

Knowing how to play a particular instrument is great, but knowing its family is better! Today, in this course, we will therefore focus on the different families of instruments. And to see the different families of instruments, we will base ourselves on the composition of the symphony orchestra.

We distinguish in all this 3 major families of instruments: strings, winds, and percussion. In each family, there are sub-families, we will detail them below:

1. The strings

- Bowed strings

This subfamily of strings is named this way because the instruments require a bow to be able to play.

Among the best known instruments of this subfamily, we can cite the violin, the cello, the double bass, the viola ...



- Plucked strings

This subfamily of strings is named this way because the instruments do not require a bow to be able to play, only the fingers of the musician.

Among the most famous instruments of this subfamily, we can cite the guitar, the harp, the piano, the organ ...



2. Brass

This wind subfamily is named this way because the instruments are all made of copper, and at the "entrance" of the instrument, we find a mouthpiece:



Please note, an exception exists: this is the family of saxophones, which are made of brass, but since they work with a reed, are part of the woodwinds.

Among the best known instruments of this subfamily, we can cite the trumpet, the trombone, the horn, the tuba, ...



3. Woodwind

This subfamily of winds is made up of all wind instruments that are not brass. At the end, at the entrance of the instrument, we can find a reed, but it is not mandatory:



Among the best known instruments of this subfamily, we can cite the clarinet, the flute, the oboe, the bassoon, the saxophone, ...



4. Percussion

An instrument of this family is defined by the fact that the emission of sound results from the striking or scraping of a membrane or a resonant material.

There are 4 sub-families of percussion:

- the Membranophones

The striking of a skin stretched over a barrel with chopsticks or the hands generates a sound amplified by the sound box (and by possible timbres). The pitch depends on the size of the barrel and the tension of the skin.

Among the best known instruments of this subfamily, we can cite the snare drum, the bass drum, the tambourine, the timpani, ...

- Idiophones

These are instruments whose material produces sound upon impact either by an external accessory or by another part of the instrument. This sound can be indeterminate or determined.

Among the best known instruments of this subfamily, we can cite the triangle, the xylophone, the marimba, the steel-drum, ...

- the Cordophones

Some string instruments are percussion instruments because the strings are struck in rhythm and make it possible to produce a tuned sound to the instruments they accompany.

- the Electrophones

An electrophone is an instrument whose sound is produced by the oscillation of an electric current and can only be heard through a loudspeaker.

Among the best known instruments of this subfamily, we can cite the vibraphone, the electronic drum, ...

Conclusion: THE TIPS TO REMEMBER

- there are 4 main families of instruments: strings, brass, woodwind, percussion.
- these 4 large families are subdivided into sub families.
- these subfamilies have a name related to a characteristic common to all the instruments of the subfamily, or a playing characteristic.