



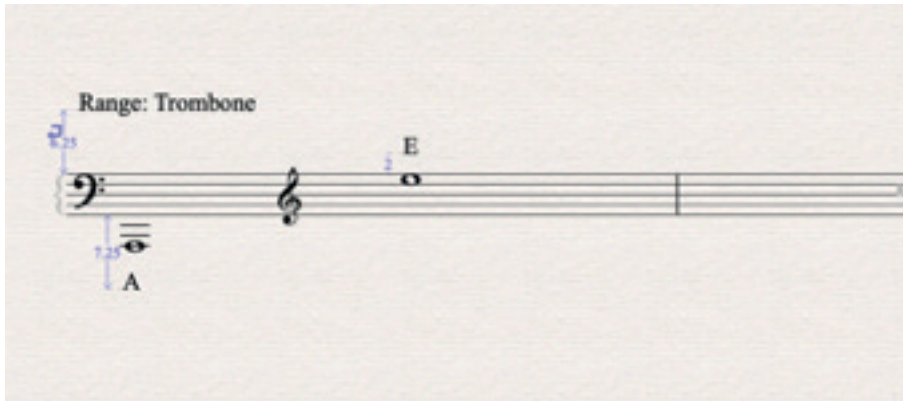
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R O Y A L
C O L L E G E
O F M U S I C
London

RCM Sparks Springboard: Instrument Guide for Composers writing for bassoon, French horn, trombone, violin or double bass

RCM Sparks is the Royal College of Music's learning and participation programme.
To find out more and get involved visit www.rcm.ac.uk/sparks

Trombone

Range: A1 to E2



The trombone and trumpet families are very similar in terms of sound except for the fact that the trombone operates in a lower register and uses a slide mechanism.

The shape of the instrument gives it its brassy character. Its tone is powerful and resonant and it is capable of extreme dynamics, cutting through a full symphony orchestra easily in the higher register.

The middle register is more mellow and rich whereas the lower register gets weaker and flabby as you descend.

Multiple mutes are available: straight mute, harmon mute and cup mute are most common.

Be careful with demanding continuous playing in the high or extreme low registers and try to avoid fast big leaps.

Very fast passages at the bottom of the register are almost impossible to play.

It is not a transposing instrument and should be written at sounding pitch in either the bass clef, or treble clef when writing high on the instrument.

Hear it in:

Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale*

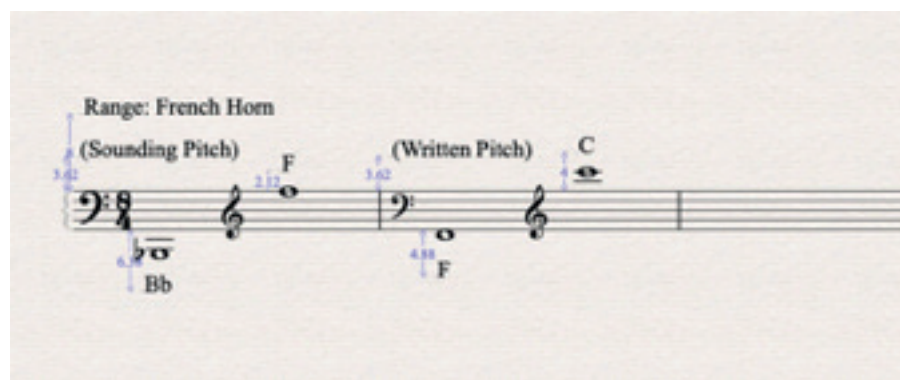
Bartok's *The Miraculous Mandarin*

Berio's *Sequenza*

Edgard Varèse's *Octandre*

French Horn

Range: Bb1 to F2 (sounding pitch)



The French horn is the most smooth and mellow of all the brass instruments. It can play gently and quietly as well as sounding noble and heroic.

It's easiest to play and sounds most characteristic in the upper two-thirds of its range. Parts are written in treble clef except for when writing in bass clef for the lowest register, where the sound is weaker and more flabby.

The horn is a transposing instrument. Its sounds five notes lower than written. (Write a middle C and it will sound F below).

The sound can be changed by using a mute and by "stopping". This is where the player completely blocks the airway with the hand in the bell so that the sound becomes buzzy, nasal and distant. It's a great effect!

As with all brass instruments, players need time to breathe and to rest from passages of sustained playing. Avoid fast passage with big leaps!

