

# Magical MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The Galleria dell'Accademia is best known for sheltering Michelangelo's iconic statue of David, one of the crown jewels of Renaissance art. In a side room of that same gallery is a hidden gem that offers a feast for the ears as well as the eyes. Opened in 2001, the Museum of Musical Instruments of Florence showcases the pivotal role music played in the Medici court.

On display are about 50 musical instruments from the private collections of the grand dukes of Tuscany, the Medici and Lorena. Gathered from the late 17th century to the early 19th century, they were given to the Cherubini Conservatory in Florence, which loaned them to the galleria in 1996. An audio system allows visitors to hear the music created by all the instruments on display, while providing information about the history of music in Florence at the time of the grand dukes. Entrance is included in the galleria's ticket.

The museum pays particular attention to the invention of the piano, which was first created for the Medici by Bartolomeo Cristofori. Renowned for the quality of the harpsichords he handcrafted, Cristofori was called into the court of Grand Duke Ferdinando. While experimenting with new



approaches to the instrument, he developed a mechanism that allows the strings to be struck with small, padded hammers rather than being plucked. This allowed for a wide range of volume, with the resulting instrument being dubbed the "pianoforte," literally "soft-loud."

Amid a variety of keyboard, wind, string and percussion instruments, you'll find a unique piece by master string-instrument maker Antonio Stradivari. He created the tenor viola on display for the renowned Medici Quintet, an ensemble of two violins, two violas and a cello. Built of spruce and maple, his viola boasts a mother-of-pearl, ivory and ebony inlay and Medici crest that make it unique.

The museum also exhibits paintings of musicians of the Medici court. Among them is a work by Anton Domenico Gabbiani, an artist in the employ of Grand Duke Ferdinando. Gabbiani's portrait is so faithful, it's possible to identify Pietro Salvetti and Francesco Veracini, composers and music directors for the Medici.

— by Francesca Papi  
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