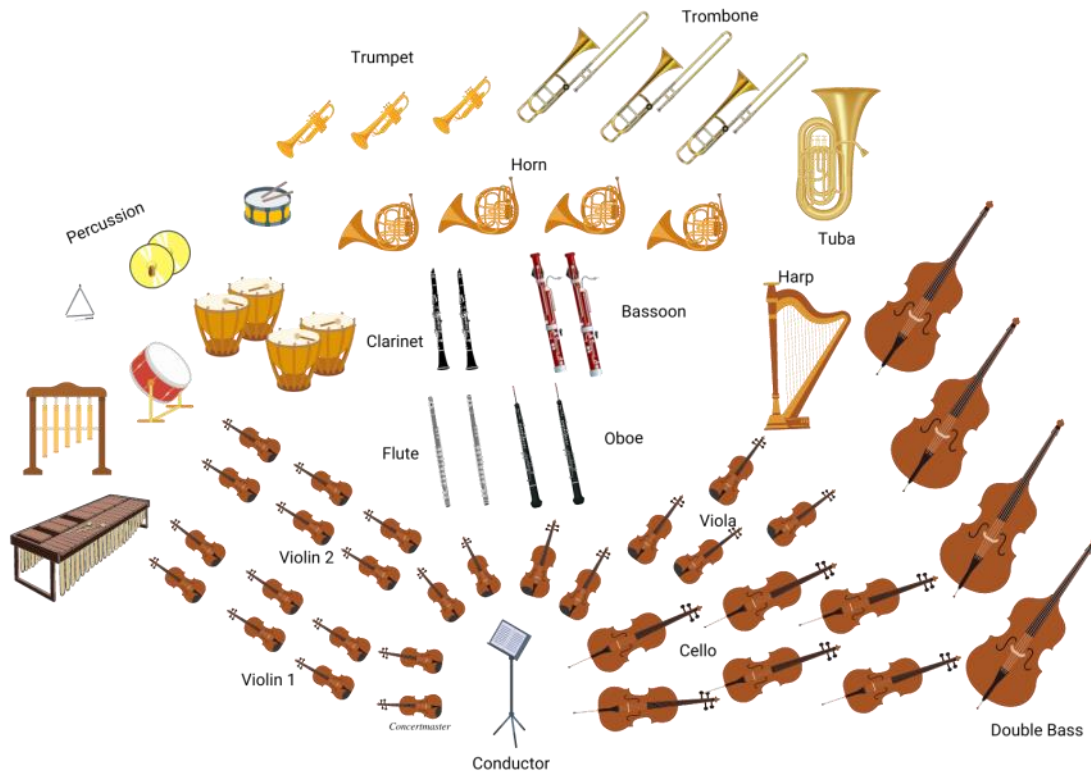


SECTIONS OF THE ORCHESTRA

You see these instruments on stage at every RSO performance—here’s a little more information about each section and how the instruments in that section produce the sounds you hear.

The orchestra is made up of four sections, each with a family of instruments that are related. Blended together the four sections create a unique and rich sound that we know as a symphony orchestra.



ORCHESTRA TRIVIA

How do the string players know when to move their bows up and down at the same time?

The sound that is made when a bow moves up or down on the strings is slightly different. Markings called “bowings” are written into the music of the string players so they are all moving and playing in the same direction at the same time.

What is a concertmaster? What are his/her responsibilities?

The concertmaster is the lead violinist. As the violinist with the highest “rank,” he/she sits in the first chair, next to the conductor’s podium. The concertmaster leads the orchestra in its tuning prior to the concert and customarily plays all of the violin solos within pieces. In addition, the concertmaster decides what the bowings will be for each piece in the orchestra.

Why does the orchestra always tune to the oboe?

Circumstances of history, mostly, but also acoustics. The first orchestras (in the late 1600s) were mainly string instruments. A pair of oboes was sometimes used to strengthen the first and second violin parts. The bright, rather penetrating sound of the oboe was easy to hear, and its pitch was more stable, so it was natural to rely on it for tuning.

Here’s a little secret you’ll never know as an audience member. Oboes aren’t always perfectly in tune—they can play sharp or flat, just like any other instrument. But these days every oboist uses a little electronic meter to ensure that their note is exactly right. In fact, some orchestras – even major orchestras – have gone ‘modern’ and use an electronic device to sound the tuning note. Even then, tradition is respected: it’s the oboist who turns the device on for tuning, and off when the task is completed!

The String Family

String instruments use vibrating strings to make their sound. The strings are stretched across the hollow body of the instrument and plucked or played with a bow. The pitch is changed by shortening or lengthening the vibrating part of the string by the player pressing down on a string in a certain place, or by adjusting its thickness, tension, or density.

