

Musical instruments

It is believed 'Twelfth Night' was written sometime between 1601 and 1602. Sadly we do not know what the tunes of all the songs would have been when the play was originally performed or exactly which instruments the music would have been played on.

We do know, however, that Feste, the clown, plays a tabor, because in the play, Viola asks him "Dost thou live by thy tabor?" [Act 3, Scene 1]

A tabor is a type of hand-held drum and usually played either with the hand or two drumsticks. The word "tabor" originates from the Latin word for drum.



Music played an important role in Tudor life and musicians were often supported by the Church or the city, and in demand. Travelling musicians had to have a licence to perform. While rich people could employ musicians to play in their houses, poorer people would be entertained by musicians at markets and other public places.

Queen Elizabeth's father King Henry VIII had at least 60 musicians on his staff. These royal court musicians had their own hierarchy. Those who played "loud" instruments, such as trumpets and cornets, were less valued than musicians who played "soft sounding" instruments such as those with strings. They were rewarded with extravagant tips and praise from the king.

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Queen Elizabeth was fond of music too and during her reign it became even more popular, leading to the creation of new and different musical instruments.

Tudor instruments included the violin, flute, lute, viol, virginal, a favourite of Queen Elizabeth, as well as the recorder, trumpet, cornet, hautboy and harpsichord. The idea of grouping musicians became popular then too. Also by combining different instruments varied harmonies were created.

