

Orchestration : An Overview

Before 1600

No idiom - The instruments used were the ones that were available at the time.

Baroque

Strings became the heart of the orchestra.
Winds and percussion were scored ad libitum.
Continuo was used as a harmonic foundation.

Later Baroque

Wind parts become specified (recorder, oboe, trumpet, horn and bassoon).

1750

Contrasts between orchestral colors (e.g. winds and strings) and simple homophonic doublings (winds plus strings). [See Handel's Water Music, 1717]
"Equally Common" - a polyphonic approach that achieved homogeneity through counterpoint of individual, balanced lines.

Early Classical

"Contrapuntal Simplification" - The violins became the focus. Winds functioned to sustain harmony. Haydn, influenced by Mozart, later gave the winds a more melodic role.

Mozart's Contributions :

- (1) Pioneered the use of the clarinet (from Mannheim).
- (2) Gave winds more prominence and more virtuosity.
- (3) Bassoon received greater independence.

Beethoven's Contributions:

- (1) Brass became more prominent and more virtuosic.
- (2) Horns became more independent (see *Eroica*, 3rd mvt.)

Opera :

- (1) Gluck used odd instruments (harp, percussion, trombone) as did Mozart (glockenspiel).
- (2) Rossini (1800) used extreme virtuosity in his wind writing.

Romantic

Berlioz's Contributions:

- (1) Orchestration was part of the musical fabric. The orchestration was as important as the musical idea.
- (2) Exploited the enhanced capabilities of the woodwinds.
- (3) The brass section became as important as the strings and winds. Brass moments were conceived as chords rather than as melodies.
- (4) Much timbral experimentation: col legno, sul pont, mutes, harmonics, gliss.
- (5) Used new instruments: harp, English horn, Eb clarinet, cornet, and the valved trumpet. Valves on the brass instruments allowed low brass.

Wagner:

- (1) Brass and winds became more prominent.
- (2) Used substantial doublings between orchestral choirs.
- (3) Occasional lengthy solos for wind instruments (English horn in *Tristan*)
- (4) Brass became central to the orchestral concept.

Three Schools of Orchestration Developed

[1] Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Brahms - Characterized by a heterogeneous blend of orchestral choirs. The strings dominated over the winds, brass, and percussion.

[2] Bruckner, Franck, and Saint-Saens - All were organists. Used full orchestral choirs either juxtaposed or contrasted in a fashion reminiscent of organ stops.

[3] Rimsky-Korsakov (from Berlioz) - Highly virtuosic with a strong focus on timbre. Chamber-like scoring. Emphasis on percussion.

Modern

Debussy's Contributions:

- (1) The woodwinds dominated. They were scored soloistically rather than sectionally.
- (2) The strings were given a background role. There was much use of tremolo, sul pont, and sul tasto coloration techniques.
- (3) The brass were often muted and percussion was used sparingly.
- (4) Stravinsky and Ravel imitated Debussy.

Varese's Contributions:

- (1) De-emphasized strings completely by removing them from scores.
- (2) Used extreme registers in the instruments.
- (3) Percussion became very prominent.