

Press Contact

Melissa Parsoff

mparsoff@parsoff-communications.com

Frequently Asked Questions

How was MIM formed?

The Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) was founded by Robert J. Ulrich, former CEO and chairman emeritus of Target Corporation. An avid collector of African art and a world museum enthusiast, Ulrich and his friend Marc Felix originated the idea for MIM after a visit to the Musical Instruments Museum in Brussels, Belgium. Their unique vision was to create a museum and collection that afford representation to the music and musical instruments of every country in the world. Using state-of-the-art audiovisual technology to show musical instruments being played in their original cultural context and delivering the sound of these instruments through high-quality headphones, MIM provides a one-of-a-kind experience to museum guests.

MIM's collection was assembled by five expert curators, with consultation from distinguished ethnomusicologists, organologists, and other field experts. The bulk of the collection is highlighted in Geographic Galleries that focus on five major global regions. There are also exhibition spaces such as the Target Gallery, which hosts traveling and special exhibitions, and the Artist Gallery, which includes noteworthy musical instruments and artifacts associated with some of the world's leading musicians. The museum opened its doors to great acclaim on April 24, 2010.

Why is MIM located in Phoenix?

Greater Phoenix is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States, with a vibrant and culturally diverse population. Its resorts attract many conventions and holiday travelers who seek world-class attractions such as MIM. Drawn by the Grand Canyon and other natural wonders of the Southwest, numerous international visitors travel through the user-friendly Phoenix airport.

Are there other museums like MIM?

There are other museums of musical instruments across the globe, but MIM is unique in that it brings together in one place an expansive collection of instruments from every country. Other musical instrument museums primarily focus on Western instruments, with much less attention paid to those from other areas of the world. MIM's experience also brings these instruments to life through technology that enables visitors to see and hear these instruments in their original cultural settings, like in no other museum in the world.

Who was the architect of MIM and what type of materials were used to build it?

MIM was designed by award-winning architect Rich Varda, in collaboration with the Minneapolis and Phoenix firm of RSP Architects. MIM's distinctive architecture evokes the topography of the Southwest. Its materials and patterns pay homage to the desert landscape, to the rhythms of musical composition, and to the familiar details

The World's Only Global Musical Instrument Museum

common to musical instruments from around the world. Indian sandstone is the primary element on the building's dynamic façade. MIM's lobby is light filled and fluid in form. Guests are linked to all the galleries through a spacious main corridor that conjures up the lyrical forms of music and graceful musical instruments. Likewise, patterns on the floors, walls, and ceilings suggest the geological striations of the Arizona landscape, the rhythms of musical composition, and the designs and shapes common to musical instruments.

How and where were MIM's musical instruments acquired?

The museum's collection of nearly 13,600 instruments and associated objects was acquired in the geographic and cultural regions where these instruments are played and have the most cultural relevance. More than 6,800 of these are on exhibit at a time. Some of the instruments in MIM's collection were, until recently, still being played in their places of origin and were subsequently donated by their makers or the musicians who owned and played them. (You can see and hear some of these very same instruments in MIM's videos.) Some were created by artisans expressly for MIM. Others were purchased from other collectors or collections. The museum's experts have gone to great lengths to acquire the instruments, sometimes traveling to extremely remote locations and regions of unrest. The instruments were selected for their fine construction, the reputation of their makers, their special provenance, or their connection to significant performers. Instruments and artifacts from MIM's Geographic Galleries focus on five major global regions: Africa and the Middle East; Asia and Oceania; Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; and the United States and Canada.

Is every country represented at MIM and how many are there?

Musical instruments and artifacts have been acquired from more than 200 countries and territories around the world. MIM continues to work on its commitment to displaying instruments from every country in the world.

What is the oldest instrument at MIM?

MIM's oldest instrument is displayed in the Orientation Gallery: a *paigu* goblet drum that dates back to China's Neolithic period. Found in Banpo village near Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi Province, the drum is estimated to have been created between 5000 and 4000 BCE. The drumhead, possibly made of snake or frog skin, would have been tied to the hooks around the rim of the drum for tension.

Among Western instruments at MIM, the 10-string *guitarra española* in the Guitar Gallery is the oldest. Instruments resembling the modern guitar first appeared in the late 1400s, and among the early guitars still in existence, this one made in Portugal circa 1590 is considered the oldest full-sized example.

Is MIM funded by the city, the state, or the federal government?

MIM is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. In addition to receiving support from individuals, foundations and corporations, MIM has received grant funding from public sources such as the Arizona Humanities Council, the Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture, and the Arizona Commission on the Arts.

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How many seats does the MIM Music Theater have?

MIM's cozy but plush theater has 300 seats and offers guests an opportunity to hear a diverse range of world-class concerts and global artists in an intimate, comfortable environment with superb acoustics. A larger space would not provide this optimal experience.

How does the guidePORT headphone system work at MIM?

MIM has approximately 1,800 Sennheiser guidePORT compact receivers with headphones available to guide guests through the museum. These audio guides—completely automatic and with high audio quality—provide the sound track for videos at more than 300 sites around the museum. Hidden identifiers are installed at exhibits that cue the audio guides automatically to exactly the right “sound track.” With guidePORT's wireless technology, every visitor has his/her own personal tour guide through the museum.

What membership and donor opportunities does MIM offer?

To view MIM's memberships and benefits by level, [click here](#).

MIM also offers a variety of other donor opportunities for individuals and businesses, which provide benefits to the donors and their families or their companies. From funding an exhibit to sponsoring a concert in the MIM Music Theater, support of MIM will allow generations of people to explore and experience the rich diversity of the world's music and musical instruments. For more information, contact MIM's Institutional Advancement Team at 480.478.6062 or advancement@MIM.org.

How do I volunteer at MIM?

Volunteer team members play an integral role in MIM's success. Becoming a MIM volunteer team member is a unique opportunity to get involved with this incredible project. The minimum age to volunteer at MIM is 16 years. For more information, contact MIM's [Volunteer team](#).

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