

THE ORCHESTRA

The symphony orchestra was a relatively recent invention at the start of the Classical era. During the Baroque era (c. 1600-1750), musical ensembles were usually made up somewhat haphazardly out of whichever players were available, with little attention paid to blending the sound. But by the dawn of the Classical age, (around 1750), the orchestral sections were gradually becoming standardised.

The normal Classical orchestra was small by modern-day standards.

The **string** section comprised violins (split into firsts and seconds), violas, cellos and double bass. This is the same as the modern-day set-up, but it is likely that the Classical orchestra had fewer string players than now, overall. Cellos and basses are often combined onto one single bass clef staff. The double bass will of course sound an octave lower than the cello. If the cello and basses have different melodies, they will be split into two parts. Some scores may have sections for combined cel/bass and other sections for split parts.

The **woodwind** section ordinarily comprised the flute, oboe and bassoon. The clarinet was a newcomer and only became a regular member of the symphony orchestra by the end of Classical era, but it is used from time to time. The maximum number of players would be two per instrument. Not all scores use all the available instruments, and various combinations are seen. One common set-up was a single flute, plus two oboes and two bassoons.

The **brass** section was comprised only of trumpet and horn (usually up to two of each). Trombones had been around for centuries but were reserved for church and operatic music and were not included in the symphony orchestra. The tuba was not invented until c. 1835.

Finally, the **percussion** section was limited to the timpani in most cases. The AmuSTCL questions will not include any other percussion instruments.

All the woodwind and brass instruments were at a relatively early stage of their development, and as such, their overall range of notes was more limited than today's instruments. The string family has remained largely unchanged.

It is worthwhile watching some Classical works being performed on period instruments. At that time woodwind instruments, (which were all *wooden* in those days), had fewer metal keys. More keys on woodwind instruments translates into more available notes, or better tunings of existing notes. The horns and trumpets were simple coiled tubes without valves or pistons, which meant their range of available notes was limited to the harmonic series. (See "The Brass" for more about this).

In order to orchestrate for a Classical symphony orchestra, it is of course necessary to know the **available notes** on each instrument. You will also need to understand the **function** of each instrument, and any **special characteristics** it has, as well as how the various instruments were typically **blended** together. In the next chapter we will examine each instrument in more depth.

AMUSTCL STAVES

In the AmusTCL exam, the orchestral score is presented as a “piano reduction” – however it may take up two, three or even four staves (treble and bass clefs, see p.23 for examples). Your job is to extract and create individual parts for each orchestral instrument, based on the piano reduction.

All parts are written at concert pitch on the piano reduction staves.

Usually², an instrument is shown on the **same** staff throughout. A single staff can hold several separate parts, and each staff may also hold up to three or even four different instruments. (Thus, for example, a single staff may hold the parts for two flutes, two oboes, one horn and one trumpet (six different parts, four different instruments).

However, if the texture of the music changes, a staff-change may occur.

The stem direction assigned to a particular instrument is normally (but not always) maintained throughout. Thus, if the oboes are written with stems down in the first bar, this will be the case all the way through. This is important, as it can help you to decipher which is the most likely instrument if, for example, six parts are reduced to four. (If however, the staff is changed, then the stem direction may also change to reflect the new layout.) Sometimes the stem direction used for an instrument may change in order to accommodate all the music clearly – you may need to use some detective skills! Remember for example, that timpani will only play tonic/dominant notes and not multi-pitch melodies, and check the range of the notes used.

When three or four parts are placed on a single staff, stems can sometimes get in the way of each other. To make things clearer, one part will be moved out slightly to the side. Here, the staff holds parts for two flutes, two oboes and two clarinets. There are three crotchet (quarter note) beats in the bar. The clarinets and oboes have stems down, and the flutes have stem up. The oboes are moved outwards slightly to the left, so that they can be clearly seen.



Notes written with a single stem are not necessarily always for the same type of instrument. In the following example, the note marked 1 is intended for two flutes (a2), and the note marked 2 is for two oboes.



The clefs used in the piano reduction will usually, but not always, correspond to the clef normally used by the instrument. You will never find flutes and oboes written in the bass clef, for example, because their ranges do not extend that far down, but the viola can be found in either a treble or bass clef staff, and the second violins might be found in bass clef staff, if they mostly play low pitches.

Usually, the upper woodwind will be found on the topmost staff and strings will be lower down. It may be the case that the bass parts are presented **not** on the lowest staff, but somewhere in the middle. Look carefully at the pitches of each part, to help you ascertain where they belong within the whole texture.

² “Usually” means based on a large selection of past papers. We cannot know whether future exam papers will be set out differently however.