Egan Harp Collection

circa 1819-1820s

IMC.M182

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### Summary Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Unit</th>
<th>Irish Music Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>Egan, John, active 1803-1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Egan harp collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date [inclusive]</td>
<td>circa 1819-1820s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>3.33 Linear feet (2 objects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>This collection contains two Portable Irish Harps by nineteenth century Irish harp maker John Egan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administrative Information

Publication Information

Processed by Nancy Hurrell, Sarah Nitenson, and Elizabeth Sweeney, March 2015. This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit.

Restrictions on access

Collection is open for research. Off-shelf viewing is by appointment, supervised by a staff member to ensure safe handling. The harps are too fragile to be strung at full tension, and therefore are not playable.

Provenance

The Portable Irish Harp was a gift of Patricia Bakwin Selch and Dr. Frederick R. Selch, 2005. The Royal Portable Irish Harp was a gift of Heidi Nitze, 2002.
Biographical note

John Egan, Dublin's leading harp maker of the early nineteenth century, manufactured a variety of harps between circa 1804 and 1839. Egan produced gut-strung pedal and portable harps for aristocratic ladies and also made a wire-strung model, called the Improved Irish Harp, for Irish harp societies aiming to revive Ireland's ancient harp traditions. Egan's most famous model was the Portable Irish Harp, whose shape was loosely based on the ancient Gaelic harps. These instruments were fitted with fretting mechanisms to facilitate changes in pitch -- ring stops or his innovative ivory ditals -- on the inner side of the forepillar. Portable Irish Harps were about three feet tall (like the famous Brian Boru harp), had soundboxes with rounded backs, and were lightweight and suitable for traveling. They were available in black, blue, or green, and were handsomely decorated with golden shamrocks. Egan's model was copied by successive generations of harp makers and was the inspiration for today's Irish or Celtic harp.

In 1821, Egan was granted the royal warrant for his harps, becoming "Harp maker to His Royal Highness George IV," and his portable model became the Royal Portable Irish Harp. George IV was known for his patronage for the arts, and several members of the Royal Family played Egan harps.

Sources


Scope and Contents note

This collection contains two Portable Irish Harps by nineteenth century Irish harp maker John Egan.

The Portable Irish Harp was made by John Egan, circa 1819, and is inscribed on the brass plate: John Egan - Inventor. / Dawson St. Dublin. The harp is handsomely decorated with gilt shamrocks, scrolls, and swirling acanthus leaves on a blue background. Its shape is similar to ancient Irish harps, with a bowed pillar and a high-headed extension. It was made for 30 strings. A leather strap or satin ribbon would have been attached to three small brass knobs, found on the lower front of the pillar and the top of the neck on both sides. Inside the harp is a stabilizing rod with a small wooden foot attached. The rod is secured by the brass screw on the back. When extended to the floor, the rod provided support while the harp was held on the lap of the player.

The Royal Portable Irish Harp was made in the 1820s by John Egan, and is inscribed on the brass plate: J. Egan 30 Dawson St. Dublin / Harp Maker by Authority of the Royal Warrant to His Most Gracious Majesty George IVth & the Royal Family / No. 2036. The harp is green and decorated with strands of golden shamrocks and swirling acanthus leaves. It has a slightly bowed pillar with a rounded top, curved back, and 33 strings. There is a rubbed out area on the brass plates where a coat of arms might have once have existed. It is possible that a royal insignia may have been purposely removed due to anti-British sentiment.
**Collection Inventory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portable Irish Harp, circa 1819</th>
<th>Object 1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Royal Portable Irish Harp, circa 1820s</td>
<td>Object 2</td>
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