

HOME.....	Music Appreciation (2) The instruments of the orchestra To go to the main Music Appreciation page Click Here To go back to main Music Page Click Here	I recommend listening to the most famous introduction to this subject: Benamin Britten's piece written as a guide to the instruments of the orchestra. Click here for this	NOTE: Video clips may be preceded by adverts. Be patient and/or click SKIP on bottom right of screen.
	The Orchestra String Section Woodwind Section Brass Section Percussion Section Brass Bands		
TOP	The Orchestra		

Instruments of The Orchestra

This diagram shows an arrangement of instrument families in a typical, western orchestra.



The main groups of the orchestra are: Strings, Brass, Woodwind, and Percussion

[TOP](#)

The string family is the largest section of the orchestra, often comprising more than half of its total musicians. It consists primarily of four bowed instruments: the violin, viola, cello, and double bass, along with the harp.

Violin: The smallest member; produces the highest pitch and often plays the melody. Usually divided into 1st and 2nd violins. The 1st violins are the leaders. In earlier music the 2nd violins often play lower notes in harmony with the 1sts but are more independent in more modern music.

Viola: Slightly larger than the violin; has a warmer, deeper tone and typically provides harmony.

Cello: Much larger and must be played while seated; it has a rich, soulful sound that spans from low to high notes.

Double Bass: The largest and lowest-pitched; provides the foundation and rhythmic backbone of the orchestra.

Harp: A unique member with 47 strings that are plucked rather than bowed



The four members of the string family



A Harp

[Click Here](#) to listen to Sir Edward Elgar's **Introduction and Allegro for Strings, Op. 47**, widely considered one of the masterpieces of the string orchestra repertoire. Composed in 1905. This piece has no harp.

Examples of the solo instruments

Violin: Sonata by JS Bach [Click here](#)

Viola: Toccata and Fuge in D minor for organ transcribed for viola: [Click here](#)

Cello: JS Bach 1st Suite for unaccompanied cello by JS Bach, [Click here](#).

Double bass: Famous solo from Saint-Saens' Carnival of the animals - the elephant; [Click here](#)

The Harp: Greensleeves; [Click here](#)

Examples of the solo instruments playing with orchestra in a concerto or with a piano

Violin Concerto by Vivaldi (The Four Seasons); [click here](#)

Viola concerto by Hoffmeister; [Click here](#)

Cello Concerto by Elgar; [Click here](#)

[The cellists of City of Southampton Orchestra](#)

Double Bass concerto by Bottesini; [Click here](#)

Concerto for harp and flute by Mozart; [Click here](#)

Viola jokes. Viola players and violas are often the subject of jokes probably based on violin players suggesting that when they find their instrument too difficult they play the viola instead. This is of course untrue and unkind but still often funny. A good example is a piece by the two violinists who present a series of musical sketches called TwoSetViolin. [Here is a great example](#) It is also a great introduction to much great viola music.

[TOP](#)

[TOP](#)

The Woodwind family. This is the largest family. Higher woodwinds frequently play the main musical theme. Lower woodwinds provide foundational chords and basslines. Of course there wonderful exceptions where a bassoon for example provides a beautiful tune. The different groups are based on how the the sound is produced. The sound of the flute is produced by bowing a across a hole in the tube. Oboes etc have two reeds. Clarinets etc use a single reed.

Video Recordings of the Woodwind family

Flute quartet for flute, violin, viola and cello by Mozart: [Click here](#)
 Clarinet quartet [clarinet plus string quartet) by Mozart: [Click here](#)
 Oboe quartet for oboe, violin, viola and cello by Mozart: [Click here](#)
 Cor anglais: Important tune in Dvorak's New World Symphony: [Click here](#)
 Bassoon concerto by Mozart: [Click Here](#)
 Saxaphone vidoe of various pieces in joke mode: [Click here](#)

As always, an excellent introduction to the sound of the woodwind group is Benjamin Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra:: [Click here](#)

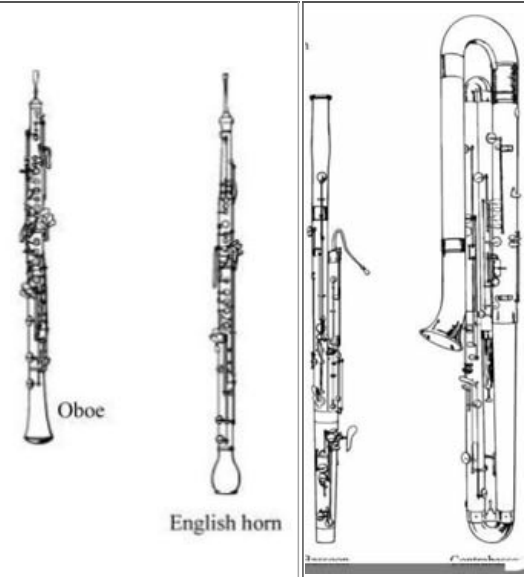
The Flutes

Concert Flute (C Flute) : The standard modern orchestral flute. (middle picture

Piccolo : A half-sized version playing an octave higher than the concert flute. It is known for its bright, high register and is common in marching bands and orchestras. (middle)

