

Instruments of the String Family

There are three string instruments played by the four members of the Quapaw **Quartet**: Two violins, one viola, and one cello. The full orchestra includes two additional string instruments, the double bass and the harp. Except for the harp, these instruments are played by the right hand, either with a bow or plucking the strings with your fingers. [See short examples of all five instruments on YouTube played by college students at the University of Texas: String instruments of the orchestra www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxFNHeXKmrY May 22, 2011.]

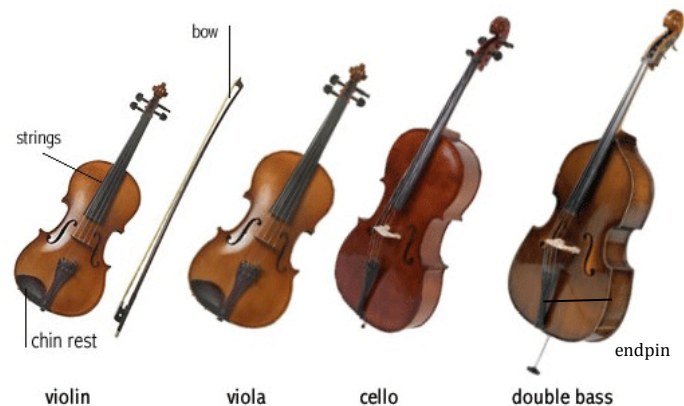
The violin, sometimes called the fiddle, is the smallest of the instruments in the string quartet. It is played by resting the belly of the instrument on your left shoulder, placing your chin on the chinrest, and holding the neck, or the skinnier part, of the violin in your left hand. Violins play the highest notes because its strings are the shortest and thinnest of all string instruments.

The viola is the medium-sized instrument in the string quartet and plays lower notes than the violin. This is because its strings are longer and thicker than those on the violin. It is held the same way as a violin and looks exactly like a violin except for that fact that it is slightly larger.

The cello (also called the violincello) is the largest instrument in the string quartet and plays the lowest notes. Cellos have a pin at the bottom so they may be played by standing them up on their ends without damaging them. This pin is called an endpin. A player holds a cello by placing it between his or her legs while holding the neck in the left hand.

The double bass is also called an upright bass or contrabass. Its notes are even lower than the cello. Because of its large size, the double bass is played by either sitting on a stool or standing next to the instrument, holding the neck in the left hand and standing it on its end. The double bass also has an endpin to help support it. (Find the endpin in the picture.)

The String Family



The cello and double bass are actually much larger compared to the violin and viola than it looks like in this illustration.

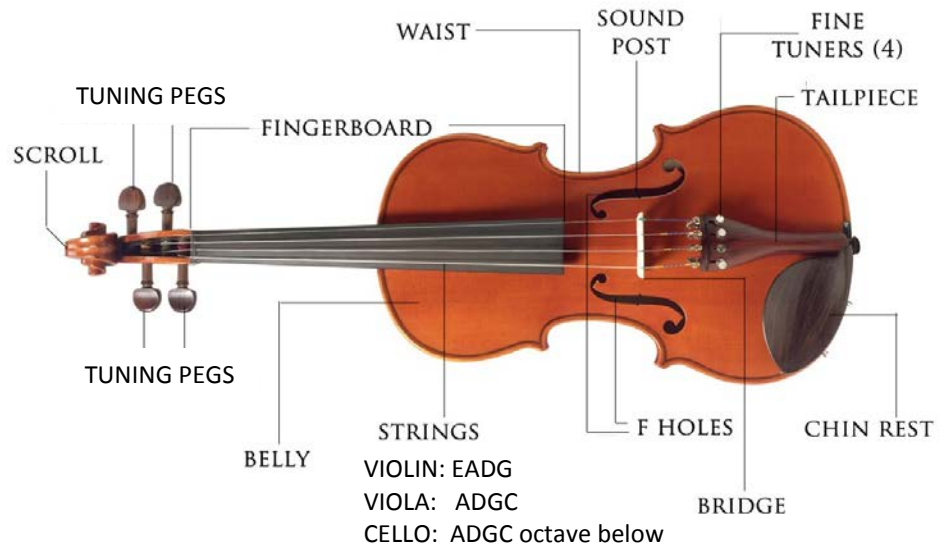
Parts of the String Instruments

String instruments have two sections: The belly and the neck. The neck is made up of the scroll, the pegbox, and the fingerboard. The carved scroll makes the instrument more beautiful. The pegbox is home for four tuning pegs, to which each of the four strings is attached. The pegs are used to tune each string. The player places his or her left hand on a string and presses down on the fingerboard to create a certain **pitch** or note. Pressing a string at different spots creates different pitches. The longer the distance between the finger and the sound post, the lower the note.

You will find the f-holes, bridge, tailpiece, and chinrest on the top part of the belly. The belly has a top and bottom soundboard from which most of the sound is projected. On a cello or double bass, the endpin replaces the chinrest.

The f-holes also project sound. The bridge holds the strings up so they can

vibrate and produce sound. Look at the diagram to find: 1) Where the strings attach to the tailpiece and, 2) The fine tuners which can be used to tune the strings very accurately.



