**Orchestra Instruments**

An orchestra is a group of musicians who play together. There are about 100 musicians in a symphony orchestra. A symphony orchestra usually plays long pieces of classical music.

The instruments they play can be divided into four “families”:
- Strings, Brass, Woodwinds and Percussion.

**The String Family**

*Made from wood, with four strings made of sheep gut, nylon or wire, tuned by turning pegs at the top, and stroked by bows made of horsehair.*

- **Violin**
  Smallest of the strings, with pitch higher than other strings. Warm, singing sound, held under the chin.

- **Viola**
  Slightly larger than a violin and has thicker strings and a lower, deeper pitch. Held under the chin.

- **Cello**
  Has rich, mellow tones thought to be closest to the sound of a human voice. Played with instrument tucked between the knees.

- **Contra-bass**
  Has deep, powerful tones. Player must stand or sit on a stool to play this tall instrument, also called the double bass.

**The Brass Family**

*Made of metal tubing curled in different shapes and lengths. The longer the tube, the lower the tone.*

- **Trumpet**
  Has a bold, high-pitched tone. Three valves can be pushed to open length and give wider range of sounds.

- **Trombone**
  Has a grand and lovely tone than can be soft or loud. The loudest instrument in the orchestra, it has no valves but a slide that is moved back and forth to give different pitches.

- **French Horn**
  A 12- to 17-foot tube wound around and around, ending in a big bell. Pressing its valves changes the pitch.

- **Tuba**
  Has powerful, deep sounds that can be funny or scary. The largest of the brasses, it has the lowest tone with 18 to 35 feet of tubing ending in a flaring bell.

**The Percussion Family**

These are instruments which make a sound by being struck. They include instruments like drums, cymbals, bells, xylophones and pianos.
The Woodwind Family

Woodwinds are hollow tubes played by blowing and pressing keys that open and close holes along the tubes that produce notes. Originally made of wood, today they are either wood or metal.

**Flute**

Two feet long with bright, birdlike tones. The player blows across the tube just like blowing over the top of a bottle.

**Piccolo**

Half the length of a flute, it sounds the highest note in the orchestra, a brilliant and piercing tone.

**Clarinet**

Same length as a flute and has tones that are more piercing than other woodwinds. It is blown by passing air over a mouthpiece to which a single piece of cane called a “reed” is attached.

**Bass Clarinet**

Twice as long as the clarinet, it plays lower tones, has a curved neck and bell-shaped end. Its sound is often described as “sad.”

**Oboe**

Two-foot long wood tube that widens into a bell. It has a mouthpieces made of two pieces of cane fastened together, called a double reed, and has a smooth and beautiful tone.

**English Horn**

Not a “horn,” but a deeper-toned version of the oboe, also played with a double reed mouthpiece.

**Bassoon**

An 8- to 9-foot tube that doubles back on itself, has a mouthpiece (with double reed) attached to a long pipe, and can make heavy, comical sounds.

**Contra-bassoon**

About twice as long as a bassoon, with its tube folded over four to six times. Also played with a double reed, it sounds the lowest note in the orchestra.

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