

David’s Harp: Realizing Cultural Interpretations

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"David’s Harp: Realizing Cultural Interpretations" explores how King David’s harp was depicted in art over a 500-year period, from 1400 to 1900. By examining 87 different artifacts—including tapestries, mosaics, paintings, and sculptures—this project identified three predominant styles of the harp: the lyre, the psaltery, and the Gothic harp. The essence of these visual interpretations was captured through sonic experimentation by constructing harps with modern materials while reflecting the historical designs. Initial prototypes were built from scrap wood found on the streets of Boston, and later models were crafted using poplar wood, basswood soundboards, and guitar strings.

Each instrument had distinct sonic qualities: the lyre, with its smallest resonant chamber, had a soft, bassy tone suited for solo performances, reflecting its early cultural role. The Gothic harp, the loudest and most dynamic, had a wide pitch range, making it ideal for larger, more public performances. The psaltery, with its rich resonance, offered a middle ground and was fitting for chamber settings. This evolution—from the intimate lyre to the grander Gothic harp—mirrored the harps' transition from personal, song-based instruments to those capable of filling larger, more orchestrated spaces with a broader range of sound. This study revealed how string instruments adapted over time, becoming louder and more versatile to meet the demands of changing musical settings, similar to the evolving cultural interpretations of the instrument that David played.



