

LEVELED BOOK • P

# Musical Instruments



Written by Kira Freed

[www.readinga-z.com](http://www.readinga-z.com)

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Frame drum with mallet

## **Introduction**

Music has probably been important since the first humans lived on Earth. They made musical instruments from everyday objects. Music might have been discovered unintentionally when musical tones were created by accidentally hitting a tree trunk or a rock. Or the wind might have created music when it blew through a shell, a reed, or a piece of bamboo.

Music is still important to us today. We can make music with our voices or with instruments. We can also dance to it or just listen to it. Music brings pleasure and joy to life. Gentle, quiet music soothes us. Loud music excites us and gives us energy. We can create or find music to express all of our moods.



Taiko drummer (Japan)

## Instruments

Just as there are many types of music, there are also many types of instruments. Each instrument has its own special personality. Each one creates its own kind of sound and mood. The sounds can be soft, loud, gentle, harsh, wild, or soothing.

Saxophone



The type of sound made by a musical instrument depends on its shape, design, and size. The sound also depends on the materials from which the instrument is made and the way it is played. It is truly amazing how many types of musical instruments there are in the world. Each one can bring pleasure to both the player and the listener.



Mandolin (wood)



Tambourine (skin)

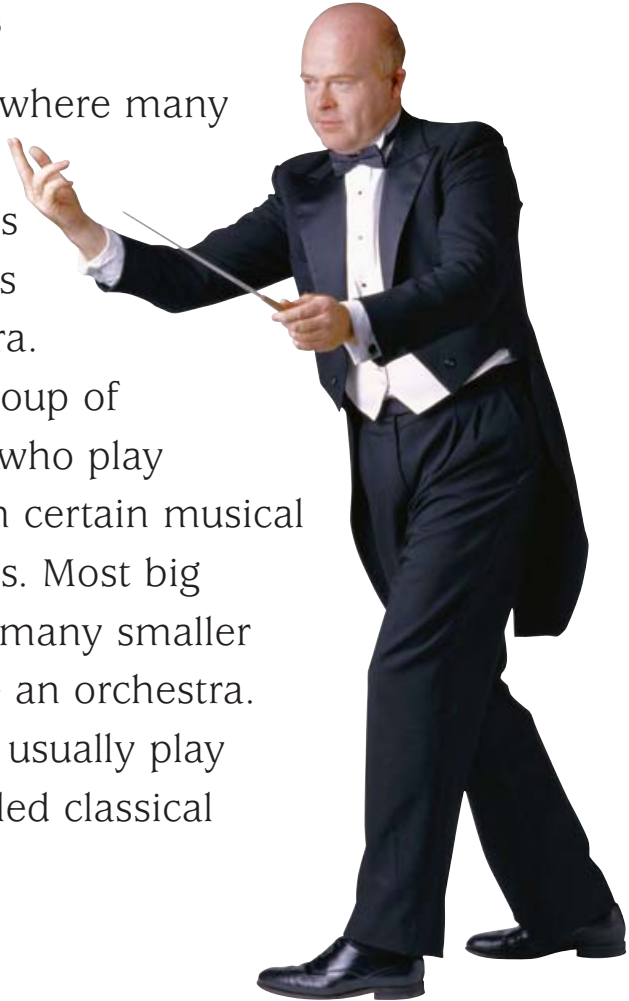


Gong (metal)

## Orchestras

One place where many musical instruments are found is an orchestra.

This is a group of musicians who play together on certain musical instruments. Most big cities, and many smaller cities, have an orchestra. Orchestras usually play what is called classical music.



Orchestral conductor



The biggest part of an orchestra is the **string section**. This includes a family of stringed instruments that are played with a **bow**.



Violin

These instruments all create a similar kind of sound, even though some are smaller with a higher sound and some are bigger with a deeper sound. The string section includes violins, violas, cellos, and double

basses. The string section of a large orchestra can contain over seventy musicians.



Cello



Double bass

Another stringed instrument in an orchestra is plucked instead of bowed.

It is the harp. It is a quieter instrument than many other orchestra instruments.

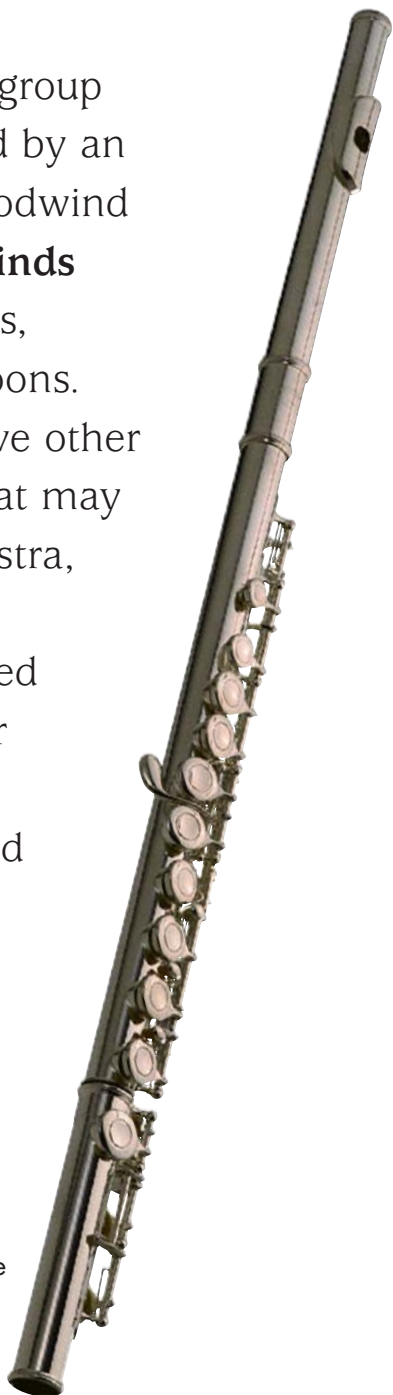
The harp is usually played while fewer other instruments are playing so that it can be heard. Sometimes the harp is played solo, or alone.



