



Harpes at the MFA (left to right): The Irish “Bunworth” *cláirseach* made by John Kelly, dated 1734; a Northern European single-row harp c. 1700; and a Holtzman single-action pedal harp c. 1785. (Photo by the author.)



William Lindsey with his daughter Leslie Lindsey Mason on her wedding day in 1915. (Courtesy of Emmanuel Church.)

## THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOSTON MFA MUSICAL INSTRUMENT COLLECTION

Nancy Hurrell

The musical instrument collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) is among the oldest in the nation, along with Washington’s Smithsonian Institution and New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Boston MFA collection originated with a donation of 560 instruments which had formerly belonged to the English collector, Francis W. Galpin (1858-1945). Local businessman William Lindsey (1852-1922) purchased the Galpin Collection and donated it to the Boston museum in 1917 as a memorial to his daughter Leslie, who had tragically lost her life two years earlier in the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania*. Renamed in her honor, the Leslie Lindsey Mason Collection was a fitting tribute to Leslie’s interest in music. This year, to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the MFA collection, special celebrations commenced with a birthday party at the museum for friends of the collection, with cake and live music. On October 19, a commemorative concert in Boston’s Lindsey Chapel, *The Lindsey Legacy: A Celebration in Music*, highlighted select instruments from the original 1917 nucleus of instruments. On



Performing on the Campbell “Boston Harp” for the *Lindsey Legacy* concert.  
(Photo by Jayme Kurland.)



MFA Musical Instruments curator Darcy Kuronen and the author following the concert in Lindsey Chapel. (Photo by Bobby Giglio.)

November 16, an unusual event at the museum, promoted as *Art in Tune: 100 Years of Musical Instruments at the MFA*, provided a rare musical treasure hunt, with twenty-one performers playing old and new instruments from the collection in eleven different galleries simultaneously! Also, throughout the year, the MFA’s Facebook page featured “Music Monday” videos of musicians demonstrating museum instruments.<sup>1</sup>

Since the founding of the MFA collection a hundred years ago, the number of instruments has almost doubled, with nearly 1,200 examples dating from ancient times to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Galpin’s collection was best known for its European examples, but today’s MFA collection spans the cultures of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas. While many of the instruments are no longer playable, the museum’s Pappalardo Curator of Musical Instruments,<sup>2</sup> Darcy Kuronen, allows instruments to be demonstrated in gallery talks if they can be safely played. Visitors to the MFA instruments gallery are often overheard saying, “You know, these old instruments need to be played to stay in good condition.” Kuronen discounts this oft-repeated popular belief as a myth.<sup>3</sup> An instrument’s material decays from the stress of playing; wooden instruments such as violins seem to have a limited performance life, and they simply wear out. Brass instruments have even shorter lives due to the moisture caused by playing; a tiny layer of

1 For the MFA harp videos, I played a single-action Holtzman harp (c. 1785) and a dital harp by Edward Light (c. 1820). See the MFA Musical Instruments YouTube channel.

2 The position of musical instrument curator was endowed by a grant from Jane Pappalardo in 2010.

3 John Koster and Darcy Kuronen, “To Play or Not to Play,” Remix lecture, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, October 26, 2017.

material is removed with each cleaning. Therefore, the museum's use of an instrument is rationed according to its fragility, and there is constant monitoring of any changes resulting from use.

