

String Orchestra Instruments Listening Unit



12 PRINTABLE PAGES

N. Paganini

G. Tartini

R. Schumann

S. Koussevitzky

P. Tchaikovsky

J. Massenet

G. Bottesini

D. Shostakovich

Violin

The violin is an instrument with four strings that you play with a bow.

You hold the violin between your chin and shoulder when you play it.

To make music, you press the strings with your left hand and move the bow with your right hand. The violin doesn't have frets or marks like a guitar does.

The violin is the smallest and highest pitched string instrument typically used in Western music. Someone who plays the violin is called a violinist.

Niccolò Paganini (27 October 1782 – 27 May 1840) was a famous Italian violin player and music writer. He was well-known as an amazing violin player during his time and played a big role in developing modern ways of playing the violin. His collection of 24 solo violin pieces, called the 24 Caprices for Solo Violin Op. 1, is very famous and has inspired many other music composers.

Let's listen to Paganini's Caprices 1, 5, 24 played by Itzhak Perlman.

Violin

All music for the violin is written in the treble clef.

Range

Giuseppe Tartini (8 April 1692 – 26 February 1770) was an Italian composer, creator and violin player from the Baroque period, born in a place called Pirano in what was then the Republic of Venice (now known as Piran in Slovenia). Tartini wrote a lot of music with more than 1000 pieces for the violin, including many violin concertos. He is most famous for his Violin Sonata in G Minor, also known as the Devil's Trill Sonata.

Let's listen to Tartini's Devil's Trill Sonata played by Itzhak Perlman.



Violin

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Viola

The viola is a musical instrument that looks a lot like the violin and is played the same way, resting on the left shoulder.

But it sounds a bit lower than the violin and higher than the big cello. It's slightly larger than the violin, which might make it hard to distinguish between the two.

The viola is special because its sound sounds deeper by five notes than the violin.

When it comes to its sound, the viola has a rich, "earthy" or "soft" kind of music, which is different from the bright and sunny music of the violin.

Robert Schumann (8 June 1810 – 29 July 1856) was a German composer, pianist, and music critic of the early Romantic era. He composed in all the main musical genres of the time, writing for solo piano, voice and piano, chamber groups, orchestra, choir, and opera. His works typify the spirit of the Romantic era in German music.

Let's listen to Robert Schumann's Fairy Tale Pictures played by Yuri

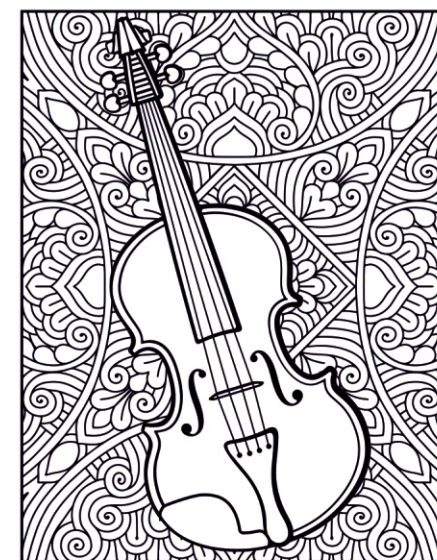
Viola

Music for the viola is usually notated in the alto clef, but to make it easier to read, the upper notes are sometimes written in treble clef.

Range

Dmitri Shostakovich (September 25, 1906 – August 9, 1975) was a famous music writer and piano player from Russia during a time called the Soviet era. He became well-known all over the world after the premiere of his First Symphony in 1926. Shostakovich used lots of different music styles in his work. He is considered one of the top music makers of the middle part of the 1900s.

Let's listen to Dmitri Shostakovich's Impromptu for Viola and Piano played by Paul Neubauer.



Viola

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Cello

The cello is a musical instrument that plays the middle and low sounds in the string section.

Unlike the violin and viola, which players hold up with their left shoulder and chin, the cello is too big for that.

Originating from Italian, its name is pronounced «cello," though its full name is "violoncello." In common conversation, it's referred to as the "cello."

Someone who plays the cello is known as a «cellist."

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (7 May 1840 – 6 November 1893) was a Russian composer during the Romantic period. He is one of the most popular of all Russian composers. He wrote melodies that were usually dramatic and emotional. Tchaikovsky wrote some of the most popular concert and theatrical music in the current classical repertoire, including the ballets *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*, his *First Piano Concerto*, and the *Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy*.

Let's listen to P.Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Roccoco theme played by Sol Gabetta.