Bass Flute : Pitched a full octave below the concert flute. (bottome picture)



	Double reed instruments The Oboe the 'standard' oboe The Cor Anglais (or English Horn). A larger oboe often sounding rather mournfull The Basson and contrabassoon. Low pitch so often doubles basline orcello tunes. Can be beatiful playing melodies.	 Oboe English horn
	The single reed instruments The Clarinet; the chief clarinet is in A or B flat The E flat clarinet (Higher pitched) The base clarinet (an octave below standard clarinet) Saxaphone. Many sizes. Used more often in jazz or related genres.	 Soprano saxophone Alto saxophone Tenor saxophone Baritone saxophone
TOP		

TOP	The Brass family.	Video Recordings of the Brass family Horn conceerto in E flat major K495: Click here Trumpet concerto by Haydn: Click here
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	French Horn, Trumpets Trombones, Tuba This section is responsible for producing the most powerful, brilliant, and triumphant sounds in classical music. They generate sound when the musician vibrates or "buzzes" their lips into a cup-shaped metal mouthpiece, which amplifies the column of air inside the coiled metal tubing.	Trombone masterclass on Mahler 3rd symphony trombone part: Click here Tuba concerto by R. Vaughan-Williams: Click here As always, an excellent introduction to the sound of the woodwind group is Benjamin Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra:: Click here
The French Horn. Warm, rich, and velvety. Exceptionally versatile at blending with woodwinds. 4 players. Trumpets. Bright, vibrant, sharp, and commanding. Often leads the melody. Mainly B flat trumpet but sometimes high D trumpet. 2-3 players. Brass bands use a cornet instead of trumpet. Trombones.Grand, heavy, and powerful but capable of smooth, dark legato melodies. Usually 2 tenor trombones plus 1 bass trombone (which has wider bore and produces a deeper sound. The base trombone and most additional tubing on its back which lowers it range by 5 notes. Ordinary tenor trombones also may have this facility. Rarely an alto trombone is requested but usually played bravely on a tenor trombone (I blew a hole in my lungs doing this so switched to cello).		
Tuba.Deep, broad, and resonant. Anchors the harmony for the entire orchestra. 1 player. Sometimes special Wagner tubas are needed (often played on brass band baritone horn).		

[TOP](#)

TOP	
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Brass bands. A musical ensemble consisting almost entirely of brass instruments, usually accompanied by a dedicated percussion section. Their mid-19th-century rise was closely linked to northern English industrialization, factories, and coal mines, the template was actually pioneered in the late 1810s by military veterans returning from the Napoleonic Wars. They remain popular in UK and the many bands take part in huge Brass Band Championships. Many orchestral brass players started in brass bands and continue to play in them and in orchestras. The trumpet is replaced by a cornet which has the same key and range as the trumpet but is more mellow and perhaps easier for very rapid playing. There is a greater range of instruments than in an orchestra - including Flugel horn (like a base trumpet), E flat Tenor horn, B flat Baritone horn and B flat Euphonium. There are usually many of each type.

For recordings: National Youth Brass Band concert: [Click here](#)
Black Dyke Band; To hear in concert: [Click here](#)

