

VIOLIN (vi'o-lin)

The violin is the “highest” sounding instrument in the string family. It has four strings tuned in fifths: G, D, A, E (lowest to highest). A violin player is called a violinist. In Europe, the violin can be traced back to the 9th century, with its origin possibly in Asia. Not less than 450 years were required to bring it to its present form, representative of the experience acquired throughout the centuries by the makers of stringed instruments. Music written for the violin almost always uses the G clef (treble clef). A colloquial name for the violin is the fiddle, and a violin is typically called a fiddle when used to play traditional music. A person who plays violin is called a violinist or fiddler, and a person who makes or repairs them is called a luthier, or simply a violinmaker.



VIOLA (vi-o'la)

The viola is very similar to the violin. It also has four strings tuned in fifths: C, G, D, A (lowest to highest). A viola player is called a violist. On average, the viola is 5 cm longer than the violin; unlike the violin and the cello, however, who have relatively standard norms, its size may vary by 8 cm from one instrument to another! Despite such disparities, its timbre is perfectly recognizable. Reading in alto clef, its deep tone quality is warm and veiled, while its high notes are bright. The viola has an extremely rich sonority, much more full-bodied than the violin, dark-toned and earthy. In the right hands, it is both capable of expressing a mournful, penetrating melancholia and a dignified, joyous voice, unique and delightful in its restrained clarity. There are very powerful soloists who play the viola with tremendous volume and energy as well as very challenging pieces of music for viola which demand flair and the entire range of emotions one might expect to be drawn from any instrument.



CELLO (cel'lo)

The cello is a much lower sounding instrument than the violin and viola and is held in a completely different position. Its four strings are the same as viola, but sound one octave lower: C, G, D, A (lowest to highest). A cello player is called a cellist. Until the end of the 18th century, the violoncello was an instrument of accompaniment that played the lower voice and filled in the musical structures. At the end of the 19th century, it was fitted with an adjustable end pin. This seemingly insignificant innovation was to give the violoncellist considerable freedom of movement and thus facilitate his/her handling of the instrument.



DOUBLE BASS (bās)

The bass is the “lowest” sounding instrument of the string family. It serves as the foundation for the orchestra. The bass is held upright and can be played standing or sitting on a stool. Its four strings are in opposite order of the violin and are tuned in fourths, not fifths like the others: E, A, D, G (lowest to highest). A bass player is called a bassist. The bass measures between 1.60 m and 2 m. Some models have a fifth C string! (In order to be able to play the low C note, some four-stringed basses have a lever which allows the E string to be lowered by two tones.) The bow is short and robust. Scores for the bass are written an octave higher than the real sound. It is used extensively in Western classical music as a standard member of the string section of symphony orchestras and smaller string ensembles. In addition to its use in classical music, it has been widely used in other genres such as jazz,



blues, rock and roll, rockabilly, and bluegrass.