

# Instruments of the Orchestra

## The Baroque Orchestra (1600-1750)

- Violin
- Viola
- Violoncello (Cello)
- Contrabass (Bass)
- Flute
  - Most often only one
  - Occasionally a soloist
- Oboe
  - Most often in pairs
  - Occasionally a soloist
- Bassoon
  - One or two, no more
  - Occasionally a soloist
- French Horn
  - Usually in pairs, no more than two
  - Occasionally a soloist
- Trumpets
  - From two to three
  - Occasionally a soloist
- Timpani
  - Usually two, tuned a fifth apart
- Organ
  - The “king of instruments” in the Baroque
- Lute
- Guitar
- Basso Continuo
  - Unique to Baroque music
  - Made up of a keyboard and a bass instrument

- Keyboard is most often a harpsichord, but could be any keyboard or guitar-like instrument of the period
- Bass instrument is most often a cello, but could be any bass instrument

### Classical Period Orchestra (1750-1820)

- Flute
  - 1 or 2
  - Not always used
  - Sometimes a soloist
- Oboe
  - Usually 2
  - Almost always used when winds are used
  - Sometimes a soloist
- Clarinet
  - Usually 2
  - Not always used
  - Only used towards the end of the period (after it had been invented!)
- Bassoon
  - Usually 2, but (especially early in the period) sometimes only 1
  - Not always used
- French Horn
  - Usually 2
  - Almost always used when winds are used
  - Could be a soloist
- Trumpet
  - Usually 2
  - Not always used, especially early in the period
- Trombone
  - Used in opera and oratorio only (pretty much)

- Represented “The Underworld” in those works – so listen for text
- Usually used in groups of three
- Timpani
  - Usually 2, tuned a fifth apart
  - Not always used
  - Most often used as part of a group with the trumpets (rarely without the trumpets)
- Organ
  - Loses prominence in this period
- Piano
  - Replaces the harpsichord over the course of the Classical Period as the important keyboard instrument.

### Romantic Period Orchestra (1820-1900)

The same as the Classical Period orchestra with changes as below:

- Flute
  - Always at least two, increasing to as many as four by the end of the period
  - The piccolo is more frequently used
- Oboe
  - Always at least two, sometimes as many as three
  - The English Horn is occasionally played (usually by the “third oboist”)
- Clarinet
  - Always at least two, sometimes three or four, with the lowest sometimes a bass clarinet
- Bassoon
  - Always two, could be as many as four, with the lowest player playing contra-bassoon
- French Horn

- Almost always used in groups of four, but, especially at the end of the period, could be many more
- Trumpet
  - Could be two, but as many as 4 or more are possible, with three the usual number
  - Berlioz and Tchaikovsky and their followers liked to use two trumpets and two cornets
- Trombone
  - Usually three
  - Occasionally, especially early in the period, not used
- Tuba
  - Mostly used at the end of the period
- Percussion
  - Usually 4 timpani, could be many more (see Berlioz)
  - Snare drum and Bass drum
  - Crash Cymbals
  - Occasionally hand percussion used for special effects
  - Occasional use of keyboard percussion, especially chimes and xylophone
- Other Instruments (rarely used in this period)
  - Baritone or euphonium
  - Wagner Tuba
  - “Serpent”
  - Saxophone
  - Piano
  - Harp
- Any string or wind instrument could be a soloist, of the brass family only the horns (with a couple of rare exceptions). Pianists are also used as soloists

“20<sup>th</sup> Century” Period Orchestra

To the Romantic Period Orchestra add:

- Extensive use of percussion instruments, including keyboard percussion. Often unorthodox instruments like brake drums or ethnic instruments like gamelans find their way into orchestral works.
- The size of the orchestra will vary from chamber sized to very large
- Instruments will be increasingly played in a non-traditional manner:
  - harmonics
  - unorthodox bow placement (sul ponticello or sul tasto)
  - playing with the back of the bow (col legno)
  - “Snap” or “Bartok” pizzicato
  - Striking the body of the instrument
  - Over blowing wind instruments to distort sound
  - Shakes, doits, falls, flips and other jazz articulation
  - whispering or vocalizing
  - “Growl” tone, and flutter tongue
  - Moving keys or valves without playing (although sometimes air is blown through the instrument)
  - Bowing keyboard percussion
  - Nontraditional percussion (water glasses, dipping a gong or cymbal in water, typewriter, etc)
  - Folk instruments
  - Alternate tunings
  - Electronic instruments