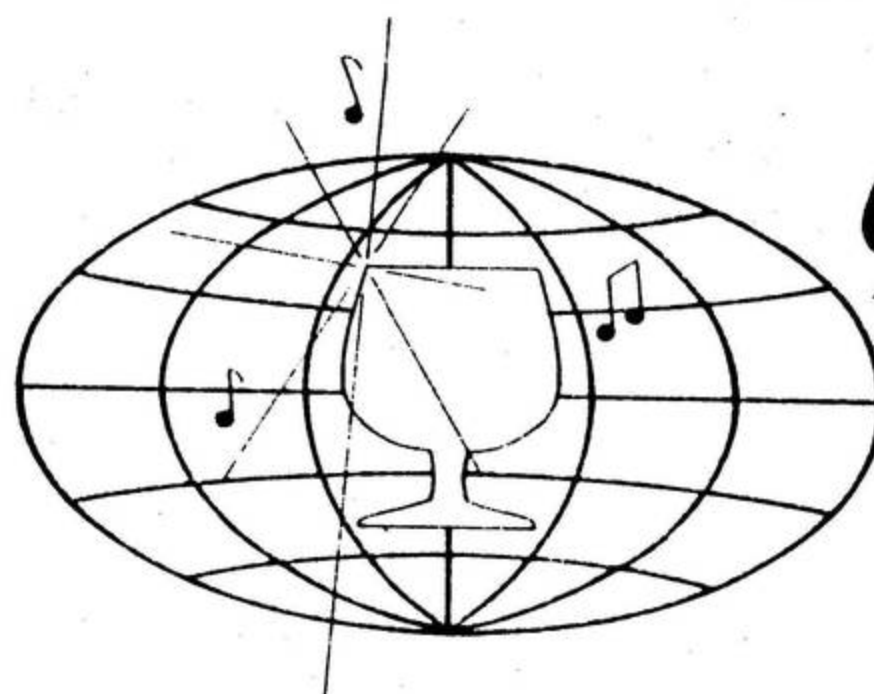


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The Development of Musical Glasses Prior to the Eighteenth Century

Lynn Drye, Percussionist
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(Article continued from April 1995)

MUSICAL GLASSES IN EUROPE

It is possible that the knowledge of using water-tuned vessels for musical use may have developed independently in Europe. The earliest record of the use of musical vessels in Europe is found in Franchinus Gaforus's *Practica musicae*, published at Milan in 1492. It contains a woodcut which shows a Pythagorean experiment; six bells and six musical glasses are being used to demonstrate harmonic intervals (Fig 3). The glasses are filled with water and are being struck with long sticks by individual performers.⁶ Another reference to musical glasses is found in G.P. Harsdorfer's *Deliciae physicomathematicae*, published in Nurnberg in 1677. In it, he refers to "making a cheerful wine music" by filling eight glasses with progressively increasing quantities of wine, and then stroking their rims with a moistened finger.⁷

It was not until the early eighteenth century that musical glasses came into serious musical use in Europe, having previously been regarded as scientific toys or used for novel amusement at social gatherings. By the 1730's references were made to using sets of tuned glasses for concert music. Walther's *Musicalisches Lexikon* of 1732 notes that a Christian Gottfried Helmond of Silesia used to play concertos on the glasses, accompanied by violins and bass. In his *Musicus* of 1738, Eisel mentions that the glasses were used to play music in



Fig. 3 Pythagorean experiment

church and on other ceremonial occasions. He also gives directions for making a "verillon," an instruments consisting of eighteen beer glasses arranged on a cloth-covered board. Water is used to alter the pitch of the glasses. Two long sticks, in the shape of a spoon and covered with cloth, are used to tap both sides of the glasses (Fig. 4). It is interesting that although the principle of stroking the rims was known in 1677, both Walther and Eisel refer solely to tapping the glasses.⁸

REBIRTH of the GLASS HARMONICA

(Continued from Page 2)

During one of the GMI Music Festivals hosted by The Corning Museum of Glass, in Corning, N.Y. I met Sascha Reckert, a gifted musician from Germany who also was interested in making and tinkering with glass instruments.

Later on he spent some time at my factory in Waltham, MA, and we did exchange ideas and opinions on various subjects concerning the Glass Harmonica. Sascha seemed to be more inclined to use the original type of glass for his glass harmonica, while I was more interested to experiment with new and better sounding glasses. Thus, leading me to my use of 'QUARTZ'.

(Article continued next issue.)

A NOTE FROM PROF. RICHARD WEISS

Some of the recent history of the Glass Harmonica should include Professor Emeritus Charles Taylor, formerly of the Physics Dept. at the University of Cardiff, Wales. He had been approached by the BBC in the late '80's to do a program on the acoustics of various musical instruments.

He borrowed the 18th century Glass Harmonica from the Museum at the Royal College of Music in London and had the glass blower at the Royal College of Art fabricate some replacement bowls for those that were defective. In his efforts to set the glasses singing, Prof. Taylor found they had an annoyingly slow rise time.

This information was later passed on to Gerhard Finkenbeiner, of G. Finkenbeiner, Inc. a scientific glass blowing company in Waltham, MA, whose genius with "glass" produced a most playable musical instrument by using 'quartz', 100% pure silicon dioxide.

I also call everyone's attention to the audio tape by Fredd Wayne whose appearances in Hollywood movies date back to the 1950's. He does a 70 minute Franklin monologue called BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, CITIZEN, in which he plays the harmonica as well as sings. It is available for \$16.00, postage included, by calling 1-800-231-4261.