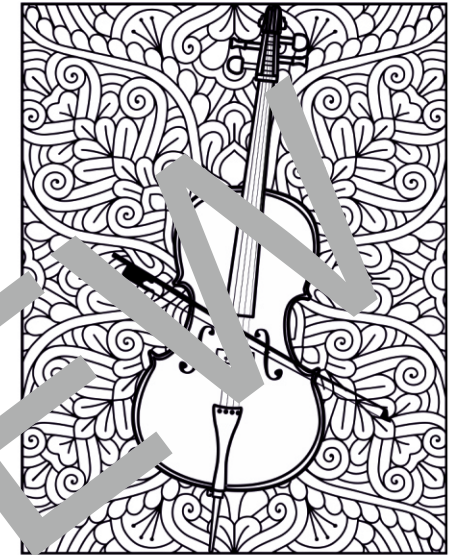
Cello

All music for the cello is written in either the bass, tenor, or treble clef to avoid multiple ledger lines.

Range

Jules Massenet, born on May 12, 1842, was a famous French composer who created over 30 operas and other music like ballets and symphonies. At only nine years old, he joined the Paris Conservatory to study music, and by 36, he was teaching there. Known for his operas full of beautiful melodies, Massenet was one of the most beloved creators of French opera music after Georges Bizet.

Let's listen to J.Massenet's Cello Concerto played by Sol Gabetta.



Cello

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Double Bass

The double bass is the largest string instrument. It resembles the cello but has longer and thicker strings to produce deeper sounds.

Also known as the contrabass, it creates low tones in orchestras or bands. It rests on an adjustable peg. Players either stand or sit on a high stool to play it, using their left knee to keep it steady.

A person who plays the double bass is known as a double bass player or a bassist.

Giovanni Bottesini (December 22, 1821 – July 7, 1889) was an Italian double bass player, conductor, and composer. His father gave him his first music lessons in early childhood, and before Giovanni turned 11, he was playing the timpani in a local theater. Bottesini became very famous, and his skill on the double bass was as amazing as Paganini's on the violin. Many top double bass players look up to Bottesini because he helped make the double bass popular again.

Let's listen to Bottesini's Tarantella for Double bass played by Théotime Voisin.

Double Bass

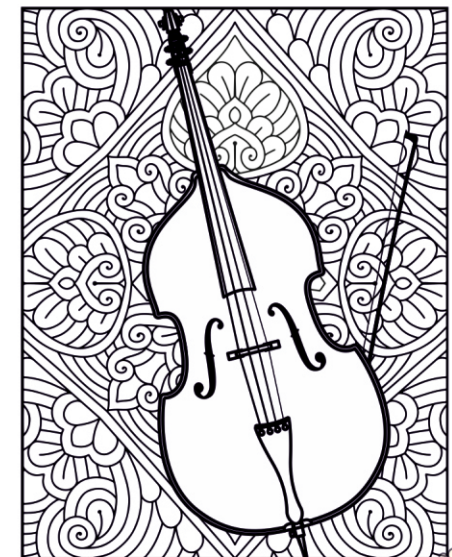
Double bass music is written in bass, tenor, and less often, treble clef, an octave higher than it actually sounds.

written sounds

Range

Serge Koussevitzky (born July 26, 1874, died June 4, 1951) was a well-known Russian and American conductor, composer, and expert double bass player. His parents taught him to play the violin, cello, piano, and trumpet when he was young. At 14, he won a scholarship to study music in Moscow. In 1924, he moved to the U.S. to lead the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Throughout his life, he helped young musicians worldwide.

Let's listen to S.Koussevitzky's Double Bass Concerto played by Marc André.

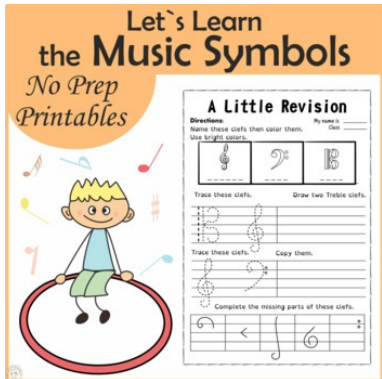
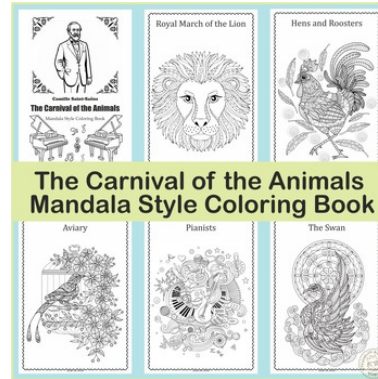
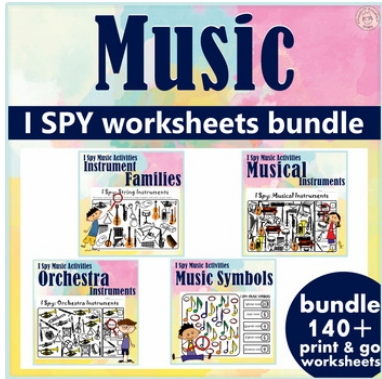


Double Bass

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