Le roi David
Marc Chagall, 1951



David
Monaco Lorenzo, 1408-1410



Kong David med sin harpe
Giovanni Beinaschi, 1636-1688



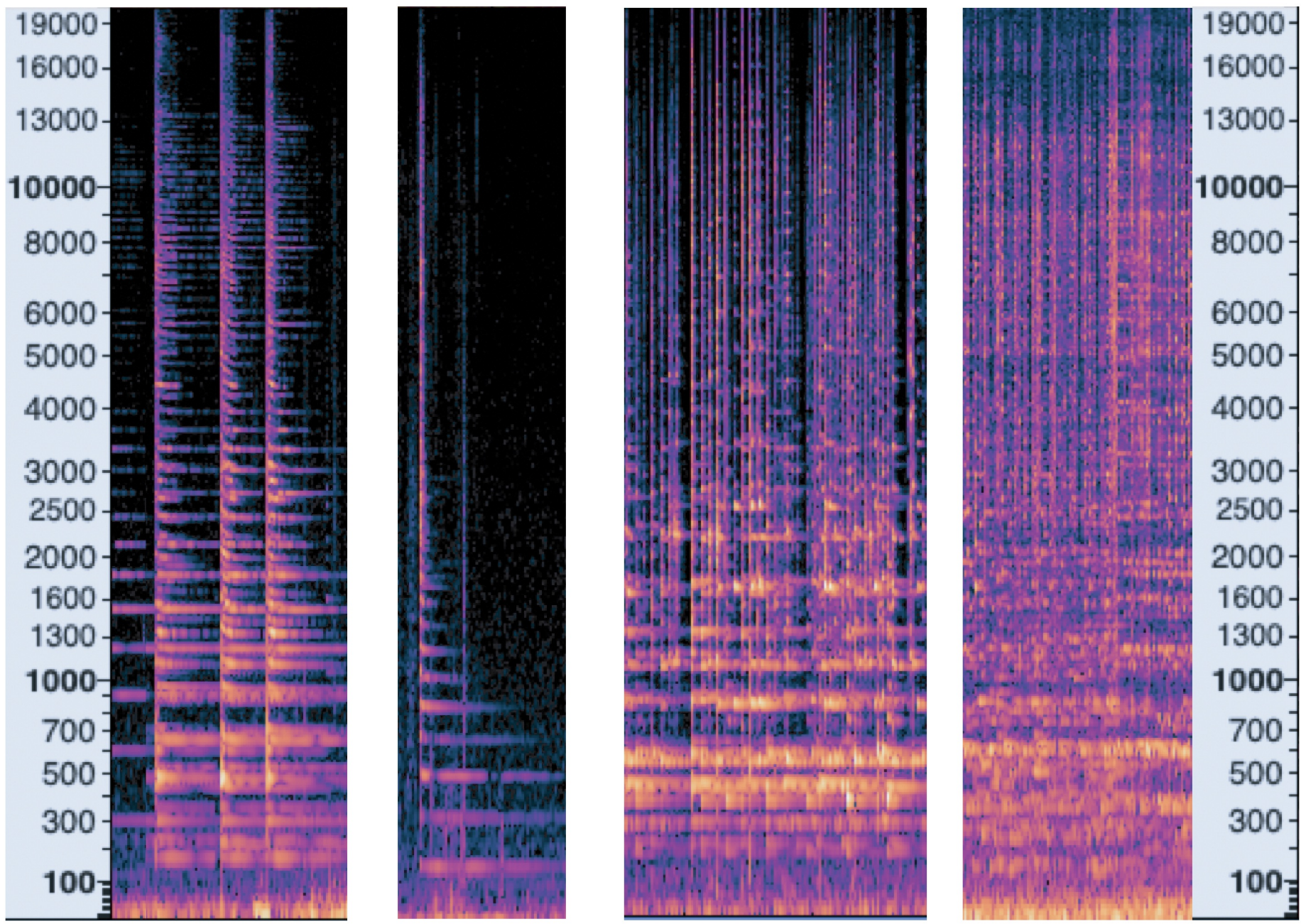
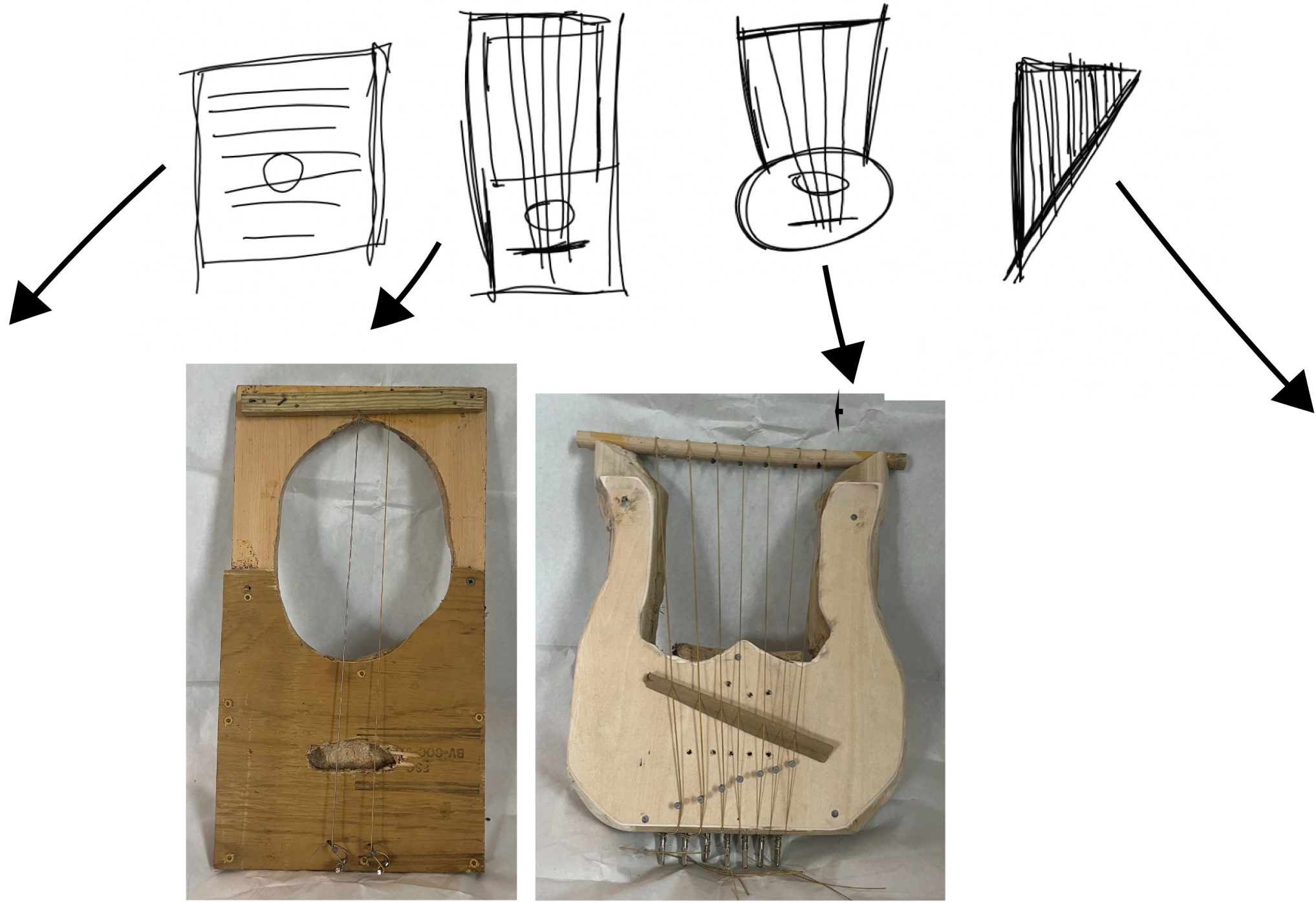