Harp

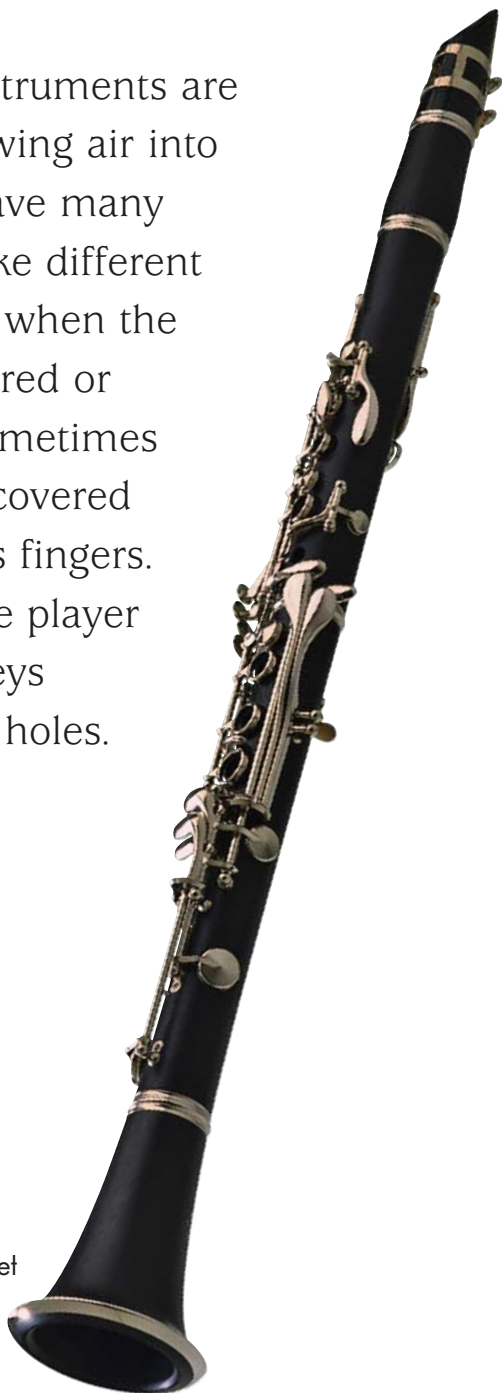
Another important group of instruments used by an orchestra is the woodwind family. The **woodwinds** include flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons. The woodwinds have other family members that may be part of an orchestra, too. The flute has a smaller cousin, called a piccolo. The other woodwinds have bigger cousins called the English horn, bass clarinet, and double bassoon.

Flute



Woodwind instruments are played by blowing air into them. They have many holes that make different musical notes when the holes are covered or uncovered. Sometimes the holes are covered by the player's fingers. Sometimes the player holds down keys that cover the holes.

Clarinet





French horn

Another section of the orchestra is the **brass** section. This includes trumpets, horns, trombones, and tubas. These are among the most powerful instruments in an orchestra. Brass instruments, like woodwinds, are played by blowing into them. Trumpets, horns, and tubas have valves that a player pushes to change notes. Trombones have a U-shaped metal tube and slide. The player moves the slide to change notes.

**Percussion** instruments are another important part of an orchestra. These instruments are all struck, or hit, in one way or another. They are made of skin, metal, or wood. Some percussion instruments, such as a xylophone, create musical notes. Others, such as castanets and most drums, create sound with no musical notes.

Percussion adds bangs and splashes to the sound of an orchestra.



Kettledrum

**Keyboard** instruments include the piano and organ. These instruments have closed cases that hide the inside of the instrument. Pianos have strings that vibrate. Organs create sound by the use of wind. These instruments all have many keys that can create many more notes than most other instruments.

