Instruments Of The Orchestra Essay, Research Paper

Instruments of the Orchestra

Strings: The viola is an important member of the orchestra, but is not often heard by itself. Because it is bigger than the violin, with longer strings, it makes a rich, warm sound that is lower in pitch. In contrast to the viola the violin is the smallest member of the string family. Because its strings are the shortest, it produces the highest sound. The viola is a little heavier, and its shape is slightly different, too. But it is still played on the violist?s left arm, just like the violin. Unlike the viola, the violins play in two different groups: with the first violins playing the highest-pitched part and the second violins playing the second highest. Both the viola and the violin are placed to rest on one shoulder, and held in its place by the chin and the left hand. You have to hold the bow in your right hand, and draw it across the strings. Pitches can be change in two ways: by drawing the bow across different strings, and by pressing on the strings with the fingers of his left hand. The viola plays a beautiful ?middle? part in the orchestra?s harmony. The violas can be hard to pick out when the whole orchestra is playing, but you would really miss the violas if they weren?t there! In the other hand the violin has stayed pretty much the same ever since the 1500s. That?s almost 500 years! The modern violin has four strings, but the earliest ones had only three. Fiddlers played them on the streets, which hoped that people passing by would like their tunes and toss them a few pennies.

ViolaViolin

Woodwinds: The bassoon is a double-reed woodwind instrument. It has almost 8 feet of wooden tubing, bent into a narrow U-shape. The reed is secured in a curved metal tube. Bassoons are the largest woodwind instruments in the orchestra – except for the contrabassoons, which are much bigger and plays a whole octave, lower than the bassoon! In contrast to the bassoon, you can hear the smooth, velvety sound of the clarinet in the orchestras, military bands, and in jazz groups. Clarinets are made of wood or molded plastic, and can be found in the different range of notes. The standard ?B-flat? clarinet is a little more than two feet long. An orchestra also often includes an ?E-flat? clarinet, which is smaller and plays a higher range of notes, and a bass clarinet, which plays an octave lower. To play the bassoon you may place on one side next to your knee if it?s big for you. Blow into the reed in the same way an oboe player does. The weight of the bassoon is usually supported by the seat strap, which the player hooks on to the lower end of the bassoon and sits on – so the audience can?t see it! Also, unlike the clarinet the bassoon has a rich and mellow sound.

BassoonClarinet

Brasses: The trombones form the middle of the orchestral brass section. They fill out the harmonies between the trumpets and the horns on top, and the low tuba below. Unlike the trombones, the Trumpet has a loud clear sound and has been use to send signals and messages for a long time. They both have been around for a long time. The trombones where around about 500 years ago when Columbus was busy discovering America and King Henry VII had a band of four trombones. They were called sackbuts back then, but they were very like today’s trombones. The modern trombones have a rich tenor voice. The trumpet was used (about 3,500 years old) back then to frighten enemies in the battle, and to celebrate big ceremonies with blazing fanfares. Its distinctive shape produces the tone of the modern trumpet: a cup-shaped mouthpiece, narrow metal tube, and flaring bell. Using a slide in trombones is how a pitch is produce and in trumpet pitches may be produce in two ways: by pressing down on the keys that control the trumpet?s three valves, and by changing the shape in your lips against the mouthpiece.

TromboneTrumpet

Percussion: The snare drum was originally called the side drum, because the player would carry it around his waist and played off to the side. The snare drum is shaped like a cylinder, with skin stretched over its top. Unlike the snare drum, the timpani are sometimes called Kettledrums because they are shaped like big copper. They are have a piece of calfskin or thin plastic stretched over their opening. This is called a drumhead. Timpani are very important in the orchestra because they ?underline? important chords. They are usually played in pairs – sometimes in threes or fours- because each drum is tuned to a different pitch. In contrast, the ?snare? is a set of wires or strings strung across the bottom of the drum. This rattling helps to produce the snare drum?s special sound. The snare drums are especially good at playing ?rolls.? They also play lots of other fancy rhythms. Sometimes the snare is tuned off, to make a dull thud sound. Snare drums do not have a definite pitch. The Timpani is played using sticks called beaters, hitting about three inches from the rim of the drum. Timpanists carry many different pairs of beaters to produce different tone qualities. Timpanists can change the pitch of each drum by pressing their foot on a pedal at the base of the drum. When they are not playing, pitches may be change by changing the tightness of its drumhead. To do this timpanist tightens or loosens screws on the side and base of the drum. A good timpanist can tune the drums very quietly and quickly while the rest of the orchestra is playing. Then, when its time for the timpani to play their part, the timpanist can make a very loud noise!

Snare DrumTimpani

\* The big bowl-shaped main chamber is called the resonator stretched across the top of the drum.

\*The timpanist uses two beaters to strike the drumhead.

\*There are several tensions screw all around the side of the drumhead. When the are tightened, the drumhead is stretched and its pitch rises. When they are loosened, the drumhead is relaxed and its pitch gets lower.

\*The pedal at the foot of the resonator activates all the tension screws around the side of the drumhead.

\*The turning gauge allows the timpanist to set the drum at the right pitch before being sounded. Timpani that have these rapid turning mechanisms are called ?machine drums.?