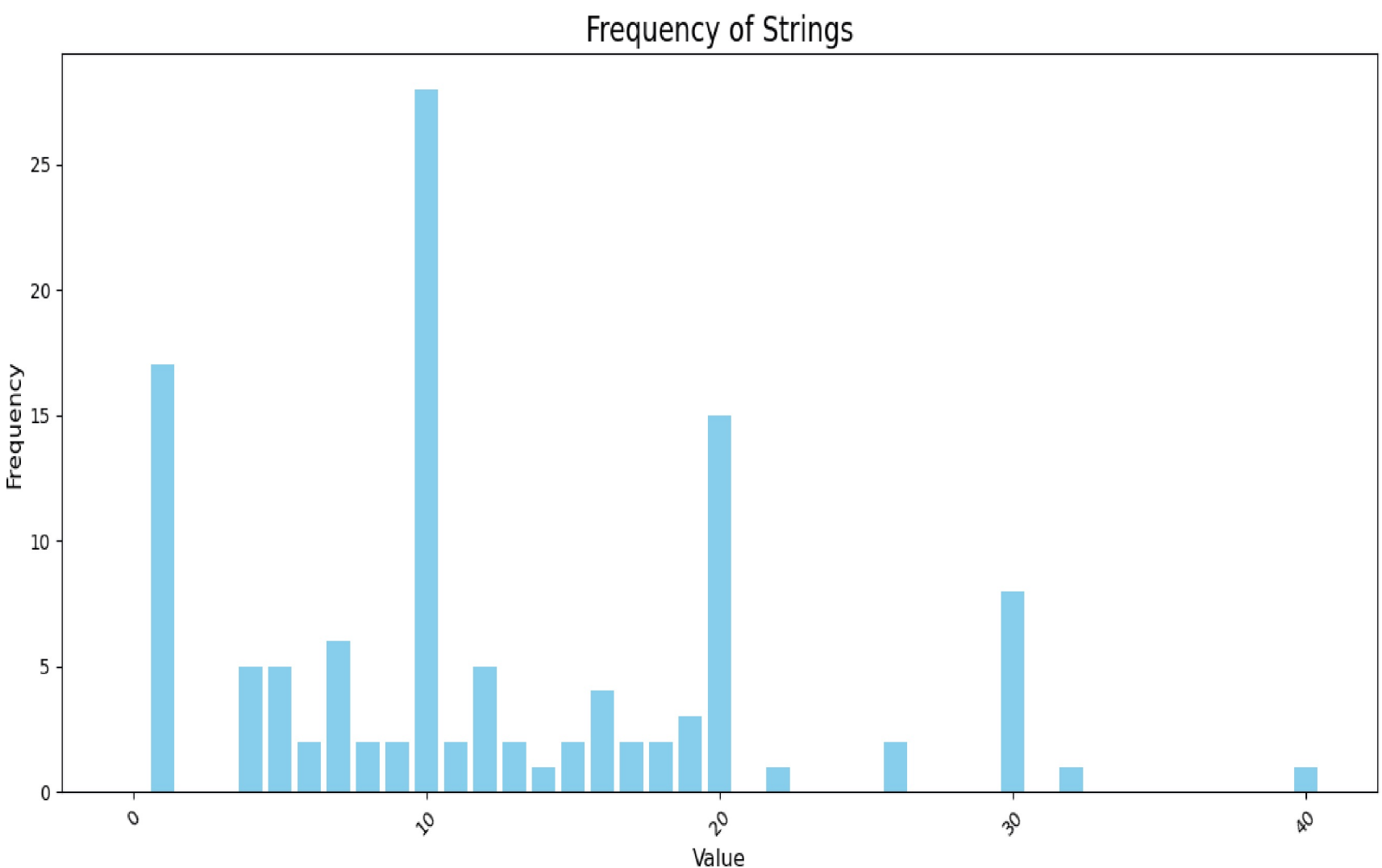
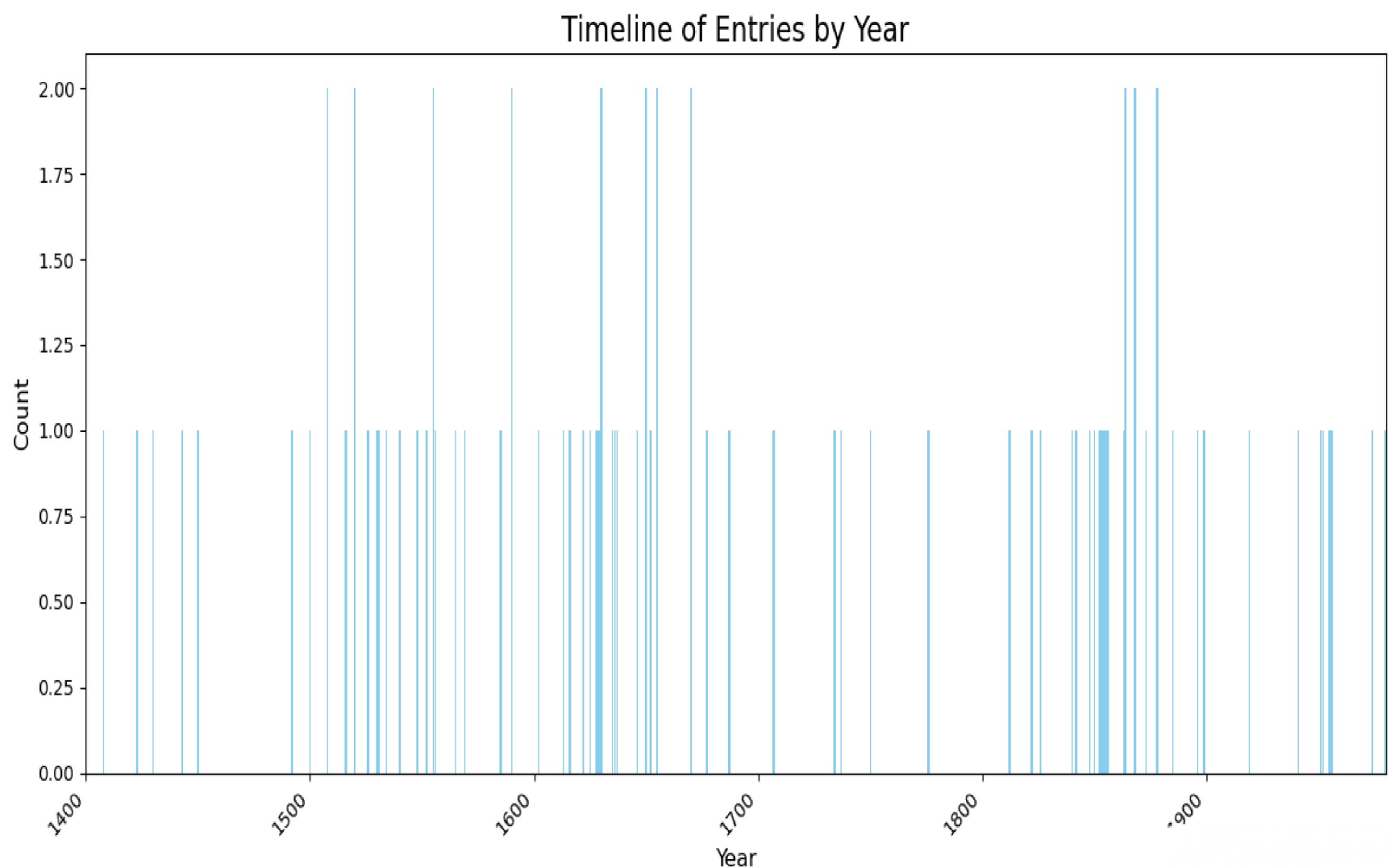
