

The Development of the Orchestra (1600-1880)



The Development of the Orchestra (1600-1880)

Introduction

The orchestra has evolved greatly from 1600 to 1880. This worksheet explores how orchestras changed from the Baroque period through the Classical era and into the early Romantic period. Understanding this evolution helps us appreciate the music we hear today.

The Baroque Orchestra (1600-1750)

In the Baroque period, orchestras were smaller and had a simpler setup compared to modern times. They generally included:

Strings: Violin, viola, cello, double bass

Woodwinds: Flute, oboe, bassoon

Brass: Trumpet (without valves), horn (with limited range)

Percussion: Timpani

Questions:

What instruments were commonly used in a Baroque orchestra? How does this compare to the instruments you might find in a modern orchestra?

Why were Baroque brass instruments less versatile than today's brass instruments? How did this affect the music composed during that time?

The Classical Orchestra (1750-1820)

During the Classical period, orchestras became larger and more organized. Key changes included:

Strings: The string section became more uniform with more players.

Woodwinds: The clarinet was added, providing a new range of sounds.

Brass: Trumpets and horns started using valves, which allowed them to play more notes.

Percussion: The use of timpani continued, but there were fewer types of percussion instruments.

Questions:

How did the addition of the clarinet change the sound of the woodwind section in the Classical orchestra?

What are valves in brass instruments, and how did their invention impact the music of the Classical period?

- **The Early Romantic Orchestra (1820-1880)**

- In the Romantic period, orchestras grew even larger and more diverse. This era saw:
- **Strings:** An increase in the number of string players, making the section bigger and more powerful.
- **Woodwinds:** New instruments like the piccolo and bass clarinet were added.
- **Brass:** The introduction of trombones and tubas added more depth to the brass section.
- **Percussion:** A wider variety of percussion instruments, such as cymbals and bass drums, were used.
- **Questions:**
- **What changes in the string section during the Romantic period helped create a richer sound in orchestral music?**
- **How did the addition of new brass instruments like the trombone and tuba affect the music of the Romantic era?**
- **Conclusion**
- From 1600 to 1880, the orchestra evolved from a small ensemble to a large and varied group of musicians. These changes in instrument technology and orchestration allowed composers to explore new sounds and create more complex music.
- **Extra Activity:**
- **Research Task:** Pick a famous composer from one of these periods (Baroque, Classical, or Romantic) and find out how their music was influenced by the orchestra of their time. Write a short paragraph explaining your findings.