Although the primary function of a musical instrument is to produce sounds, the examples in the MFA collection are also valued as works of art and as historical records of instrument manufacture, and a balance between conservation and demonstration is maintained. According to John Koster, former conservator at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, the attitudes towards conservation versus restoration have shifted in recent years, in contrast to the practices of 50 years ago.<sup>4</sup> In the past, instruments were routinely given new parts to replace old ones, and sections were structurally reinforced with the goal of making fragile instruments playable. In the 1960s, the prevailing belief was that instruments *ought* to be played, and examples from the MFA collection were available in the basement for members of the public to come in and play.<sup>5</sup> At the time, a performing ensemble, the Camerata (later known as the Boston Camerata), presented frequent concerts using the collection, and a museum music school held classes in which the students also played the MFA instruments.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a sudden realization that museums needed to be more careful, according to Koster, and the emphasis shifted to preserving the instruments. Current trends favor more of a hands-off approach for rare instruments that survive intact with original parts, and museums choose instead to commission historically accurate replicas for playing. At the MFA, there are some instruments, such as the Hensch harpsichord (c. 1736), which have already undergone several stages of restoration. The instrument is kept in working order for gallery demonstrations and also for use in concerts in conjunction with the biennial Boston Early Music Festival (BEMF).

Kuronen champions conservation while still allowing instruments to be played and heard whenever appropriate, and the MFA offers an impressive program of monthly gallery lecture/demonstrations, the only program of its kind in the country. Presenters are professional musicians drawn from the city's wealth of performing ensembles and music schools, bringing expertise and historical knowledge to the popular lecture series. Typically, a presenter briefly demonstrates the historical MFA instrument and then plays a modern replica from a personal collection.

## The Galpin Collection

The nucleus of the MFA instruments was originally collected by Britain's pioneering musicologist, Francis William Galpin. Many of the instruments were purchased in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at antique markets, and Galpin favored playable examples, as he was one of the few players of antique instruments at the time. He wrote, "To me a musical instrument is a thing of life, something that will speak to us and reveal the hidden secrets of its sound. Therefore, I made every effort to secure specimens that were playable or could be rendered so."<sup>7</sup> Galpin was part of a trend of gentlemen collectors in England at the turn of the century who acquired interesting antique musical instruments to display in their "cabinets of curiosities." In time, as one's collection outgrew the limited space of the owner's residence, it became necessary to donate the instruments to a more spacious museum where they could be appreciated by a wider audience. The English collector George Donaldson (1845-1925) gifted his significant instrument collection to the newly opened Royal College of Music in the 1890s. Another notable collector of instruments, the Englishman Frederick John Horniman (1835-1906), amassed an extensive collection that eventually prompted the construction of a new building, the Horniman Museum. In the early 1900s, Charles Paget Wade (1883-1956) purchased a Cotswold

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4 *Ibid.*

5 On a student visit to Boston in 1969, I remember entering the basement and playing one of the harps.

6 Geoffrey Burgess, *Well-tempered Woodwinds: Friedrich von Huene and the Making of Early Music in a New World* (Indiana, 2015), p. 145.

7 Francis W. Galpin, Forward in Nicholas Bessaraboff, *Ancient European Musical Instruments: An Organological Study of the Musical Instruments in the Leslie Lindsey Mason Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Cambridge, MA, 1941), p. xxiii. The Bessaraboff catalogue of the collection, published in 1941, was commissioned by the museum.