Hear it in:

Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*
Any Symphony by Mahler
Mozart's Horn Concerto no. 4
Richard Strauss Horn Concerto no. 1 or 2

Bassoon

Range: Bb1 to E2



Parts for the Bassoon are normally written in the bass clef, except for the higher register when the treble clef becomes easier to read.

It has a large register with an even sound throughout and produces a veiled, velvet and melancholy character. In the very lowest regions of the instrument it's hard to play very quietly. Higher notes sound increasing unearthly and mysterious.

The bassoon is an agile instrument and traditionally it has taken on the role of playing bass lines, been used to exploit a comedic character and has also been used to express a lyrical, lonely and melancholy mood.

It's not a loud instrument so take care not to obscure it when writing ensemble and orchestral music.

The Bassoon is not a transposing instrument, so write the notes you want to hear!

Hear it in:

Stravinsky's Octet

Tchaikovsky's Symphony 4-6

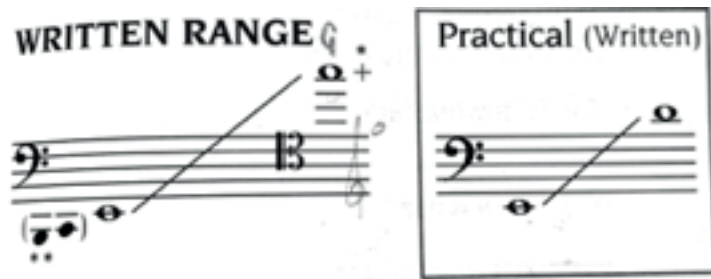
Ravel's Piano Concerto

Beethoven's Symphony 4-6

Bartok's Concerto For Orchestra

Double Bass

Range: E to D (sounds one octave lower than written)



The double bass has two important playing techniques:

Arco = play with the bow

But where can you play?

- Sul pont. (on the bridge) creating a sharp, acidic sound
- Sul tasto (on the fingerboard) creating a soft, sweet sound

Pizzicato = plucking

Con sord. = with the mute, creating a muffled, darker sound.

The bass is comprised of four strings. The open (unfingered) strings are, from lowest to highest: E (IV), A (III), D (II) and G (I). Unlike the violin, viola and cello, the contrabass' strings are tuned a perfect 4th apart.

The sound characteristics of the double bass are heavy, weighty, dark, wafting, somber, earthy, resonant, mighty, menacing, violent, mellow....

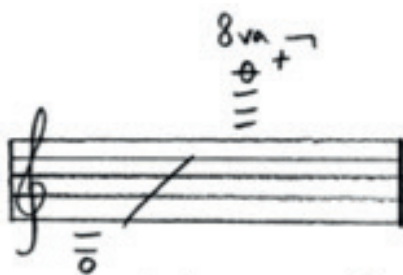
Hear it in:

Solo from Mahler: Symphony #1 (3rd Movement). This demonstrates the mellow, sombre tone of the instrument.

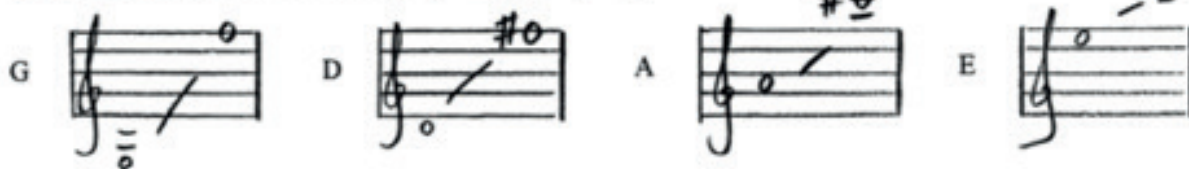
Violin

Range and Characteristics

The range of the violin is :



A recommendation for the most appropriate playing range on each string is :



The playing techniques of the violin are like the double bass.

Arco means to play with the bow

But where can you play?

-Sul pont. (on the bridge) creating a sharp, acidic sound

-Sul tasto (on the fingerboard) creating a soft, sweet sound

Pizzicato = plucking

Con sord. = with the mute, creating a muffled, darker sound.

The character of each string varies hugely. The G string is full, rich, dark, strong tone; the D string is softer and mellow; the A string is brighter, more penetrating yet rounded in sound; the E string is very bright and projects well

Hear it in: .

Vaughan Williams' The Lark Ascending. This is a good example of the beautiful tone of the E string.

The opening of Ravel's Tzigane. This is a good example of the rich tone of the G string.