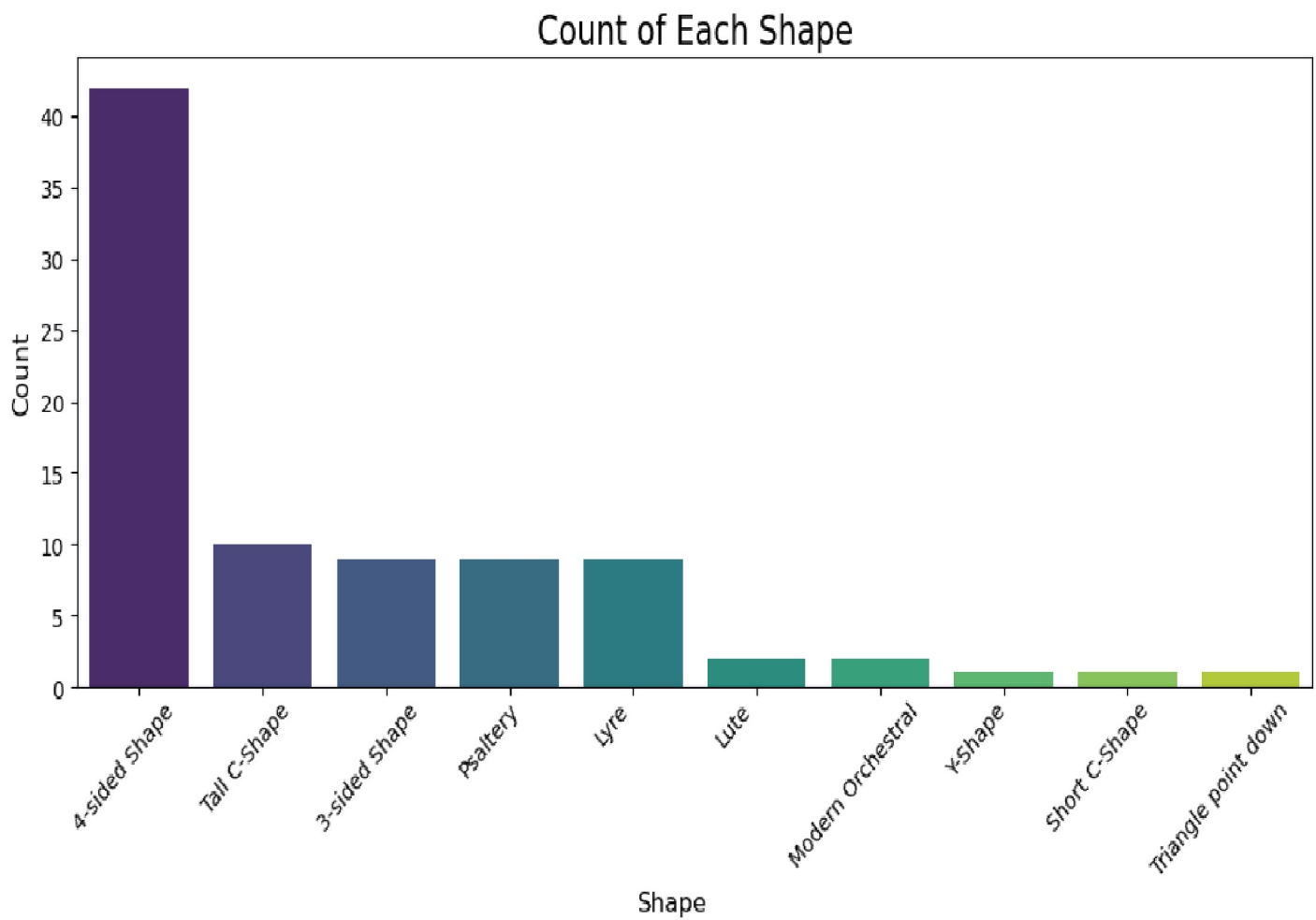
David, Solomon, Rehoboam
Lucas van Leyden, 1520