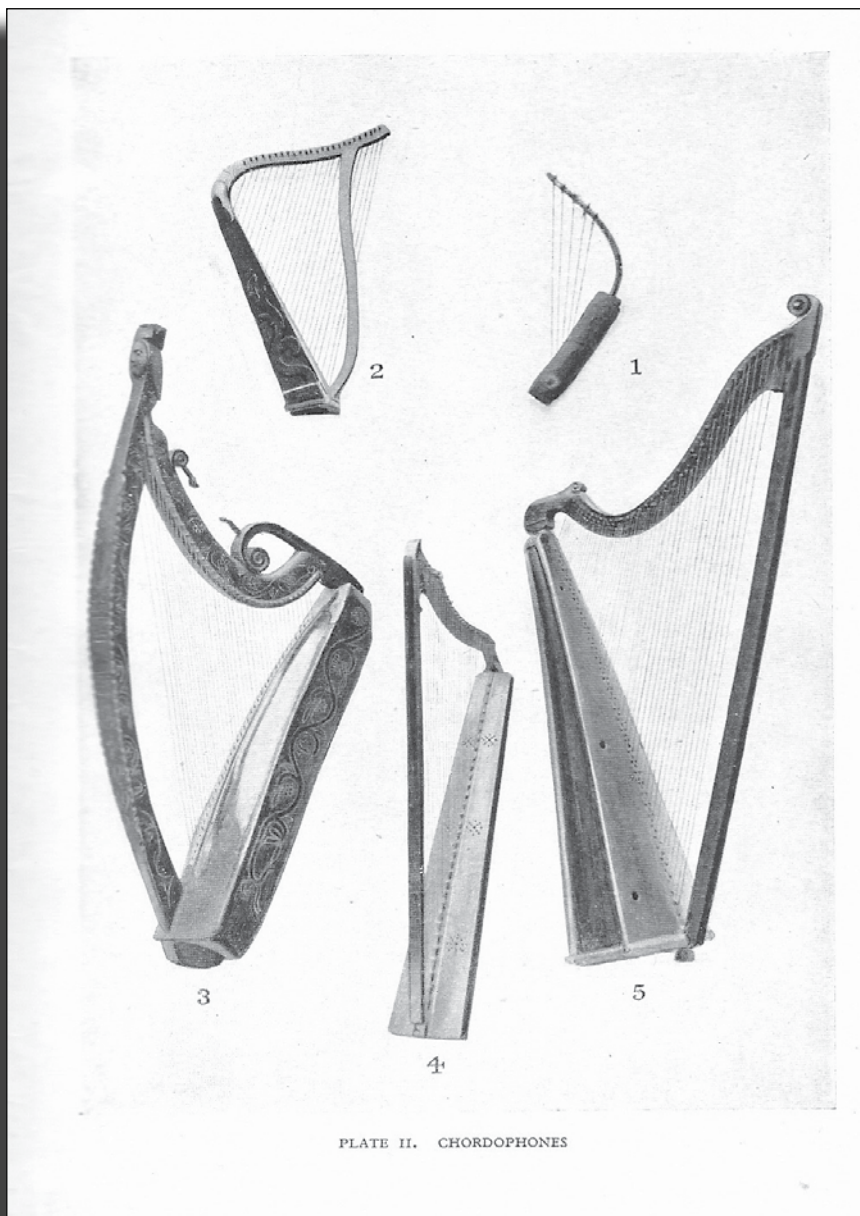


Plate in Francis Galpin's *European Musical Instruments* showing the harps in his collection, all donated to the MFA.

manor house, Snowhill Manor, to showcase his extensive collection of antiques and musical instruments as a house museum, while he lived in a small outbuilding nearby. In America, Mrs. John Crosby Brown (1842-1918) donated her large personal collection of instruments to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in 1889, laying the foundation for the first major instrument collection in an American museum.

In 1916, Galpin also sought a permanent home to house his 560 instruments (keeping 100 examples for his own personal use), and William Lindsey, a member of the board of trustees at the MFA, purchased the instruments for the Boston Museum. In addition to his celebrated instrument collection, Galpin is also credited with laying the groundwork in the field of organology through articles and his two books on musical instruments. After Galpin's death in 1946, the musicologist's work was honored by the formation of the Galpin Society, a thriving organization known for its conferences and scholarly journals devoted to the study of musical instruments.

### *The Lindsey Legacy: A Celebration in Music*

In the 1930s, Galpin wrote, "It is unfortunate that many of these museums keep their specimens in the still silence of the glass case, and, even if they are liberated from their prison-house, they are forbidden to speak."<sup>8</sup> On October 19, a few of Galpin's instruments were once again brought to life with voices soaring in the resonant space of Lindsey Chapel in Boston's Back Bay. Titled *The Lindsey Legacy: A Celebration in Music*, the unique concert celebrated the dual legacies of the Lindsey family: the MFA instrument collection and Lindsey Chapel, an architectural gem. On April 21, 1915, William Lindsey's daughter, Leslie Hawthorne Lindsey, was married to Stewart Southam Mason in Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Unfortunately, the couple was aboard the Cunard

