

Collection Significance Report: European Musical Instruments

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About this Document

This document is extracted from a report by Glasgow Museums submitted to the Scottish Executive's Recognition Committee as part of its recognition scheme for non-national collections.

Overview

Musical instruments have evolved over thousands of years, but the range and design of 'classical' instruments stabilized in the eighteenth century. There are three classes of instruments. Wind instruments make sound using a flow of air, percussion instruments make a sound by hitting them and stringed instruments make a sound by the vibration of strings.

Collection Size

About 400 musical instruments plus parts, associated cases and furniture.

The Collection

This collection is largely made up of British instruments. There are also a number of French, German, Italian and Swiss pieces. They date mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but there are a small number that date between 1600 and 1800.

The largest part of this collection was collected by the Glen family of Edinburgh instrument makers. It includes a variety of flutes, oboes, bassoons, clarinets, violins, lutes, violas, trumpets, horns and bagpipes. Another significant part of the collection came from the noted musicologist and theatre musical director Dr Henry George Farmer (1882-1965). His collection included some rare and interesting instruments from Scottish popular culture.

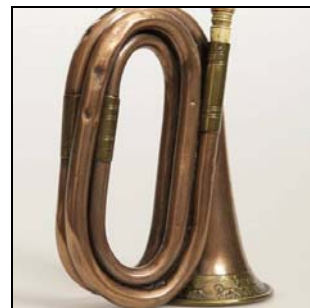
There are also a number of keyboard instruments, including the organ made by for Kelvingrove in 1901, and a rare, fully functioning, orchestrion.

Collection Significance

This is one of the largest collections of musical instruments in Scotland. It provides a good overview of classical and popular instruments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It also includes some rare and unusual individual pieces.

The Glen collection was begun by Thomas McBain Glen (1804-1873). It was one of the earliest collections of musical instruments in Scotland and items from it appeared in most exhibitions of musical instruments from 1872. This collection provides a good representation of most types of European musical instruments in use between c.1650-c.1900. It includes some rarer early items and some examples of wind instruments newly invented in the nineteenth century. A rare instrument is the transverse flute of brown boxwood and ivory. It was made in Paris around 1710 by Jean Jacques Rippert and is a fine example of a baroque flute developed at the end of the seventeenth century. This example unusually is made in three pieces rather than being made from a single piece of wood. Much of the Glen collection is currently on long-term loan to the Reid Hall Concert Hall Museum of Instruments at the University of Edinburgh.

There is also a good collection of Scottish Highland and regimental instruments such as bagpipes and drums and a small but wide-ranging group of instruments that belonged to popular local entertainers, including John Hall and Billy Connolly. An important instrument is a dancing masters kit or small fiddle made by James Aird of Glasgow in 1780. It was small enough to be played while demonstrating dance steps and quiet enough not to disturb neighbours. This is a rare example of early musical instrument manufacturing in Glasgow.



Bibliography

(1987) *Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum*, London & Glasgow, p.60.

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