Articulations (or ways of playing the same note, but making different sounds)

There are many different ways (or techniques) to play a string instrument. These techniques have Italian names because Italian composers were first to experiment and create these sounds. You can play the instrument with a bow or you can pluck the strings (like a guitar) called *pizzicato*. Normally, the bow is drawn over the strings half way between the end of the fingerboard and the bridge. But composers write on the score if other techniques are to be used. In *sul tasto*, the bow is played over the end of the fingerboard to create a soft, thin sound. *Sul ponticello* means to draw the bow close to the bridge, creating a scary, screechy sound. *Col legno* means to strike the strings with the wooden side of the bow by: 1) Bouncing the bow or 2) Drawing the wood over the string, each creating a soft, but very different sound.

Two other articulation styles are *legato* and *staccato*. These two are opposites. *Legato* means "connected" in Italian or like a smooth melody. It tells a musician to play the music without space between the notes and several notes are played in one draw of the bow. *Staccato* in Italian means "separated" so there is a tiny break in sound between the notes.

Composers of the Quartets Being Performed

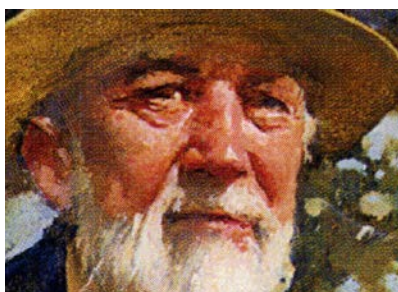
Franz Joseph Haydn is remembered as the first great symphony composer and is credited with essentially inventing the string quartet. Starting in about 1757 and continuing until 1806, three years before his death, Haydn composed 68 string quartets. As with his symphonies, Haydn used quartets to develop the classical style, and like the symphonies many of the quartets have been given individual names such as the 'Sun', the 'Prussian' and the 'Apponyi'.



Witold Lutoslawski (1913-1994) was one of the most important composers of the twentieth century. He was relatively unknown outside Poland until the 1960s. Because Russian composers were **persecuted** by the communist government under **Stalin** if their music was not easy to understand, Lutoslawski developed a fresh, tonal style. After Stalin's rule in the 1950s, he adopted more creative techniques that were being used by other composers of the time.

Later in life, he received many international commissions and major awards. He completed one of his greatest works, Symphony No 4, just before he died.

Bela Bartok was born March 25, 1881, in what was then Hungary. His mother gave him his first piano lessons and his progress was so rapid that at 10 he made his initial public appearance as composer-pianist. In 1899 Bartok entered the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest. He began collecting Hungarian folk music soon after he left the Academy. In all he gathered more than 6,000 folk songs. Bartok came to the United States for the first time in December, 1927. From 1940 until his death in 1945, Bartok lived in New York. He added several extensive works to his long list of compositions.



Charles Edward Ives was an American composer born in 1874. He became internationally famous, though his music was largely ignored during his life, and many of his works went unperformed for many years. He combined the American popular and church-music traditions of his youth with European art music. Ives was among the first composers to use new musical techniques that became widely used by many other 20th century composers.

Sources of Ives' musical ideas are hymn tunes and traditional songs, the town band at holiday parade, the fiddlers at Saturday night dances, patriotic songs, sentimental parlor ballads, and the melodies of Stephen Foster. (Adapted from Wikipedia)

Three Historical Periods of Music



Classical (late 1700's and early 1800's): Classical composers such as Haydn wrote works according to an accepted set of rules. They wrote **melodies** based upon short ideas called themes. Within a piece of music, a composer used multiple themes and often repeated the same music that was played at the beginning (exposition) again at the end (recapitulation). During the middle section (development), the composer modified the themes which made the music more dramatic. Like music of this era, buildings and rooms in them were

plain and **symmetrical** (being the same on either side and slightly more ornate in the middle).

Romantic (mid to late 1800's): **Architecture** of this era added rounded walls and porches to make buildings look grander. Painters pictured elegant people, scenes from their national history and emotions, such as peacefulness, fear, anger or love.

During the Romantic era, composers like Beethoven often incorporated the folk music of their homeland, which sometimes resulted in long, flowing and beautiful melodies. Composers used contrasting loud and soft **dynamics** and thin and thick **textures** in the music to show feeling and emotion. They used **harmony** that sometimes clashed with the melody to increase the feeling of tension.



20th Century: Artists in the 20th Century often focused on abstract art that is not as easy to understand at first glance. In music composed by Charles Ives and others in the 20th Century, you can hear traditional and new instruments to create new sounds. Melodies you will hear are more difficult to sing back because they jump around. Composers focused on what they thought were interesting sounds and created music using those sounds.

Vocabulary

architecture - style or design of a building

Classical - an era of art and music making with focus on form and balance from about 1750 to the early 1800's

composer - a person who writes music

dynamics (in music) - how loud or soft the music is

harmony - a musical term for notes used in a musical piece that provide background for the melody

melody - a long passage of music forming a theme that you can recognize as in a song

Romantic - an era of art and music making which reflected strong emotions and feelings from the early 1800's to the early 1900's

texture (in music) - the way the melody, rhythm and harmony combine in a composition

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