8 Francis W. Galpin, *A Textbook of European Musical Instruments: their origin, history and character* (London, 1937), p.15.

liner RMS Lusitania on their honeymoon when it was torpedoed and sunk on May 7. To memorialize the untimely death of their daughter, in addition to the Lindsey collection of instruments, William and Anne Lindsey also oversaw the building of a magnificent chapel attached to Emmanuel Church. The Leslie Lindsey Memorial Chapel was designed in the English Gothic style with a high vaulted stone ceiling and marble floors. The space, renowned for its acoustic clarity, is a favorite venue for early music concerts. For the first time ever, the two legacies of the Lindsey family were jointly honored in the chapel concert, *The Lindsey Legacy: A Celebration in Music*.

In the stunning visual and aural space of Lindsey Chapel, eleven instruments from the MFA's original Leslie Lindsey Mason collection were played in concert, including an ocarina, a viol, a *crwth*, a *kantele*, and a guitar, as well as two replica instruments, a theorbo and a harp.<sup>9</sup> The evening's emcee, Darcy Kuronen, noted that the concert performers (apart from himself) were all female musicians, and it was somehow appropriate in the Lady Chapel honoring Leslie Lindsey Mason.<sup>10</sup> The chapel décor includes a splendid tribute to women in the form of a magnificent altar screen featuring 36 small alabaster statues of female saints from various times and nations. Another feminine icon, St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, is depicted in a stained glass window at the back of the chapel. For St. Cecilia's face, the artist rendered a realistic portrait of Leslie Lindsey Mason holding a reed organ.

### The Campbell "Boston" Harp

Galpin collected several notable European harps, including a Welsh triple harp or *telyn* made by John Richards in about 1750, an Irish *cláirseach* made by John Kelly in 1734, and a Northern European (German) single-row harp dating to 1700 or slightly earlier. Since all are too fragile to play, I was invited to perform in the Lindsey Legacy concert playing my historical replica of the Northern European harp made by Catherine Campbell in 1998. Campbell's "Boston Harp" model has a surprisingly powerful voice and rich tone emanating from a fairly shallow rectangular sound box. In the welcoming acoustical space of Lindsey Chapel, the harp easily projected its exquisite timbre and wide range of dynamics.

The maker, Catherine Campbell, first began acquiring her woodworking skills in shop class in high school, as well as working with her father at home. A professional violinist, she later gained experience working with local violin makers in their workshops, where she made repairs to instruments. She also gained a wealth of information from studying articles in luthier journals such as the *Catgut Acoustical Society Journal*, *The American Luthiers Journal*, *the Folk Harp Journal*, FoMRHI,<sup>11</sup> and the *Galpin Society Journal*. Campbell credits the town where she lives, Port Townsend, Washington, known as a boat builder's town, as another important influence, for it gave her access to large, fine pieces of wood, and she also gained useful advice over the years from local woodworkers.<sup>12</sup> Campbell now produces a range of historical harp models, but her very first harp was a replica of the MFA's Northern European harp.<sup>13</sup> She had discovered the harp in an illustration in an early edition of the *Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* and was immediately attracted to the instrument. The illustration in *Grove* had actually come from Galpin's 1937 work, *A Textbook of European Musical Instruments*.<sup>14</sup> The plate titled "chordophones" presents drawings of Galpin's harp collection, which was included in the 1917 donation to the MFA.

Campbell learned of the existence of a technical drawing of the Northern European harp during a visit to South Dakota's Shrine to Music Museum (now renamed the National Music Museum). She had visited the museum to

9 The original theorbo and harp in the Lindsey collection are no longer playable.

10 The performers were Shirley Hunt, Nancy Hurrell, Laura Jeppesen, Darcy Kuronen, Catherine Liddell, Sarah Paysnick, and Emerald Rae.

