At the opening of the museum in 1903, and for concerts in the early years, this room was used as the men’s cloakroom. Many of the objects displayed here retain a connection with music, and most of the paintings belong to the era of the museum’s founding. For the first visitors, this was a space of the modern world, while the galleries beyond were devoted to the past.

The Music Cases
These cases are filled principally with memorabilia of musicians and composers whom Isabella Gardner admired. Throughout her life, she was passionate about attending concerts and operas. She also supported many musicians, commissioning works and following their careers. The love of music preceded her collecting of art, and she presented prestigious concerts at her Beacon Street house and then at the museum. Soprano Nellie Melba, pianist Ignace Paderewski, violinists Charles Martin Loeffler and Fritz Kreisler, and actor/singer Paul Robeson were among those who performed at her private recitals.

James McNeill Whistler
American, 1843–1903
Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville, 1865
Oil on canvas
This radically simplified beach scene is really little more than three horizontal stripes of paint across the canvas that suggest beach, sea, and sky. The figure gazing out to sea is French painter Gustave Courbet, who worked alongside Whistler at Trouville. The painting thus pays homage to the older artist who had been such an innovative and adventurous force in French painting.

Nocturne, Blue and Silver: Battersea Reach, About 1872–78
Oil on canvas
The titles Whistler gave his paintings—seen here in “Harmony” and “Nocturne”—are suggestive of musical compositions, which may be why Isabella Gardner installed them in this room devoted to music. The colors and forms glimpsed in these paintings are so subtle that the subject and place are almost impossible to identify. Indeed, Whistler wished his paintings to trigger pure aesthetic responses. In this work, the thin, sweeping strokes of blue paint are punctuated by darker forms and a few specks of orange and yellow, which suggest boats on the river Thames in London.

Edgar Degas
French, 1834–1917
Portrait of Joséphine Gaujelin, 1867
Oil on canvas
Joséphine Gaujelin was a Parisian ballerina who later became a teacher and an actress. Degas was uncompromising in his portraiture and, probably for that reason, seldom received or accepted commissions. Although the sitter did commission this portrait, she rejected it, undoubtedly because Degas portrayed her so sternly. Yet the intensity of the sitter’s gaze is both disturbing and compelling. Berthe Morisot wrote that it was “a very pretty little portrait of a very ugly woman.”

2. Portrait of Joséphine Gaujelin, 1867. Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917). Oil on canvas


4. Settee and Side Chairs (from a suite of furniture: 5 side chairs, 2 armchairs, and 1 settee). French, late 18th century. Wood and caning


North Wall (not pictured)

Mirror. Italian, 19th century (?)


Chair. Italian, 17th century. Wood
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Henri Matisse
French, 1869–1954
The Terrace, St. Tropez, 1904
Oil on canvas

Matisse’s wife, dressed in a kimono, sits leaning against a boathouse, almost hidden in the scene. Forms and colors play against each other: the sea at the left, the shadow cast by the building, and the twisting branches above flatten the space. This work was painted while the Matisses were staying with painter Paul Signac, in the south of France. Isabella Gardner did not buy much twentieth-century art. This painting and several drawings by Matisse were given to her by a circle of friends who evidently thought that Matisse’s interest in figures and identifiable places, as well as his sensuous colors, would appeal to Gardner, who was so passionate about the Italian Renaissance.

John S. Sargent
American, 1856–1925
Charles Martin Loeffler, 1903
Oil on canvas

John Singer Sargent became a close friend of Isabella Gardner, who collected a large number of his works. In 1903, shortly after the opening of her museum, Isabella invited Sargent to work in her museum, and he used the Gothic Room on the third floor as his studio. There, he painted this portrait of Loeffler, and gave it to Gardner on her birthday. Sargent inscribed the portrait at the top: “To Mrs. Gardner con buone feste [happy birthday] from her friend John S. Sargent.” A composer and violinist, Loeffler (1861–1935) arrived in America in 1881 and the next year began twenty years as assistant concertmaster for the Boston Symphony Orchestra.


3. **Isabella of Portugal**, 17th century. Pieter de Jode II (Flemish, 1606–about 1674). Engraving, after a painting by Titian


9. **Buddha**. Chinese, 18th century. Painted and gilded bronze

10. **Cabinet** contains Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Persian, and Turkish ceramics, including 18 pieces of 18th century Sévres porcelain and 24 pieces of Worcester Armorial China (English, 1789–1840).

11. **Mary, Queen of Scots under Confinement**, 1793. William Ward (British, 1766–1826). Mezzotint, after a painting by Robert Fulton

12. **Mary, Queen of Scots Leaving Scotland**, 1779. Francesco Bartolozzi (Italian, 1727–1815). Mezzotint, after a watercolor by Richard Westall

13. **Mary, Queen of Scots**, 1779. Francesco Bartolozzi (Italian, 1727–1815). Engraving, after a painting by Federico Zuccheri


18. **Lowland Pastures**, 1870s. Felix François Georges Philibert Ziem (French, 1822–1911). Oil on wood


20. **Textiles**. French, early 18th century. Silk

21. **Chairs** (from a suite of furniture: 5 sidechairs, 2 armchairs, and 1 settee). French, late 18th century. Wood and caning

22. **Case** contains autographs, letters, and photographs of musicians, friends, and acquaintances of Isabella Gardner as well as musical memorabilia.