

OBOE

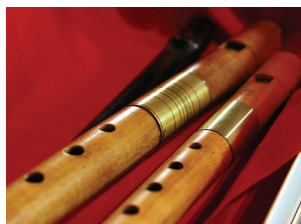


The modern-day oboe is a beautiful and complex instrument, commonly made of grenadilla (African blackwood) and featuring a complex key system with 45 pieces of keywork. The Baroque oboe is more rustic, generally made of boxwood and containing only three keys, which means

players have to “overblow” to reach the higher harmonic pitches. Invented in the mid-17th century and one of the first woodwind instruments to be adopted into the orchestra, the oboe played an especially important part in Baroque orchestras and was frequently employed as a solo instrument. The oboe d’amore, featured as a solo instrument on this program, is especially beloved for its serene tone color, something Bach and Telemann utilized to great effect.

FLUTE

Flutes are one of the earliest known instruments, having been found in the Byzantine Empire. Unlike other woodwind instruments, flutes do not use reeds,



and instead have an embouchure hole near the top across and into which the player blows. During the Baroque Period, the original transverse flutes were redesigned to give the instrument a wider range and more penetrating sound, while maintaining its soft, expressive qualities. Composers such as Bach, Telemann, and Vivaldi incorporated the flute into a wide range of opera, ballet, chamber and orchestral music. The flute enjoyed popularity during the Baroque and Classical periods, but fell out of favor during the Romantic era until Theobald Boehm redesigned the instrument into the form most commonly found today, made out of metal rather than wood.

HARPSICHORD



It seems only natural to group the harpsichord with the piano and organ because of the way it’s designed and played, but the funny thing is, in some ways the harpsichord is actually more similar to the guitar. When you play a key on the harpsichord, the levers activate a

mechanism that plucks the string, whereas in a piano the sound is produced by hammers hitting strings (like percussion instruments), and in organs by releasing pressurized air through a series of pipes (like a wind instrument). On a harpsichord, it doesn’t matter how powerfully or gently one strikes the notes, the tone is generally brilliant and direct, but inflexible and unvarying. Many harpsichords are made with two “manuals” (two sets of keyboards), which allow for some variation in volume and tone color.

The harpsichord is extremely important in early music for providing the harmonic progressions and bass lines. Conductors of period ensembles also commonly lead from the harpsichord, playing the figured bass while conducting. In addition to its accompanying role, the harpsichord can also be a solo instrument; Bach alone wrote a large number of keyboard works that were played on the harpsichord before they became popular on piano as well. Though the instrument fell into disuse by about 1810, supplanted in popularity of pianos, 20th-century composers have returned to the harpsichord, seeking variation in the sounds available to them. Today, we hear the harpsichord in Baroque music as well as in the works of contemporary composers such as Ligeti and Bartók.

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INTRODUCTION TO A BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

How was music played in Bach and Mozart's time? This innocent question became central to a major intellectual and musical movement called "historically informed performance," or "period performance." The idea of historically informed performance dates back to the late 19th century, when instrument maker Arnold Dolmetsch made copies of Baroque-era instruments and studied treatises on how music was performed in earlier times. The movement grew quickly after WWII, with the founding of ensembles such as the Academy of Ancient Music, the Boston Baroque, and the English Concert.

There are two main considerations to period performance – using historical instruments and knowing the appropriate, "historically accurate" playing styles based on modern-day research. Here, we will explore some of the instruments used in a Baroque orchestra, how they compare to modern-day counterparts, and a few of the stylistic aesthetics commonly observed.

LUTE

The lute and its cousin, the four-stringed oud, are influential predecessors of the modern-day guitar. A plucked string instrument with a large half-pear body, frets, and a pegbox, the lute is used both as a solo and accompanying instrument, especially well-suited to providing harmony to vocal songs. The lute was one of the most important instruments for Renaissance secular music, but fell out of fashion by the late 17th century in part because of the harpsichord's increasing popularity.



VIOLIN



The Baroque violin differs from the modern violin in several ways. For one, strings are made of catgut, prepared from natural fiber found in the walls of animal intestines, rather than steel. This gives the instrument a darker, richer, but less brilliant and explosive sound. In addition, Baroque violinists did not play with chin rests or shoulder rests, as they didn't exist at that time. The Baroque bow also bends outwards rather than inwards, contains less bow hair, and is lighter than its modern counterpart.

Aesthetically, the choice of tempo, tuning pitch, improvisation, ornamentation, and vibrato are all significant points of debate that have been the subject of entire books. To make some large generalizations, the research behind period performance has often led musicians to adopt faster tempos, lower tuning pitches, freer improvisation, specific approaches to ornamentation, and restrained use of vibrato. Ensembles were also far smaller in the 18th century. Whereas a Handel piece typically features 25-50 instrumentalists, in the 20th century, some composers wrote works for over 100 players. The period performance movement influenced orchestras to reduce ensemble size when playing earlier music, and many feel that this allows us to hear textures and musical lines that might otherwise disappear in a larger ensemble.

TRUMPET AND HORN



All conversations comparing modern and historical brass instruments begin and end with valves – they're that important. The ancestor to the French horn, "natural horn," did not have a valve system. As a result, pitch changes were mainly controlled by lip tension and hand position in the horn bell. This not only makes the horn difficult to play, but also limits the range of notes the instrument can produce. As a result, music written for the natural horn had to account for its limitations until valves were developed, which allowed for a whole new world of chromatic possibilities. However, some composers such as Brahms preferred the sound of the natural horn and continued to write for it, adding to the repertoire already left behind by Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Telemann, and others.

Likewise, before the invention of keyed trumpets by Anton Weidinger in 1770, the instrument was valveless and immensely difficult to play. It's interesting to note that most contemporary replicas of natural trumpets are made with modern compromises, such as the addition of vent holes that ensure acceptable intonation, while still recreating the original sound. This gives us an idea of just how much skill it took to control these instruments before the invention of valves.