David med harpe
Giovanni Trotti, 1555-1612

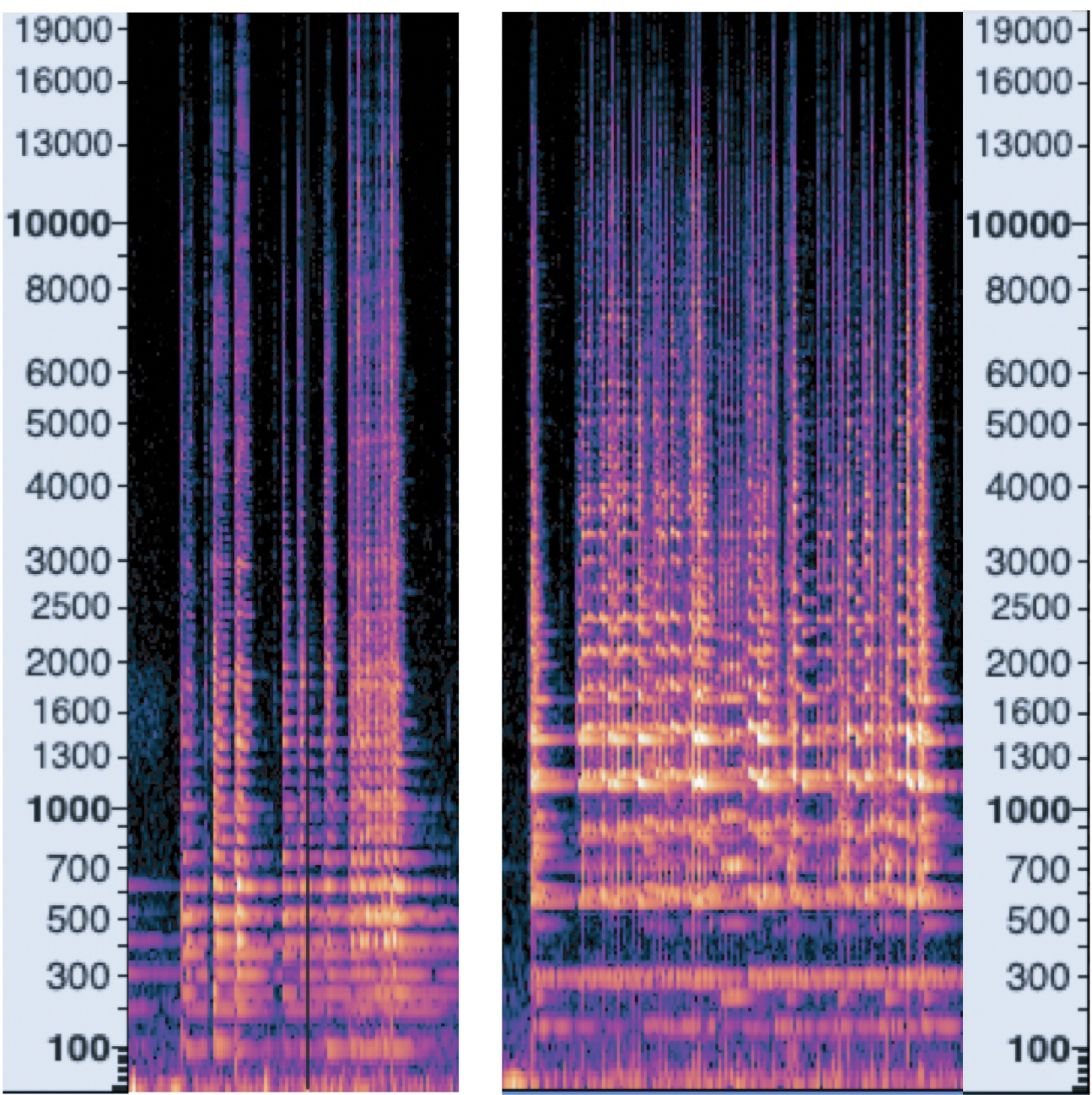


David und Saul
Christian Rohlfs, 1919



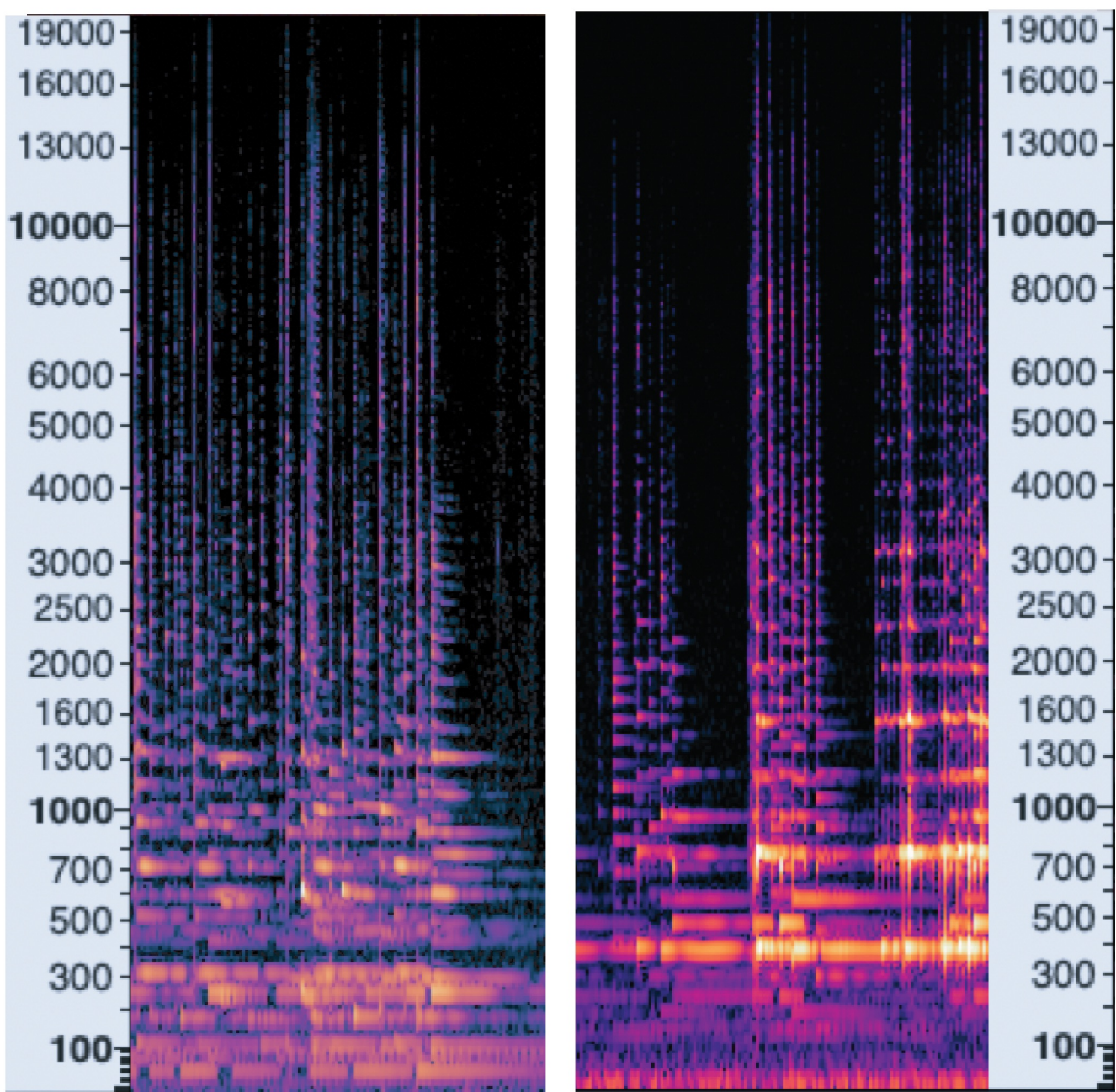
Psaltery (1100-1400 CE)

Early precursor to the dulcimer and zither. Entire instrument functions as a resonating chamber, contributing to its distinct tonal quality. Spectrogram analysis shows a higher concentration of upper frequencies. Increased number of strings allows for a broader range of notes. Typically used in small chamber settings, often accompanying vocals.



Lyre (BCE)

Features a resonant chamber at the bottom of the instrument, amplifying its sound. Spectrogram reveals an emphasis on lower frequencies (lows). Fewer strings limit the instrument’s note range, but make it suitable for more intimate performances. Traditionally designed as a solo instrument, often accompanying a singer. Frequently depicted in ancient art due to its classical aesthetic and historical significance.



Gothic Harp (1400-1700 CE)

An evolutionary step towards the modern pedal harp. Characterized by a forepillar joining the neck and soundbox, providing structural stability. Spectrogram displays a greater presence of lower frequencies. Fewer strings compared to later harps, resulting in a more limited range of notes. Designed for both chamber and larger settings, its larger soundbox and lower strings give it a powerful and resonant sound.

Bibliography

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1. Artifact Gathering

2. Data Analysis

3. Prototype Design

4. Audio Analysis

5. Synthesizing Audio and Historical Analysis