

Press release

Temporary exhibition

13 September 2017 / 15 January 2018

MUSIC!

Echoes of Antiquity

Let the crotales ring and the trumpets sound! The Louvre-Lens Museum presents the very first exhibition dedicated to the role of music in the great ancient civilisations, from the Orient to Rome via Egypt and Greece.



Stele: the blind singer Djedkhonsouiefankh plays the harp before the god Re-Horakhty.
Egypt, Thebes?, 1069-664 BC, painted wood, Paris, musée du Louvre
© Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN-GP / Christian Decamps

Music was an ever-present aspect of ancient cultures, where it served several functions. Whether played by professional musicians or amateurs, it accompanied people through the various stages of their lives, from the cradle to the grave. Just as likely to be heard on the battlefield as it was around the high tables of power, it was also a key part of religious rites and acted as an intermediary between people and their gods. Known by all and played by many, music represents an original yet universal key, with which our visitors can unlock the secrets of civilisations, which vanished long ago, and discover their social, political and religious workings.

From Mesopotamian cylinder seals to monumental Roman reliefs, taking in Egyptian papyri and Greek vases along the way, the exhibition brings together almost 400 incredibly diverse items. Some of these often-fragile pieces have never been displayed before. They are taken from the collections of the Louvre museum and around twenty other institutions, both in France and further afield, including the National Museum of Athens and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The exhibition's journey through time also includes new audio devices, which allow visitors to listen to reconstructions of what ancient instruments may have sounded like, as well as the oldest anthem known to mankind.



Statue: Satyr with kroupeza, «The invitation to the dance». Rome, 2nd century AC (copy of a Greek original from the 2nd century BC), marble, Paris, musée du Louvre
© Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-GP / Thierry Ollivier

It is difficult for anyone living in the 21st century to imagine the role of music in ancient cultures, especially since no sound from Antiquity survives to this day for our listening pleasure. On the other hand, musical instruments, sound-producing objects, musical notation and many depictions of musicians have been miraculously preserved, allowing us to tune in to 3,000 years of history. From modest hand-crafted creations to priceless masterpieces, our abundant and diverse collection of musical scenes - statues, ceramics, mosaics, and even coins - clearly shows the importance of music in Antiquity. This is also amply demonstrated by the remains of musical instruments, which reveal the astonishing know-how of the makers and the richness of the materials used: leather, bronze, bone, ivory, wood and more.

From Iran to Gaul, and from the 3rd millennium BC to the 4th century AD: the enormous geographical and chronological range of the exhibition allows us to underline cultural traditions and peculiarities, but also to highlight the exchanges, influences and cross-pollination that took place between these different musical civilisations, which are often considered the foundation of our own musical heritage. As such, our rattles, harps, flutes and cymbals date back several thousands of years.

By revisiting the often-reductive image of ancient music as it appears in the Western imagination - inherited from 19th century clichés and popularised by opera, comics and Hollywood epics - the exhibition and the rich cultural programme that accompany it remind us that today, just as in the past, music and sounds have the power to captivate, beguile, comfort, frighten and excite us as they soundtrack the major events of our public and private lives.



Attic red-figure bowl by Macron: School scene (detail), Athens, 480-470 BC, ceramic, Paris, musée du Louvre
© RMN-GP (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski

Orpheus mosaic (detail), ancient city of Vienne, end of the 2nd century AC, Saint-Romain-en-Gal, musée gallo-romain
© Paul Veyssière, musée de Saint-Romain-en-Gal (Vienne - southeastern France)



This exhibition at the Louvre-Lens museum builds on a research programme created by the French Schools Overseas titled «Sonic landscapes and urban spaces of the ancient Mediterranean», led by the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology, the French School at Athens and the French School at Rome. It therefore provides an overview of current research in the field, which is varied and extensive thanks to the work of curators, historians, archaeologists, ethnomusicologists, acousticians and archaeometrists.

The exhibition is jointly organised by the Louvre-Lens museum, the Fundación “la Caixa” and the Louvre museum.

It was created in conjunction with the French Schools Overseas: the French School at Rome, the French School at Athens, and the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology.

It benefits from the exceptional support of the Fondation Crédit Mutuel Nord Europe.



Double flute player, Idalion (Cyprus), 600-575 BC, limestone, Paris, musée du Louvre
© RMN-GP (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux



Drum, Egypt, unknown origin, 664-332 BC, wood, leather, hide straps, Paris, musée du Louvre
© RMN-GP (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux

THE EXHIBITION IN FIGURES

- 1,9:** in centimetres, the smallest item on display. The piece is a silver coin (didrachma) from Delos in the Cyclades (Greece). It is decorated with the image of a zither and is usually kept at the National Library of France.
- 22:** the number of lenders who have contributed to the exhibition.
- 33:** the number of different instruments displayed or represented in the exhibition (wind, string and percussion).
- 219:** in centimetres, the largest item on display. This is the sarcophagus of Julia Tyrrania, kept at the Museum of Ancient Arles.
- 374:** the number of items on display.

CURATORS

Sibylle Emerit, former member of the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology, CNRS UMR 5189 HISOMA ; **Hélène Guichard**, Louvre museum, department of Egyptian antiquities ; **Violaine Jeammet**, Louvre museum, department of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman antiquities ; **Sylvain Perrot**, former member of the French School at Athens, Academy of Strasbourg ; **Ariane Thomas**, Louvre museum, department of Oriental antiquities ; **Christophe Vendries**, university of Rennes II ; **Alexandre Vincent**, former member of the French School at Rome, university of Poitiers, **Nele Ziegler**, CNRS UMR 7192.

Scenography: AtoY - Naori Yamazoe and Chiaki Yatsui.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Exhibition from 13 September 2017 to 15 January 2018.

Open daily from 10 AM to 6 PM.

Closed on Tuesdays, 25 December and 1 January.

Free entry for under 18 year olds / 18-25 year olds: 5€ / Full price: 10€

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#expoMusiques

After Lens, the exhibition will be displayed at the Caixa Forum Barcelona from 8 February to 6 May 2018, then at the Caixa Forum Madrid from 6 June to 16 September 2018.

PRESS CONTACTS

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