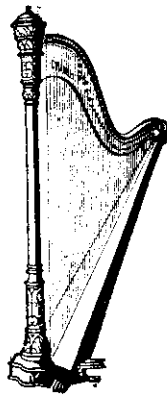


INSTRUMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA:

(13) The Harp

THE thirteenth of a series of short articles on the instruments of the National Orchestra, written to help interested listeners towards a more informed appreciation of orchestral music and a better understanding of the resources at the command of the conductor.



THE harp is to-day a sadly neglected instrument. It is to be hoped that this is merely the outcome of a passing musical fashion, and that this beautiful instrument, with its colourful and wide range (it has half the compass again of a quartet of mixed voices) will return to greater favour. Good harpists are now rare beings and few beginners in music choose the instrument for their especial study. This is a vicious circle, as lessons from an experienced harpist are essential if a pupil is to make satisfactory progress and the shortage of pupils recently means an even greater shortage of teachers in future.

The harp is roughly triangular in shape. The side nearest to the player is the soundboard, the other upright is the supporting pillar, and the frame thus formed is surmounted by the curved neck. The 47 strings are stretched vertically, at great tension, and at the base of the soundboard is the pedal box.

There are seven strings to each octave, and seven pedals on the instrument. Each of the latter controls one string in each octave. The C pedal, for example, by being depressed into either of its two notches raises all the C strings to the pitch of C sharp, or lowers them to C flat. The disengagement of the pedal restores them to C natural.

The harpist uses only the thumb and first three fingers of each hand, so that eight tones can be sounded at once. The range of the harp is about six and a-half octaves.

The harp dates back to very early times, but until the 9th Century, when it was modified by the Irish and the Saxons, it had no supporting post. Pedals (five at first) were incorporated by a Bavarian, Hochbrucher, in 1720, and 90 years later a Frenchman, Sebastian Erard, built the prototype of the harp of to-day.

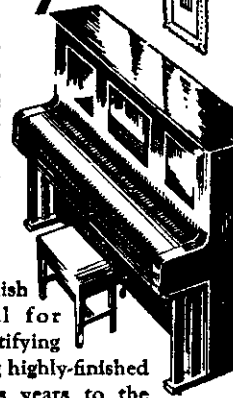
The National Orchestra has one harpist.



Spencer Digby photograph
WINIFRED CARTER, the National Orchestra's harpist

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