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R O Y A L
C O L L E G E
O F M U S I C
London

Royal College of Music Museum

Western Classical Music - KS3 & 4
Harp Pack

Pedal harp by Sébastien Érard (London, 1800)

The harp has been around since Ancient Egyptian times, but it became a member of the orchestra in the romantic period (c.1810 – 1900).



This beautiful harp is on display in the Royal College of Music Museum. The man who made it, Sébastien Érard, was famous for making harps and pianos.

Music in the Romantic period was becoming increasingly expressive, with new combinations of chords, keys and harmonies. The chromatic scale became more widely used.

Harps were not built to play all these chromatic notes, so Sébastien Érard decided to try to solve this problem. He invented a pedal system (see the pedals at the bottom of this harp) that increased the number of chromatic notes the harp could play.

But how could the gentle harp be heard in these huge romantic orchestras? Romantic music had lots of dynamic contrast, so in the softer moments you can still hear the harp in the texture.

During his lifetime, Sébastien Érard (right) made instruments for King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, but he had to flee France to escape the French Revolution (making harps and pianos for royalty made him unpopular).



WATCH: Instrument: Harp

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2Xdb1lj3g>