11 The Fellowship of Makers and Researchers of Historic Instruments. See <http://www.fomrhi.org>.

12 Email communication from Catherine Campbell, November 1, 2017.

13 See the Campbell Harps website: <https://campbellharps.com/>.

14 Galpin, op. cit., plate 2, facing p. 78.

examine the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian harp, which she later copied for her “Vermillion” model, and in conversation with the conservator John Koster, learned that he had made a technical drawing of the MFA harp a few years earlier.<sup>15</sup> A copy of the MFA drawing was purchased, and, using her experience in violin-making techniques, Campbell constructed her first “Boston Harp” in 1992. Since then, she has made over sixty “Boston Harps,” with several played by Historical Harp Society members.<sup>16</sup> The harp’s slender profile, with the pillar culminating in a hook-shaped finial, the sculpted “lip” on the harmonic curve, large bray pins, and tiny perforated clusters for sound holes, give the instrument a distinctive appearance. In recent years, she has made a slightly enlarged version of the model to incorporate a wider string spacing requested by some players. The popular historical replica of the MFA German harp has enabled players over the years to experience the bright tonal spectrum of an early harp with brays.<sup>17</sup>

Technical drawings have been made for only a dozen MFA instruments, and in the case of the Northern European

harp, the drawing was a positive byproduct of an otherwise unfortunate episode in the harp’s history. During the ill-conceived era of altering historical instruments to make them playable, the German harp underwent extensive alterations in 1964.<sup>18</sup> Weakened by woodworm damage and cracks, the soundboard was braced on the inside with wooden cross strips, and a plate of plywood was glued to the underside of the soundboard. The restorer restrung the harp with nylon strings, but was unhappy with the dull sound of the longer strings in the bass. It was decided to put wire strings on the harp instead! Quite soon it became evident that the bray pins were unable to hold the high-tensioned metal strings, and so new holes were drilled beside each original string hole with ivory pegs *glued* into the holes. The harp’s original staples tended to break the wire strings, and consequently they were removed. In 1979, John Koster performed another restoration of the harp, to undo the over-zealous alterations of the 1960s and to restore the instrument to a more original state. He carefully removed the wire strings, wooden plate, and other modern alterations, and while the harp was in pieces, was able to make a full-scale technical drawing of the instrument. The positive outcome of a series of unfortunate events was Koster’s important drawing, which enabled the building of many playable replicas of the MFA German harp.



Detail of the Northern European harp with brays in the MFA collection. (Photo by the author.)

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15 These plans are still available to purchase for \$35 on the MFA website.

16 In 2013, Campbell’s first “Boston Harp” model was on view at the Museum of Making Music in Carlsbad, California, for the exhibition *The Harp: a global story of man, music & medicine*.

17 On a personal note, I purchased my Campbell “Boston Harp” in 2000, the summer before moving to Boston. To see the original harp hanging on the wall of the MFA gallery was thrilling, and since then I have played my harp in many gallery talks at the museum.

18 The 1964 “Restoration Data” report by George F. Brewer in the MFA archives states that the “first plan” was to “put the instrument into playable condition” and to discover the function of the “L-shaped string pins” (bray pins), questioning whether they might have been used for changing keys! For clues as to stringing and tuning, the restorer turned to “contemporary concert harps and Irish harps.” The idea of using metal strings may have been prompted by the Irish wire-strung Bunworth harp in the MFA collection. For the nylon stringing, he used modern concert harp strings brought up to pitch, which caused new cracks in the soundboard. The wire stringing broke the bray pins, and in the end the restorer concluded that the harp was not meant to be strung with wire.



Hurrell playing the MFA 1820s Royal Portable Irish harp in the English Regency Gallery. (Photo by Haley Hewitt.)



The Royal Portable Irish harp by John Egan c. 1820. (Photo by author.)

