

Year 3 - Egyptian Music

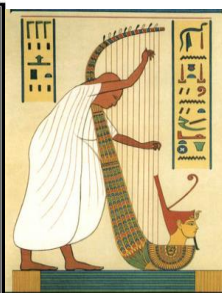
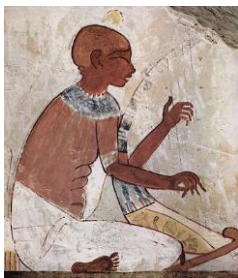


Was There Music in Ancient Egypt?

Have you ever thought of music echoing around the pyramids? What kind of music did the Egyptians have?

Ancient Egyptians enjoyed vocal and instrumental music and used it for many purposes. **Egyptian music** played a role in religious rituals and ceremonies as well as public celebrations. It was also used for entertainment on a professional level. Most of the musicians in Egypt were highly skilled, and there isn't much evidence of amateur music-making.

We've been able to learn about Egyptian music through depictions of musical activities in ancient Egyptian art, including tomb paintings and carvings. Archaeologists have also found a few examples of early instruments.



TASK - DESIGN YOUR OWN EGYPTIAN STYLE CARVING / TOMB PICTURE USING MODERN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Egyptian music featured many instruments, some associated with specific gods and goddesses. Among the musicians with the highest regard in Egyptian society were those who performed in temples, many of whom were women. Men played music too, often instruments like drums and possibly trumpets in military settings.

We don't really know what Egyptian music sounded like, because we don't have any surviving written musical compositions. Certainly, there were no recording devices to preserve sounds. But we do know about some of the instruments they used.

Ancient Egyptian Musical Instruments

Stringed Instruments

Some of the oldest and most important Egyptian musical instruments were stringed instruments. These included three sizes of **lyres**, an asymmetrical instrument with two arms and a crossbar attached to a sound box. The strings, connected to the cross bar and the sound box, were plucked to make a sound.

The Egyptians also had two styles of harps, some dating back to 3000 BC. We have many depictions of harp players in early Egyptian art, and the harps were favoured instruments. They were sometimes complex and beautiful; some were decorated with inlays of ivory, silver, and gold that signalled their importance and status as objects.



Example of an arched harp

<https://youtu.be/bqAZ28dPjPQ>

The older style was the **arched harp**, a sound box with a curved rod or arm to which the strings were attached, usually ten strings or less. The player let the body of the harp rest against them with the arch pointing outward. A later style of harp, the **angular harp**, was the larger of the two styles. It resembled an oblong box with rods or arms protruding from it to which strings were attached. The large angular harp was played standing up, and it had more strings.

Percussion Instruments

Egyptian musicians also played a wide variety of percussion instruments. One of the most important was the **sistrum**, a rattle-like instrument that was held in the hand and shaken. Sistrums, often made of wood, ceramic, or metal, looked like a closed Y with a handle and two arms that closed at the top. Bands of metal were attached between the arms and contained small metal pieces and other objects. The objects moved, smacked together, and made sounds when the sistrum was shaken. The sistrum was often used in ritual rites connected to the goddess Isis.



Example of a sistrum. This one is made of metal.

https://youtu.be/bTRkCX_4YKo

Other percussion instruments included drums (examples have been found dating to around 1400 BC), cymbals, and the menit. The **menit**, associated with the goddess Hathor, was a series of bead strands attached to a handle. When shaken, the bead strands made a sound similar to a rattle.

TASK - Make up a quiz using information from this sheet

See who can make 10 questions!

