

MUSIC MAESTRO PRIMARY

The Instruments of the Orchestra

An orchestra is a large group of musicians who play different instruments together. Each instrument makes its own special sound. Some sounds are high and bright, while others are low and deep. The instruments are grouped into four main sections: **strings**, **woodwind**, **brass**, and **percussion**. When they all play together, they create rich and exciting music.

The String Section

The string section is the largest section of the orchestra. These instruments make sound when their strings vibrate. Musicians usually use a bow, which is a stick with horsehair, to play them. Sometimes they pluck the strings with their fingers instead.

The **violin** is the smallest string instrument. It makes high sounds and can play fast and lively music. Violins often play the main melody. The bow used to play the violin is made with real horsehair. Some violins are over 300 years old and are still used by musicians today.

The **viola** looks like a violin but is slightly bigger. It makes a deeper and warmer sound. The viola often plays middle notes that help connect the higher and lower sounds. The viola uses a special musical symbol called the alto clef. Many composers like the viola because of its rich and gentle sound.

The **cello** is much larger than the violin and viola. The musician sits down and rests the cello on the floor while playing. The cello makes deep, smooth sounds. The cello can sound very similar to the human voice. The cello is able to play both low notes and quite high notes.

The **double bass** is the largest string instrument in the orchestra. It makes very low sounds. The musician usually stands or sits on a tall stool to play it. The double bass is often simply called the bass. The instrument is so large that it is often taller than the person playing it.

The Woodwind Section

Woodwind instruments make sound when the musician blows air into them. Some woodwind instruments use reeds, which are thin pieces of wood that vibrate to make sound.

The **flute** is held sideways and played by blowing across a hole. It makes a light and high sound. The flute is one of the oldest musical instruments in the world. Even though it is in the woodwind section, the flute is usually made of metal.

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The **clarinet** uses a single reed to make sound. It can play both low and high notes, which makes it very useful in the orchestra. The clarinet has a smooth and rounded sound. The clarinet is also often used in jazz music.

The **oboe** uses two reeds, which are called a double reed. It makes a clear and strong sound. The oboe usually plays the tuning note before the orchestra begins. The sound of the oboe can easily be heard above the other instruments.

The Brass Section

Brass instruments are made from metal. The musician blows air into the instrument and presses valves or moves slides to change the notes.

The **trumpet** is small but powerful. It makes a bright and strong sound. The trumpet is often used to play fanfares. Long ago, trumpets were used to send signals in battles.

The **French horn** has a long tube that is curled into a circle. It makes a warm and smooth sound. If the tube of a French horn was stretched out, it could be over 3 metres long. Players put their hand inside the bell to help change the sound.

The **trombone** uses a slide to change notes instead of valves. Moving the slide makes the pitch higher or lower. The trombone can make sliding sounds that are fun to hear. The name trombone means "large trumpet."

The **tuba** is the largest brass instrument. It makes the lowest sounds in the brass section. The tuba helps provide the deep bass sound in the orchestra. The tuba was invented in the 1800s.

The Percussion Section

Percussion instruments are played by hitting, shaking, or striking them. They help keep the beat and rhythm of the music.

Timpani are large, round drums. They can be tuned to play different notes. Timpani are also known as kettle drums. The player can change the pitch by using special pedals.

The **drum kit** is made up of several drums and cymbals. It is used to keep a steady beat.

The drum kit is very important in rock and pop music. The player uses both hands and feet at the same time.

The **xylophone** has wooden bars that are hit with sticks called mallets. Each bar makes a different note. The bars are different sizes to produce different pitches. The xylophone makes a bright and clear tapping sound.