## Art in Tune: 100 Years of Musical Instruments at the MFA

In the spirit of Francis Galpin, who frequently demonstrated the instruments in his collection, the centennial MFA event in November, *Art in Tune*, was an incredible showcase of rare instrumental performances. For two hours, twenty-one musicians played historical and modern instruments in galleries throughout the museum. Performers were thematically placed, matching the period and country of each instrument with the museum's art gallery representing the culture. The Chinese *pipa* was played in the Chinese Ceramics gallery, and in the Ancient Greece galleries, visitors experienced the Greek *lyra* and *laouto* in performance. The Nineteenth Century European Paintings gallery featured flutes and guitars playing period pieces, and in the American Modernism wing, electric violin and steel guitar matched the artwork with sounds of jazz improvisations.

Playing an 1820s Royal Portable Irish Harp by John Egan, I was placed in the English Regency gallery, which displayed neoclassical furniture decorated with the same motifs of swirling acanthus leaves as seen in the harp's painted ornaments. The gilt bust of George IV in the center of the room was appropriately placed, for Egan was harp maker to the King, and a royal inscription to "George the 4th" is painted in gold on the harp's soundboard. Replicating the repertoire of a Regency harpist, I played a mixture of opera themes, Bochsá solos, and Irish airs, all drawn from period collections surviving in the British Library in London. In addition, I briefly demonstrated an English dital harp made by Edward Light, decorated in a gilt Chinoiserie theme. Afterwards, at a reception for the performers, we shared our common experience of packed galleries throughout the evening, confirming the extraordinary public response to a once-in-a-lifetime event.

### The MFA Harp Collection

There are currently 14 harps in the MFA Collection; however, only three are currently on view in the instrument

gallery.<sup>19</sup> Since I began working as a harp consultant in 2001, four harps have been purchased,<sup>20</sup> and the museum commissioned from David Kortier a stunning replica of the rare 1734 Irish “Bunworth” *cláirseach*. The MFA harp collection has come out of storage for two conferences of the Historical Harp Society (2003, 2009), and for a lecture for the Boston Harp Society (2001). In collaboration with the Historical Harp Society of Ireland, a Gaelic Harp Conference in 2011 celebrated the debut of the Kortier Bunworth replica *cláirseach*, which was played in a concert by Ann Heymann. It has been a privilege to restring, show, and play the MFA harps in monthly gallery talks, conferences of the American Musical Instrument Society (AMIS), exhibition openings, and programs for Boston music school students. The distinctive sound, look, and feel of each historical harp in the MFA collection provides valuable insights into the music-making of former cultures. ❖

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19 See <http://www.mfa.org/collections/musical-instruments/tour/harps>

20 Later harps acquired by the MFA: a London Érard Grecian double-action pedal harp, c. 1815; a John Egan 1820s Royal Portable Irish Harp; a George Freemantle single-action pedal, c. 1865 (made in Boston); and a Pleyel, Wolff Lyon & Cie cross-strung harpe chromatique with an Art Nouveau gilt metal swan sculpture on the finial, c. 1900.

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## ON THE COVER

# THE JOHN ROBERTS FAMILY ENSEMBLE PLAYING FOR QUEEN VICTORIA

by Samuel Milligan

*In a conversation with Nancy Hurrell, I mentioned that while my family name is Irish, my lineage is overwhelmingly Welsh with a trace of Breton—three great harp playing traditions of which I am intensely proud. That being so, Nancy asked if I knew the memoirs of John Roberts’ grandson, E. Ernest Roberts.<sup>1</sup> I did not, but found a copy which furnished the cover for this issue as well as a lot of information about the Roberts family. So thanks to Nancy for bringing all this to mind. And thanks, too, to the National Library of Wales, Cardiff, for permission to reprint both the cover illustration and the picture of John Roberts.*

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1 Roberts, E. Ernest, *With harp, fiddle and folktale*, published by the author and distributed by the Welsh Books Centre, Aberystwyth, Dyfed.