

MUSIC APPRECIATION SECTION

The Symphony Orchestra

By BERT PAUL OSBON *

(Continued from the January number)

II. THE WOODWIND SECTION

*Contra-
bassoon**Bassoon**Bass
clarinet**Clarinet**English
horn**Oboe**Flute**Piccolo*

IN THE symphony orchestra there are two groups of wind instruments, into each of which the player blows a column of air when playing. One of these groups is the second section of instruments of the orchestra: the woodwind section — sometimes called “the woodwinds.”

Originally all of these wind instruments were made of wood, hence, the name woodwind, but in the modern orchestra a few of them, as the flute and the piccolo, are made of metal. But they are still called woodwind.

In the woodwind section there is a quartet of the most important of these instru-

ments: (1) the flute, (2) the oboe (pronounced o-bo), (3) the clarinet, and (4) the bassoon. Each of these has a companion instrument which is somewhat similar, yet it has enough difference to add additional range and tone color to the woodwind section: (1) with the flute the piccolo (or little flute) is placed; (2) with the oboe there is the English horn which is really an alto oboe; (3) with the clarinet is the bass clarinet; and (4) with the bassoon is the contrabassoon. Thus there are really eight instruments in the woodwind section.

The woodwind section, when played by itself, has a beautiful, characteristic tone color something like a large pipe organ. The players in this section usually sit in the cen-

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ter of the orchestra with the flutes and piccolo in front; nearby will be the oboes, the English horn, the clarinets, and the bass clarinet, while a little way behind them there are the bassoons and the contrabassoon. All of these instruments, except the flute and the piccolo, contain thin reeds—either one or two—and are frequently called “the reeds.”

A reed is a small piece of bamboo shaved very thin at one end. When this reed is placed in the mouthpiece, the player blows a column of air which causes the reed to vibrate. Thus a tone is produced.

The clarinet and the bass clarinet have one reed each; they are known as the single-reed instruments. The oboe, the English horn, the bassoon, and the contrabassoon have a double reed each.

In a large symphony orchestra, there will be something like the following number of woodwind instruments: 3 flutes, 1 piccolo, 3 oboes, 1 English horn, 3 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon.

The woodwind section gives tone color to the music, but the music must be so written that each woodwind player will have a frequent rest. You will remember that I told you that the players in the string section can play a long time without needing to rest, but this is not true of the players of wind instruments. The strain of blowing air from the lungs and from contracting the muscles of the lips make occasional rest periods necessary.

Sometimes there will be various combinations of woodwind and string instruments, because these instruments blend well. A great many different combinations are possible. A splendid combination of woodwind and string instruments is made by using the flute, the violin, and the cello. Of course there must be an additional instrument to play the accompaniment such as the harp or the piano or the organ.

Some of the woodwind instruments are of very ancient origin. Flutes were used in ancient Greece, and it was considered a necessary part of every Greek boy's education to be able to play the flute. A simple form of oboe was also used in ancient times.

Within the last century many improvements have been made in the mechanism of woodwind instruments. Consequently the tone quality is better, and it is possible to play difficult music with greater ease.

The saxophone is used occasionally in a symphony orchestra, but it is usually not considered as one of the symphonic instruments. Although a saxophone is played by means of a reed, it is not, strictly speaking, a woodwind instrument.

Study the picture on page 60. Memorize the names of the woodwind instruments. Notice the appearance of each. If you can hear any of these instruments played alone listen to the tone color of the instrument which you hear. In a later article, I will tell you about each instrument.

(To be continued)