

The Glass Armonica

IN 1759, Franklin heard composer George Frideric Handel's *Water Music* performed on a set of wine glasses filled and tuned with different levels of water. "Charmed by the sweetness of its tone," Franklin invented his own instrument: the glass armonica.

Working with a glass blower, Franklin had 36 glass disks (called cups) made of various thickness and sizes. The glass pieces, each separated by a piece of cork, were strung on an iron spindle set in a wood case on four legs. A foot treadle rotated the bowls. A musician moistened his fingers and rubbed the cups, creating the armonica's delicate, angelic sound.

"The advantages of this instrument," wrote Franklin, "are that its tones are incomparably sweet beyond those of any other; that they may be swelled and softened at pleasure by stronger or weaker pressures of the fingers."

Franklin claimed the glass armonica was his favorite invention, and he had one wherever he lived. He especially loved to hear Scottish folk tunes. Mozart even composed a piece for the armonica. Eventually Franklin's invention lost out to another new instrument, the more powerful piano.