the rich, clear tones achieved by vinyl records proved their enduring popularity, rendering them a household staple for music lovers once more.



HINT:

You saw an earlier version of the record player, the phonograph, on display below the guitar.

Location:
Four Centuries of
Furniture, Room 6

Museum number:
DF:2011.10, Bush
Radiogram, United
Kingdom, c. 1950s

8. Music Room

This music room, modelled after those commonly found in prosperous 19th century households, contains three different types of instruments: a piano, a harp, and an idiophone. While pianos and harps are chordophones, with strings creating the sounds, idiophones use the vibration of the instrument itself. This example consists of wine glasses that vibrate when their brims are circled with a finger. Precise movements are needed to create the desired tones. Despite their differences, these three instruments require their practitioners to have great dexterous skill and musical instinct. These were prized accomplishments in the 19th century, which is demonstrated by the instruments' ornate carpentry, lavish gilding, and prominence in the home.



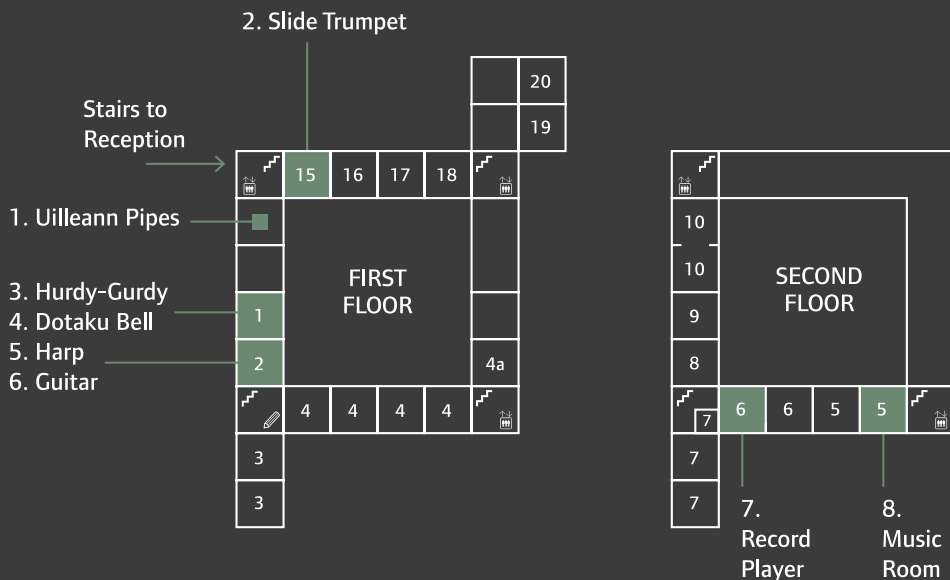
Location:
Four Centuries of
Furniture, Room 5

Museum number:
DF:1910.34, Idiophone,
possibly Irish, 19th
century; DF:1939:15,
Piano, Morland, Dublin,
1807; DF:1913:382,
Royal Portable Harp,
Egan, Dublin, 1820



Listen here!

Follow the Music Trail through the exhibitions



There are two exhibitions you can visit where music is used to enhance audience engagement. Located on the second floor, visit *Ib Jorgensen: A Fashion Retrospective* and *Alison Lowry: (A)dressing Our Hidden Truths* to experience the effect of music in museum settings.

We would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their permission to provide links to video content for this Trail:

Royal Irish Academy of Music
www.riam.ie

Irish Traditional Music Archive
www.itma.ie

Na Píobairí Uilleann
www.pipers.ie

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
www.comhaltas.ie

Nancy Hurrell,
 The Egan Irish Harps
www.hurrellharp.com/writings

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
www.mfa.org

Collins Barracks
 Benburb Street, Dublin 7

Sunday & Monday,
 1pm – 5pm

Tuesday – Saturday,
 10am – 5pm

Luas Red Line
 Museum stop

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