RICHARD

(Ed. note: Prof. Weiss is a physicist and authority on Dr. Ben Franklin.)

MUSICAL GLASSES IN EUROPE

(Continued from Page 1)

The most important person to give serious performances on the musical glasses in western Europe was an Irishman named Richard Pockrich. Pockrich called the glasses his "angelick organ."⁷ He used wine glasses which were tuned with water and fixed in position on a table.⁹ Although, he probably tapped them with sticks at first, Pockrich is credited with refining the techniques of stroking the rims.¹⁰ Later performers on the

musical glasses, who ranged from popular entertainers to the higher ranks of society, all favored the friction method popularized by Richard Pockrich.¹¹

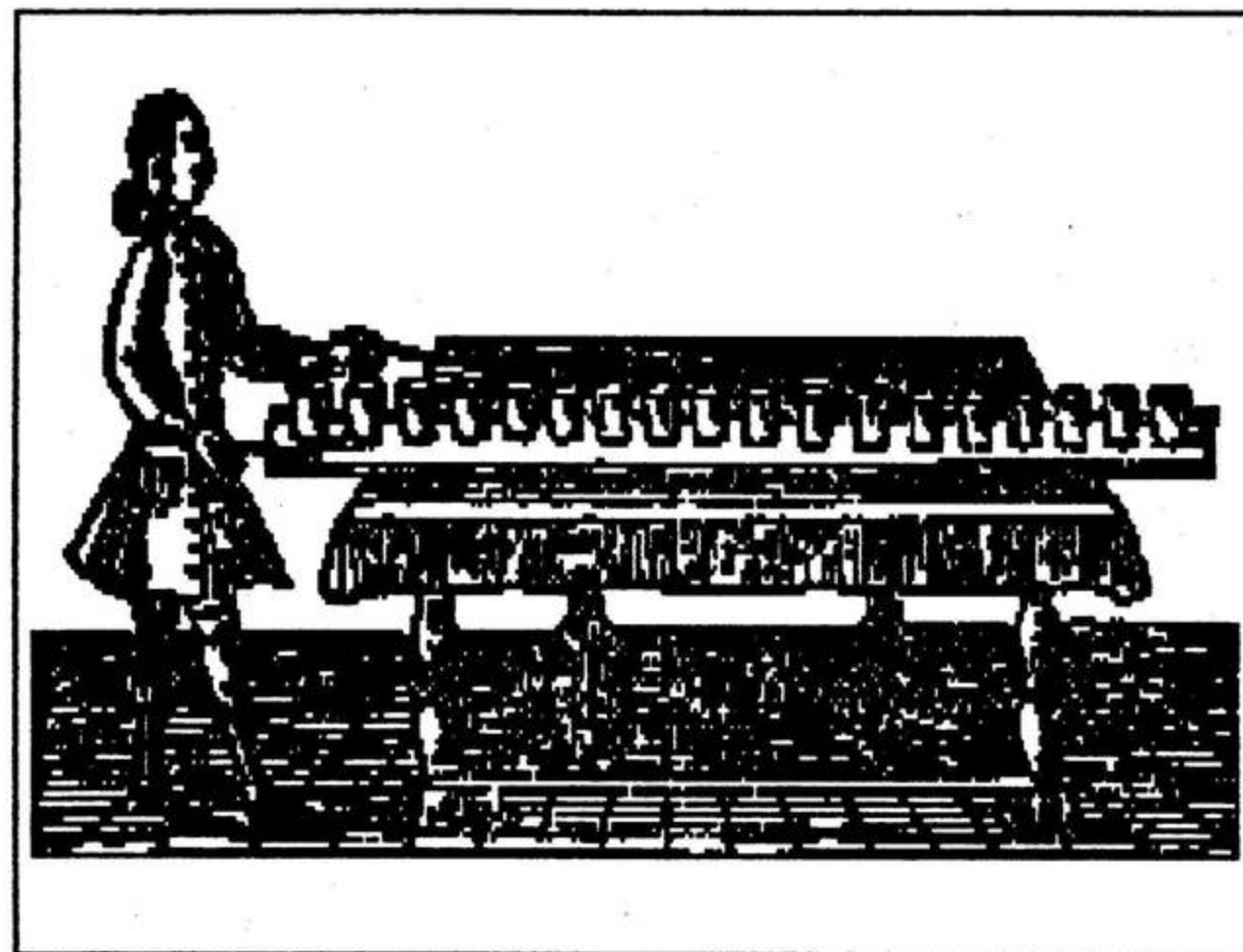


Fig. 4 Verillon

Since their origin, the musical glasses in various forms have existed continuously throughout the centuries until today. In their earliest stage, they were actually cups made of porcelain or earthenware which were struck with sticks. It wasn't until the eighteenth century that the method of stroking the rims of the glasses became popular. Although many of the performances given today are on varied forms of the instrument, the most popular method of tone production continues to be the friction method.

6 James Blades, Percussion Instruments and Their History (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1970), 199-200.

7 King, "The Musical Glasses and Glass Harmonica," Royal Proceedings LXXII, 99.

8 Ibid., 99-100.

9 Horace Ervin, "Mr. Franklin and Mr. Mozart," American Record Guide XXV (Jan., 1959), 310.

10 Benjamin Franklin, et al., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, 23 vols., eds. Leonard W. Larabee et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), X, 117.

11 King, "Armonica," Grove's Dictionary I, 205.