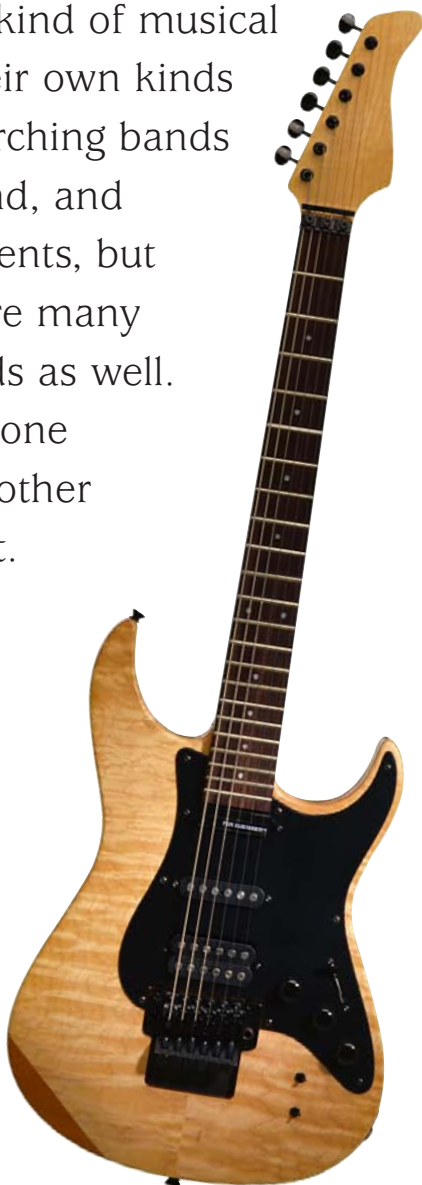


Baby grand piano

## Bands

Bands are another kind of musical group that have their own kinds of instruments. Marching bands use brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments, but no strings. There are many other kinds of bands as well. They often include one or more guitars, another stringed instrument.

Guitars are the foundation of many bands in the same way that the violin family is the foundation of an orchestra. Guitars played in bands are often made louder by the use of **amplifiers**.



Electric guitar



A rock band can include electric guitars, bass guitars, drums, and an electronic keyboard, along with other instruments. A jazz band can have many of the same instruments as a rock band. It can also have woodwinds and brass instruments. Latin bands often have extra percussion such as the marimba, an instrument related to a xylophone.



Bluegrass and country music bands may have guitars, banjos, mandolins, and autoharps. They may also have various percussion instruments such as spoons, washboards, and bucket basses. These bands also have fiddles, which are violins played in a very different style than they are in an orchestra.



Five-string banjo



Kalimba, or thumb piano (Africa)

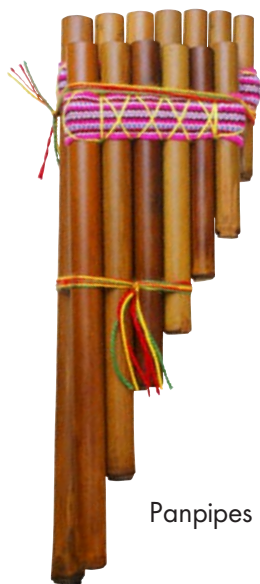
## **Instruments Around the World**

Cultures around the world have instruments that are very different from the ones described so far in this book. But most instruments, no matter where they are found, are played in one of four ways—by blowing, scraping, plucking, or hammering. Some examples of each type of instrument are shown on the following pages.

Blown instruments, including the woodwinds, all force air down a tube. Look at these photographs of blown instruments from around the world.



Native American flute



Panpipes (Greece, Latin America, Far East)



Scottish bagpipes (Scotland)

Scraped instruments include the violin family. They often use a bow that creates sound when scraped over strings. But many scraped instruments create music in other ways. These are two unusual scraped instruments.

Gusle  
(Eastern Europe)



Hurdy-gurdy (Europe)

Plucked instruments have strings that can be plucked using fingers or a variety of other objects. Here are some plucked instruments from around the world.



Lute (Middle East, Europe)



Koto (Japan)



Sitar (India)



Hammered instruments include drums and other percussion instruments. They create music by hitting one object with another. Cultures around the world have many kinds of hammered instruments. Here are a few of them.



Drum (Africa)



Shekere, or beaded gourd shaker (Africa)



Castanets (Spain)

In many ways, the human voice can be considered a musical instrument. It is perhaps the most flexible musical instrument of all. It can create and sing songs with words, tunes without words, and a wide variety of rhythms and sounds. It doesn't cost anything since no extra equipment is needed. If you are in a place where you need to be quiet, you can still hum or sing silently to yourself.

Barbershop  
quartet





Music brings great joy to life. It helps us to express ourselves, and it fills our world with beauty.

Whether you sing, dance,  
play an instrument,  
or sit and listen  
to music,  
be sure  
to make it  
a part of  
your life.



Saxophone player

## Glossary

<b>amplifier</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	electronic equipment that makes a musical instrument sound louder (p. 16)
<b>bow</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a flexible rod with horsehairs stretched from end to end for playing instruments of the violin family (p. 9)
<b>brass</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of metal instruments that includes trumpets, trombones, horns, and tubas (p. 13)
<b>keyboard</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of instruments that includes the piano, organ, harpsichord, and more. Also, the row or rows of keys on any of these instruments (p. 15)
<b>percussion</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of instruments on which music is made by hammering or banging, such as the drum (p. 14)
<b>string section</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the violins, violas, cellos, and double basses in an orchestra (p. 9)
<b>woodwinds</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of instruments that includes flutes, clarinets, oboes, and bassoons (p. 11)

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**Correlation**

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