

What instruments are played in orchestra?

Below is a short description of the instruments. To see all four of these instruments in action, check out this short YouTube clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxFNHeXKmrY> (harp is not available, sorry!)

Violin



Left: A full-sized violin.

Right: A student playing a sized violin.

The violin is the highest pitched of the string instruments. Violins and violas look very much alike, and both instruments sit on your shoulder while you play them.

Like all string instruments, violins are very versatile, but they are maybe most commonly seen in classical music, fiddling, and mariachi music.

Viola



Left: A 15 1/2-inch viola.

Right: A student playing a sized viola.

The viola looks a lot like the violin, and like the violin, it sits on your shoulder. However, a viola has a deeper, lower sound. This instrument has a long history and a beautiful sound. Many composers have chosen to play viola when playing their own pieces. [The American Viola Society](#) and many groups like it sponsor competitions, publish magazines, and commission new compositions all centered on violas.

Cello



Left: A full-sized cello.

Right: A student with a cello her size.

Many students prefer the cello to the violin because of its deeper, lower sound. Cellists play the lowest, root parts in string quartets, providing an anchor in a chamber music group. In string orchestras, only the bass plays lower parts than the cello.

The cello is so big that players place it between their legs when playing; an end pin, or metal rod, keeps it at the right height. Unlike a violin or viola, a cellist places the bow across the strings level with the floor. Some famous cellists include Yo Yo Ma and Pablo Casals.

Bass



Left: A three-quarters-sized bass.

Right: A student playing a sized bass.

The bass is the lowest of the string instruments, and the root of the orchestra. A full-sized bass is so large that not many adults play them; most play a three-quarters sized instrument instead, including many professional symphony members. The bass is unique among the orchestral strings in that it is a member of the viol, not violin, family of instruments. A bass is also sometimes called a string bass, upright bass, or double bass.

Bass players are not only in demand in the world of classical music. Many styles of music include a bass at the root of their ensembles, including jazz, salsa, country, folk, and pop music among others.