

## History of the Harp

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<https://www.harp.com/history-of-the-harp/> :

Ancient Egypt (2500 BC)

The earliest evidence of the harp is found in Ancient Egypt circa 2500 BC. They were shaped like bows or angular and had very few strings.

Irish Harps (800 AD)

There are very few remaining in existence, art from that time indicates they utilized about ten or eleven strings. The first harp to feature a hollowed soundbox that amplified the instrument's sound dates back to Ireland in the 14th century. It also included a curved forepillar, a stronger neck and 30 to 36 brass strings.

Diatonic Harps (1800 AD)

Referred to as Renaissance harps, they typically had 24 or more gut strings which were fixed to the soundboard with brays (wooden pegs). By the end of the 17th century, they typically had staved sound bodies and straight forepillars.

Double-Action Pedal Harps (1810 AD)

In 1810, a double-action pedal harp was patented . . . When a pedal was depressed . . . it sharpened a semitone while the bottom disc turned partially but did not touch the string. To sharpen another semitone, the pedal was depressed again into a lower notch and the bottom disc turned further to grip the string even more. Aside from mechanical improvements, this system is still used today.

Harpo Marx (USA, 1888-1964), second oldest of the "Marx Brothers" – the popular vaudeville act and movie team of the 20's and 30's; taught himself to play the harp while never learning to read music; his two gold Lyon & Healy harps were donated to an Israeli university for student use upon his death.

**Folk, lever, and Celtic instruments**[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Celtic harp](#)

In the modern era, there is a family of mid-size harps, generally with nylon strings, and optionally with partial or full levers but without pedals. They range from two to six octaves, and are plucked with the fingers using a similar technique to the pedal harp. Though these harps evoke ties to historical European harps, their specifics are modern, and they are frequently referred to broadly as "*Celtic harps*" due to their region of revival and popular association, or more generically as "*folk harps*" due to their use in non-classical music, or as "*lever harps*" to contrast their modifying mechanism with the larger pedal harp.<sup>[38]</sup>

The modern Celtic harp began to appear in the early 19th century in Ireland, contemporary with the dying-out of earlier forms of Gaelic harp. Dublin pedal harp maker [John Egan](#) developed a new type of harp which had gut strings and semitone mechanisms like an orchestral pedal harp; it was small and curved like the historical *cláirseach* or Irish harp, but its strings were of gut and the soundbox was much lighter.<sup>[39]</sup> In the 1890s a similar new harp was also developed in Scotland as part of a Gaelic cultural revival.<sup>[40]</sup>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyon\\_%26\\_Healy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyon_%26_Healy) :

Lyon and Healy now primarily manufactures four types of harps—the *lever harp*, *petite pedal harp*, *semi-grande pedal harp*, and *concert grand harp*. They also make limited numbers of *special harps* called *concert grands*. Lyon & Healy makes electric lever harps in nontraditional colors such as pink, green, blue, and red.

THERE ARE MANY HARP MAKERS IN THE UNITED STATES WHO MAKE FOLK OR LEVER HARPS, including Lyon and Healy mentioned above. Other prominent makers are Dusty Strings Harps in Seattle, WA, Harpsicle Harps in IN, Triplett Harps in CA; Music Maker Harps in MN.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harp#As\\_a\\_symbol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harp#As_a_symbol) :

Ireland[[edit](#)]



Pub plaque, [Omagh](#)

The harp has been used as a political symbol of Ireland for centuries. Its origin is unknown but from the evidence of the ancient oral and written literature, it has been present in one form or another since at least the 6th century or before. According to tradition, [Brian Boru](#), [High King of](#)

[Ireland](#) (died at the [Battle of Clontarf](#), 1014) played the harp, as did many of the gentry in the country during the period of the [Gaelic Lordship of Ireland](#) (ended c. 1607 with the [Flight of the Earls](#) following the [Elizabethan Wars](#)).<sup>[[citation needed](#)]</sup>

In traditional Gaelic society every [clan](#) and chief of any consequence would have a resident harp player who would compose eulogies and elegies (later known as "planxties") in honour of the leader and chief men of the clan. The harp was adopted as a symbol of the [Kingdom of Ireland](#) on the coinage from 1542, and in the [Royal Standard](#) of [King James VI and I](#) in 1603 and continued to feature on all English and United Kingdom Royal Standards ever since, though the styles of the harps depicted differed in some respects. It was also used on the [Commonwealth Jack](#) of [Oliver Cromwell](#), issued in 1649 and on the [Protectorate Jack](#) issued in 1658 as well as on the Lord Protector's Standard issued on the succession of [Richard Cromwell](#) in 1658. The harp is also traditionally used on the [flag of Leinster](#).

Since 1922, the government of Ireland has used a similar left-facing harp, based on the [Trinity College Harp](#) in the [Library](#) of [Trinity College Dublin](#) as its state symbol. It first appeared on the [Great Seal of the Irish Free State](#), which in turn was replaced by the [coat of arms](#), the [Irish Presidential Standard](#) and the [Presidential Seal](#) in the 1937 [Constitution of Ireland](#). The harp emblem is used on official state seals and documents including the [Irish passport](#) and has appeared on [Irish coinage](#) from the [Middle Ages](#) to the current Irish imprints of [euro](#) coins. Irish companies such as [Guinness](#) since 1759, [Harp Lager](#) since 1960, [Irish Independent](#) since 1961 (originally in black but in green since 1972), and [Ryanair](#) since 1985 have all incorporated harps into their logos.

Elsewhere<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

The South Asian [Tamil harp yaal](#) is the symbol of [City of Jaffna](#), Sri Lanka, whose legendary root originates from a harp player.<sup>[[47](#)]</sup>

Religious<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>



St. Maria (Weingarten/[Württemberg](#))

In the context of Christianity, [heaven](#) is sometimes symbolically depicted as populated by [angels](#) playing harps, giving the instrument associations of the sacred and heavenly. In the Bible, [Genesis](#) 4:21 says that [Jubal](#), the first musician and son of [Lamech](#), was 'the father of all who play' the harp and flute.<sup>[[48](#)][[49](#)][[50](#)]</sup>

Many depictions of King David in Jewish art have him holding or playing a harp, such as a sculpture outside King David's tomb in Jerusalem. "[King David statue at King David's tomb](#)". Jerusalem.com. photo gallery. Jerusalem.

Other organisations in Ireland use the harp, but not always prominently; these include the [National University of Ireland](#) and the associated [University College Dublin](#), and the [Gaelic Athletic Association](#). In [Northern Ireland](#) the [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) and [Queen's University of Belfast](#) use the harp as part of their identity.

## History of origins

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Harps have been known since antiquity in Asia, Africa and Europe, dating back at least as early as 3000 [BCE](#). The instrument had great popularity in Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, where it evolved into a wide range of variants with new technologies, and was disseminated to Europe's colonies, finding particular popularity in Latin America.

Although some ancient members of the harp family died out in the Near East and South Asia, descendants of early harps are still played in Myanmar and parts of Africa; other variants defunct in Europe and Asia have been used by [folk musicians](#) in the modern era.