The Woodwind Family

Woodwind instruments are made of long hollow tubes of wood or metal. The sound is made by blowing air through a very thin piece of shaved wood called a reed or across a mouthpiece. Finger holes along the instrument are opened and closed to change the pitch.

The Brass Family

This family of wind instruments is made of metal with a cup-shaped mouthpiece. The player creates a vibrating column of air inside the tube of the instrument by pressing his or her lips together in the mouthpiece and forcing air out between them, as if they are making a "raspberry" sound.

The Percussion Family

Percussion instruments are probably the oldest musical instruments and include drums, bells, cymbals, or any instrument that is struck by a hand, mallet, or stick to make a sound. Because of this definition, the piano is actually included in the percussion family. Some percussion instruments produce a variety of sounds that can be tuned, such as marimba, timpani, and xylophone. Others make only one sound that is controlled by the size and shape of the instrument. Percussion instruments are made out of a wide range of materials including wood, metal, and animal skins.

La familia de las cuerdas

La familia de las cuerdas incluye el violín, la viola, el chelo, y el contrabajo. Los instrumentos de cuerda usan cuerdas vibrantes para producir sus sonidos. Las cuerdas son estiradas sobre el cuerpo hueco del instrumento y punteadas o ejecutadas con un arco. El tono se cambia cuando alargas o acortas la cuerda, o ajustando su grosor, tensión, o densidad. El violonista principal de la primera sección de violines dentro de esta familia es conocido como el concertino de la orquesta. El concertino se sienta directamente a la izquierda del director, más cercano a la audiencia. El concertino es uno de los músicos más habilidosos de la orquesta, el cual guía al resto de la sección de cuerdas con su ejecución y con los movimientos y de su arco.

La familia de instrumentos de viento

La familia de instrumentos viento incluye la flauta, el clarinete, el oboe, y el bajón. Los instrumentos de viento son hechos de tubos largos y huecos de madera o metal. El sonido se produce al soplar a través de una pieza muy fina de madera rebajada que se llama lengüeta o a través de una boquilla. Los agujeros del instrumento se abren y cierran con los dedos para cambiar el tono.

La familia de metales

La familia de metales incluye el trompa, la trompeta, el trombón, y la tuba. Esta familia de instrumentos de vientos está hecha de metal con una boquilla que tiene forma de copa. El intérprete crea una columna de aire vibrante dentro del tubo del instrumento cuando presiona sus labios contra el instrumento y sopla el aire a través de ellos como imitando el sonido de un pedorreta.

La familia de percusión

Los instrumentos de percusión quizás son los más antiguos, e incluyen tambores, campanas, címbalos, o cualquier instrumento que se golpea con la mano, mazo, o baqueta para provocar sonido. También se puede incluir el piano por la misma razón, pues es tocado con las manos. Algunos instrumentos de percusión producen una variedad de sonidos que pueden ser afinados como la marimba, los timbales, y el xilófono. Otros solo hacen un sonido que es controlado por el tamaño o forma del instrumento. Los instrumentos de percusión son hechos de distintos materiales que incluyen madera, metal y pieles de animales.

The Conductor

Conductors are also musicians themselves, but they do not need to know how to play all the instruments. The conductor spends many hours studying the score, or sheet music played by the musicians. A page from a conductor's score, showing all the parts on one page, is shown to the right. It is his/her responsibility to know how all the instruments' music fits together for the performance. The conductor plans rehearsals to practice the music and works with individual musicians to provide instructions. Sometimes using a special conducting stick called a baton, the conductor stands on a podium so that the musicians can easily see his/her hands. His/her entire body is used to express how the music should sound, how fast it should be played, and when the musicians should start and stop playing.



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El director de orquesta

En una orquesta, el director puede o no ser el director de música (la persona que escoge la música que se ejecutará). Los conductores también son músicos, pero estos no necesitan saber cómo tocar todos los instrumentos. El director de orquesta pasa varias horas estudiando la música que será interpretada por los músicos. Es su responsabilidad saber cómo la música de los instrumentos se ensambla durante la interpretación. El director planifica los ensayos para practicar la música y trabaja con cada músico que necesite instrucciones especiales. A veces, el director de la orquesta usa un palo especial que se llama batuta para dirigir la orchestra. El director del orquesta se pone de pie en un podio para que los músicos puedan ver sus manos. El director usa su cuerpo entero para expresar cómo la música se debe escuchar, cuán rápido debe ser tocada y cuándo los músicos deben empezar y parar de tocar.