

## AN INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC HISTORY 2: MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND ENSEMBLES

**Note:** This section includes many different families of instruments that are broken down, to give a sample of the number of instruments available.

### MUSICAL SOUNDS

Music is made up of different properties, for example, pitch, duration, volume, timbre, instrument and register. In the previous section, I defined pitch and volume (or dynamic). A duration in music is how long or short the note is to be played, or sung, not to be confused with the tempo of a piece. The timbre of an instrument is its tone colour. No two instruments have the exact same timbre, though some instruments between instrument families (discussed later) are close.

Two basic media are used to produce music: human voice and instruments. Instruments are mechanisms that produce musical vibrations which are then transmitted (or launched) into the air. Each instrument has its own register, an area within the range that an instrument is capable of producing. Very few performers will use the entire range of an instrument when writing a piece of music. The voice is also used, as it is the most natural instrument used to produce music. Different ranges for female and male voice parts exist, although lower female and higher male singers can often overlap voice parts, with training.

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

There are four main categories by which instruments are classified:

1. **Aerophones** (Aero means air): use air to transmit sounds. Most wind and brass instruments fall into this category.
2. **Chordophones** (chord or string): use vibrating strings to produce sounds. Stringed and plucked instruments fall into this category.
3. **Idiophones**: sound is produced from the substance of the instrument. Percussion instruments are good examples of idiophones.
4. **Membranophones** (membrano means membranes): use tightly stretched membranes to produce sound. Type of drum-like instrument.

### ORCHESTRAL EFFECTS FOR STRINGED INSTRUMENTS

Stringed instruments can play many different styles and use several different effects. The quality of tone, such as staccato (short, detached) and legato (smooth, connected), and pizzicato (plucking the instrument) to creating a tremolo (rapid retention of a tone) to quadruple stopping (playing 4 strings simultaneously) can be achieved. Two examples are glissandos (gliding from one pitch to another) and tremolos (trembling effects). These terms also refer to keyboard playing.

### MUSICAL ENSEMBLES

Choral music is music performed by many voices, performed around the world for a variety of occasions and reasons. A chorus is a larger body of singers, whereas a choir is a smaller group of singers. A cappella singing is when the singers have no backup or accompaniment. Smaller choirs exist, such as the madrigal and chamber choirs.

Chamber music is similar to choral music, but for instruments. A chamber ensemble usually consists of string players. Woodwind (or wind) and brass ensembles also exist.

Orchestra is used to describe any group of musicians who play a diverse group of instruments, for examples, strings, woodwinds (wind), and brass. An orchestra can also be called a symphony orchestra; both terms are interchangeable.

The term band is a generic name given to many ensembles from around the world. Examples of bands include marching bands, rock bands, and jazz bands. Concert bands (or wind ensemble) are popular bands in high schools and post secondary institutions. Jazz bands vary in instrumentation, depending on the music played. Rock bands usually use heavier guitars, more percussion, and electronic sounds to produce music.

### **THE CONDUCTOR**

The conductor plays an important part in ensemble and symphonic music that is performed. The conductor helps keep the musicians in time with their music part (each musician will have a different part that they perform).

### **MUSIC IN SOCIETY**

From academic performance, to generic listening, the functions for which music can provide from around the world are endless. Different societies will use music according to their own needs. Musical genres are vast. To research and provide a listings of all musical genres from around the world. Differences in performing music (and especially opera) also exist, and vary widely in different cultures. Oral transmission is music that is not notated. Crossovers between musical genres also occur, when one type of music is blurred into another type, or elements of a specific style of music are used in another style.