



Instruments of the Orchestra

KS2 objective: To develop an understanding of the history of music.

Orchestras are known across the world, originally for playing traditional classical music, but now, orchestras can be seen and heard playing a variety of both historic and modern music. But what instruments are involved?

- The majority of musical instruments fall into one of six major categories: bowed strings, woodwind, brass, percussion, keyboard, and the guitar family.
- With regards to orchestras, the main instrument families are strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.
- The string family includes violins, violas, cellos and double bass.
- The woodwind family includes flutes, clarinets, oboes and bassoons.
- The brass family includes trumpets, trombones, French horns and tubas.
- There are around 500 different types of percussion instruments, but only some of them appear in an orchestra. They include: xylophones, bells, snare drum, bass drum, timpani, tambourine and cymbals.
- The piano is classed as both a percussion instrument and a string instrument. When hitting the keys, hammers inside the piano hit onto strings and cause vibrations, creating the sound.
- The orchestra is directed by a conductor. He/she helps the players to play together, to get the right balance so that everything can be heard clearly, and to encourage the orchestra to play with the same kind of feeling.
- The conductor uses a stick called a baton to direct the orchestra.

Fun facts about Orchestras

- The word 'orchestra' comes from a Greek phrase meaning 'dancing place'.
- The word 'karaoke' comes from a Japanese phrase meaning 'empty orchestra'.
- All the instruments in the Vegetable Orchestra based in Vienna are made from vegetables.