

AN ORCHESTRA ADVENTURE

Glossary of Terms

Symphony Orchestra

An orchestra is made up of four sections, or groups of instruments: woodwinds, strings, brass, and percussion. The instruments play together to make music.

Conductor / Maestro

A conductor, also called a maestro, leads the orchestra and shows them how to play — fast or slow, loud or soft, etc. The conductor often holds a stick called a baton and uses hand and arm movements to send messages to the musicians.

Composer

A composer is a person who writes music.

Episode 1:

Woodwinds

The woodwind section is usually found in the middle of the orchestra. The musicians blow into woodwind instruments to make sound, and use their fingers to play different notes. The clarinet, flute, bassoon, and oboe are woodwind instruments.

Harmony

Harmony is when two or more different notes are played at the same time to create a sound that matches. When musicians play together, they often create harmony.

Melody

The melody is the main tune of a piece. When a musician plays a solo, or a special part alone, they are often playing the melody.

Baroque

Baroque music is a style composed from approximately 1600 to 1750. The orchestra was first created during the Baroque era, along with other musical forms such as opera. Harpsichords, a type of keyboard, were common during this period. Composers Bach, Handel and Vivaldi are often associated with Baroque music.

Classical

The Classical era spans about 90 years, from approximately 1730 to 1820. Mozart lived during the Classical era and used clear melodies. Composers during this era used pianos instead of harpsichords. This period saw the introduction of the symphony — longer pieces of music divided into sections and including many instruments.

Romantic

The Romantic era spans about 110 years, from approximately 1800 to 1910. Beethoven and Schubert were important composers during the Romantic era. Composers during this time used a lot of harmony to create longer stories with their music.

20th Century

20th Century music has many different categories! During the 1900s, composers often explored harmonies and rhythms that do not match. The invention of radio broadcasting and recordings made music accessible to everyone. Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Debussy became prominent during this era.

Episode 2:

Strings

The string section is often found at the front of the orchestra. The musicians pull a horsehair bow over the strings to make sound. From the smallest instrument with the highest sound, to the largest with the lowest sound, the orchestra string family includes the violin, viola, cello, and bass.

Bow

The bow is the part of the instrument that the musician moves over the strings to play the notes and make sound.

Up Bow

The motion of pushing the bow over the strings away from the body.

Down Bow

The motion of pulling the bow over the strings towards the body.

Treble Clef

The treble clef is for instruments that play mostly higher sounding notes. The violin plays in the treble clef.

Alto Clef

The alto clef is for larger instruments that play some high sounding notes, but lots of lower notes. The viola plays in the alto clef.

Bass Clef

The bass clef is for large instruments that play lower sounding notes. The cello and bass play in the bass clef.

Vibrato

Vibrato a tool musicians use to shape the sound from their instrument. String players create vibrato by moving their left hand on the string they are playing.

Episode 3:

Brass

The brass section is usually found at the back of the orchestra. The musicians blow into the instrument to make sound and use valves or, in the case of the trombone, a slide to play notes. The brass family includes the trumpet, trombone, tuba, and French horn.

Forte

The term 'forte' means to play loudly.

Piano

The term 'piano' means to play softly.

Crescendo

A crescendo is when the music gradually becomes louder.

Diminuendo

A diminuendo is when the music gradually becomes softer.

Episode 4:

Percussion

There are a lot of percussion instruments! Anything you can make a sound by striking or shaking is percussion.

Harp

The harp is a special instrument — it has strings but is considered a member of the percussion family because it is played by striking and plucking those strings.

Timpani/Timpano

The timpani are large pitched drums that can sound different notes. More than one is called timpani, and one alone is called a timpano.

Rhythm

Rhythm is the pattern of the music. Every piece has a different rhythm and is a combination of strong and weak sounds.

Triangle

The triangle is a bar of metal that produces a bright expressive element to the percussion section.

Snare Drum

The snare drum is a percussion instrument usually used in marches and rock bands, and it helps keep the rhythm of the piece.

Bass Drum

The bass drum is the lowest sounding drum in the orchestra and has a loud booming sound.

Cymbals

The cymbals are two round metal plates that are clapped together to make a big ringing sound.

Tambourine

The tambourine is a small drum with small cymbals attached to the sides, so it can be played to keep the rhythm but with the shimmery sound of small cymbals.

Tubular Bells

The tubular bells are a melodic percussion instrument used to create low, beautiful tones.

Cajon

The cajon is a drum that resembles a box and can be played between the legs. The tone is hollow and versatile.

Mallet Percussion

Mallet percussion is any instrument that makes sound when it's hit with a mallet — a stick with a wrapped end used for playing instruments like the vibraphone, marimba, and tubular bells.

Vibraphone

The vibraphone is a melodic percussion instrument that is played with mallets.

Inner Hearing

Inner hearing is the skill of hearing words or music inside of your head.

Tempo

Tempo is the pace and speed of the music.