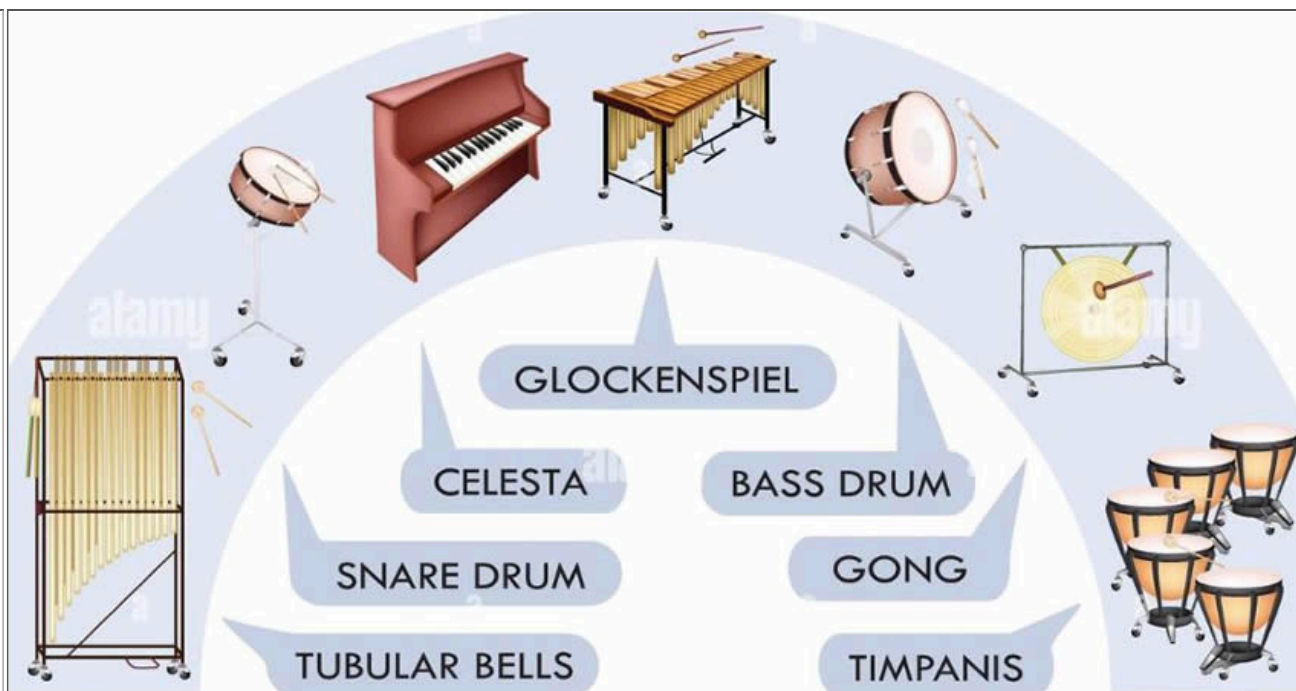


Watford Boys Brigadw Band. I am front right with trombone. My twin (John) is on cornet, back row. My young brother (Richard) is 2nd left on back row with Baritone horn. The Euphonium is payed by Terry Fox, 2nd left front row.
For more pictures of the band players and instruments go to my [Autobiographical bits.](#)

[TOP](#)

The Percussion family

The percussion family is the largest section in the orchestra. Musicians use mallets, sticks, or hands to strike them. They can produce the loudest cracks or the softest whispers in the hall. They primarily maintain the tempo and drive the energy of the piece. In a symphony orchestra. They sit at the very back of the stage because its instruments are highly resonant and can easily overpower the quieter strings and woodwinds. The timpani player stays at his instrument while as few players as possible have to move from instrument to instrument as required



As always, an excellent introduction to the sound of the Percussion group is Benjamin Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra:: [Click here](#)

Tuned Percussion (Definite Pitch)

These instruments play specific musical notes and melodies.

Timpani : Large copper kettledrums that are fundamental to the orchestral sound.

Piano: Rare before 20th century

Celeste: A keyboard instrument resembling a small upright piano that produces a delicate, bell-like timbre using felt hammers that strike suspended steel plates.

Xylophone : Wooden bars struck with hard mallets to create a bright, sharp sound.



[The sound of tuned percussion](#)

	Glockenspiel : Steel bars that produce a high, bell-like, twinkling sound. Marimba : Larger wooden bars with resonators that create a deep, mellow tone. Chimes : Long metal tubes hung vertically, sounding like church bells when struck.	
	Untuned Percussion (Indefinite Pitch). These instruments produce rhythmic sounds or special effects without a specific musical pitch. Snare Drum : A shallow drum with metal wires underneath that create a sharp buzzing sound. Bass Drum : The largest drum in the orchestra, producing a deep, booming thud. Cymbals : Large brass discs crashed together to mark major dramatic climaxes. Triangle : A small metal bar bent into a triangle, creating a piercing, clear ring. Tambourine : A small drum with jingling metal discs built into the frame. Gong / Tam-tam : A massive suspended metal disc that vibrates with a powerful, ominous roar.	There are many extra untuned percussion instruments; these can be heard amongst other: click here
TOP		

TOP.....		
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Benjamin Britten's The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra (Op. 34) is a 1945 musical composition designed to introduce the different sections and instruments of an orchestra. Its subtitle is Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell. It is built around a melody by the 17th-century English composer Henry Purcell. The theme is first played by the full orchestra, then repeated by each of the four families: Woodwinds, Brass, Strings, and Percussion. The work is divided into three main sections: Introduction, Variations, and Fugue.

1. The Introduction

The theme is played six times in total:

Full Orchestra (triumphant opening)

Woodwind Family

Brass Family

String Family

Percussion Family

Full Orchestra (recap)

2. The Variations

Britten "takes the orchestra apart," giving each instrument a solo variation that highlights its unique character and range:

Woodwinds: Piccolo & Flutes (agile), Oboes (plaintive), Clarinets (fluid), Bassoons (staccato/clumsy).

Strings: Violins (brilliant), Violas (warm), Cellos (rich), Double Basses (deep), Harp (shimmering).

Brass: French Horns (regal), Trumpets (bold), Trombones & Tuba (powerful).

Percussion: A rhythmic sequence featuring Timpani, Bass Drum, Cymbals, Xylophone, and others.

3. The Fugue

The finale reassembles the orchestra. Each instrument enters one by one, playing a fast-paced new melody based on Purcell's original. While the woodwinds and strings continue the frantic fugue, the brass enters with Purcell's original theme played broadly and majestically over the top.

[To hear a recording on YouTube Click Here](#)

[TOP](#)