

*Journal of the
American Musical
Instrument Society*

VOLUME XVIII • 1992



Copyright by the [American Musical Instrument Society](#).
Content may be used in accordance with the principles of fair
use under [Section 107 of the United States Copyright Act](#).
Content may not be reproduced for commercial purposes.

The five articles are preceded by a well-written ten-page introduction to the acoustics of the piano. The book contains solid information on the acoustics of the piano, and there is nothing else quite like it. All the articles are written in an interesting fashion and should be comprehensible to any educated musician, although some readers may well need to go through the material several times before comprehension takes hold. The book should be on the shelf of every mature and thoughtful pianist, and required reading for anyone interested in musical acoustics.

EDWARD L. KOTTICK
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Martha Maas and Jane McIntosh Snyder. *Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989. xx, 261 pp.; 165 black-and-white illustrations. ISBN 0-300-03686-8. \$45.00.

A 1991 winner of the American Musical Instrument Society's prestigious Nicolas Bessaraboff Prize for the most distinguished book-length work which best furthers the Society's goal "to promote study of the history, design, and use of musical instruments in all cultures and from all periods," *Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece* is a monumental scholarly study, the comprehensiveness of which is approached by no other published work in its field. An amalgam of the highest quality of musicological, iconographical, and literary research, this outstanding book provides the best-informed insight currently available into the musical life and the musical instruments of the ancient Greeks.

Authors Maas and Snyder, both distinguished scholars in their fields, are on the faculty of Ohio State University, in the departments of music and the classics, respectively. In the preparation for this, their first collaborative effort, they studied nearly 2,000 artistic representations (vase paintings and sculpture) and the more than 700 literary references (in surviving epic and lyric poetry and drama) to plucked stringed instruments in ancient Greece, dating from about 2700 B.C. to the deaths of Alexander the Great and Aristotle in 323–322 B.C. The dependence upon iconographic and literary source material was necessitated by the scarcity of archaeological evidence for the existence and use of the three types of stringed instruments popular in Greece during that time period—the lyre, the harp, and the lute.

As in all studies based primarily upon iconographical and literary sources, the authors had to deal with a myriad of potential problems and

pitfalls which, once entered into the data base, can strongly influence interpretations and hypotheses. These include the difficulty of accurately dating sources; artistic license; historic and cultural artistic conventions; the perceived abundance, or lack thereof, of literary and artistic references to certain instruments in various eras; and the difficulty (or even the inability) of linking names of instruments found in literature with unnamed artistic depictions, to mention just a few. Bearing such problems in mind, Maas and Snyder nevertheless sensitively present their own informed interpretations of, and hypotheses concerning the structure, playing technique, history, musical and cultural use of the plucked stringed instruments of ancient Greece. In addition, as a result of combining the authors' iconographic and philologic expertise, some new interpretations of previously misunderstood references to musical instruments in Greek literature are proposed.

Although the three principal plucked stringed instruments of ancient Greece are all scrutinized, it is entirely appropriate that the greatest attention is focused upon the various forms of the lyre, one of the most important stringed instrument types in the Classical Greek world. These include the *kithara* (a highly developed lyre which was the chief instrument associated with the god Apollo); the *chelys-lyra* (often represented in association with the Muses); the *barbitos* (an elongated tenor lyre associated with the cults of Dionysos and Eros); and the *phorminx* (a lyre with a round base, the function of which changed greatly over the centuries). The harp and lute, of less importance to ancient Greek culture, receive much less, although certainly adequate coverage.

The book is technically well produced, with 165 clear, black-and-white illustrations, helpful lists detailing the sources of all the iconographical objects mentioned, accessible endnotes, a comprehensive bibliography of materials published before 1984, and an index.

Well deserving of its Nicolas Bessaraboff Award, *Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece* will undoubtedly remain the primary resource in its field for some time.

MARGARET DOWNIE BANKS
SHRINE TO MUSIC MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA