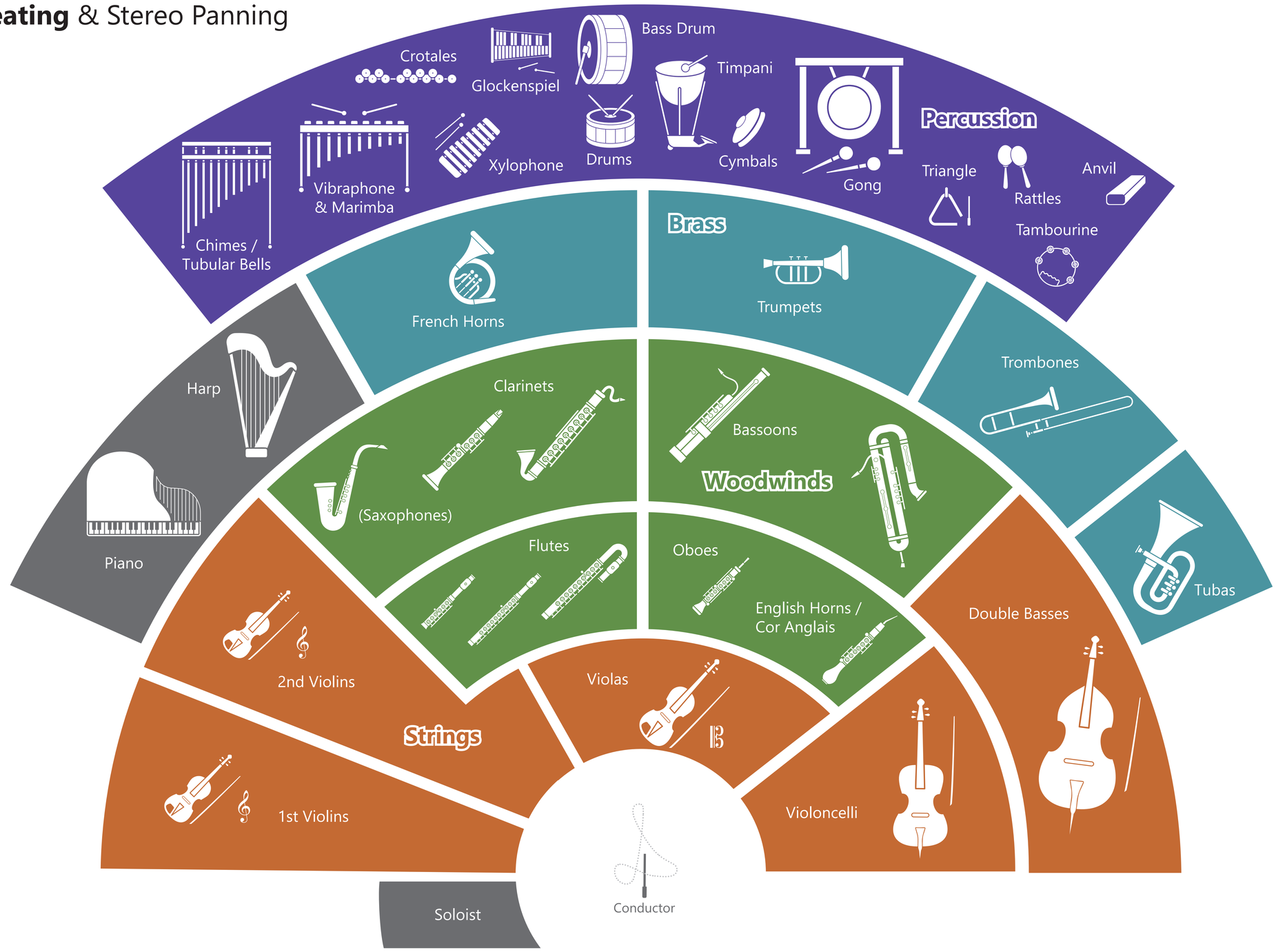
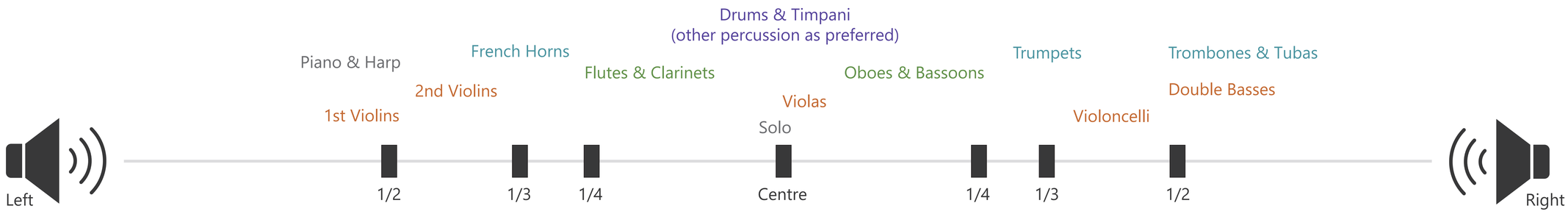
# **Orchestral Seating** & Stereo Panning




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EN

# Notes

**Please use this chart as a guideline rather than an absolute reference.** Orchestral seating has evolved from the Baroque through the Classical and Romantic periods to the present day, adapting as orchestras grew and musical demands changed. Instrumentation varies from piece to piece, and composers have even introduced new instruments, such as the Wagner tuba, to realise particular sounds they had in mind. Seating arrangements are therefore flexible, responding to the needs of the music and the sound envisioned by the composer or conductor. Even today's renowned orchestras adapt their seating arrangements to the works they perform.

Practical considerations, such as the shape of the stage and the space available, also play a role. A symphony orchestra, for example, might have 60 to 100 musicians, all of whom need enough room to play their instruments without poking their neighbour in the eye with a violin bow. Everyone also needs to see the conductor and hear the other musicians to stay in tune and in time, and to pick up their cues.

Generally, orchestral layouts follow a few basic principles. Musicians usually sit in a fan-shaped arrangement, giving everyone a clear view of the conductor. Louder instruments tend to sit further back: a trumpet is considerably louder than a single violin. Since sound becomes quieter with distance, this helps balance what the audience hears. In this way, some of the balancing that a front-of-house engineer would handle with faders at an amplified concert happens naturally within an orchestra.

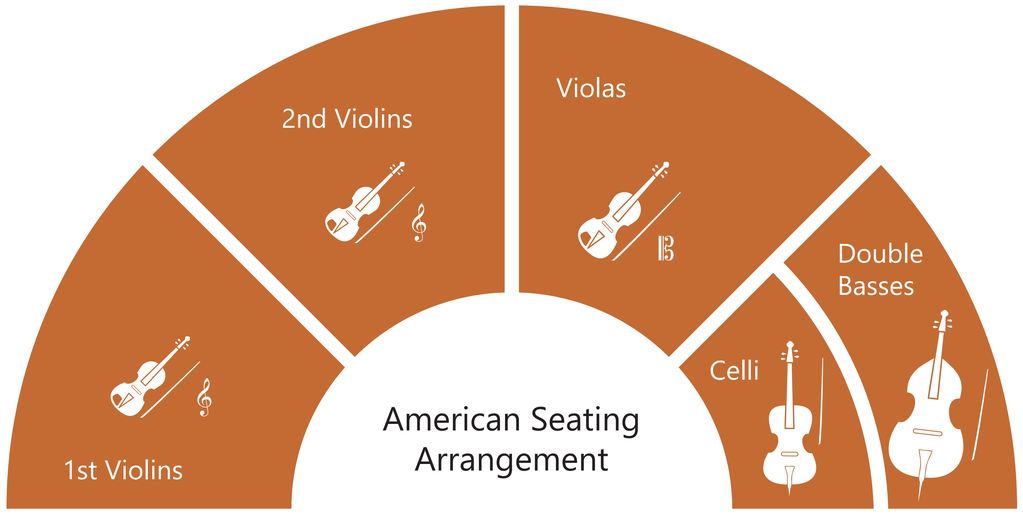
If you are composing for orchestra and want your mix to sound like a traditional orchestral performance, the seating arrangement is a useful starting point. Otherwise, choose positions that best serve your music.

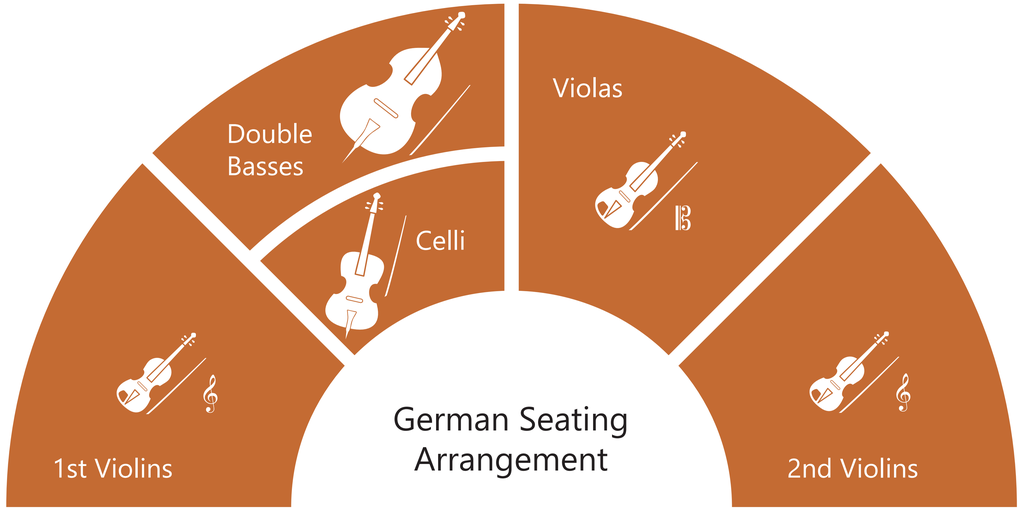
This chart shows the American seating arrangement, with the first and second violins sitting next to each other on the audience's left. Leopold Stokowski helped popularise this layout in the 1920s—a change often referred to as the "Stokowski Shift". Bringing the two violin sections together helps the musicians hear one another and coordinate their playing, and can produce a more blended sound.

Another widely used layout is the German, or antiphonal, seating arrangement. Here, the second violins sit opposite the first violins. In compositions featuring a call-and-response dialogue between the two sections, this separation makes the exchange easier to hear and more vivid for the audience. You can use this spatial interplay with all instruments in your own mix, too. If the dialogue is between the flutes and violins, for example, you could pan the flutes more to the right to move them further away from the violins.

In contemporary pop music, we are used to hearing bass sounds in the centre, so you do not necessarily need to place double basses, tubas and contrabassoons on the right of the stereo image. You can also use panning to bring out the individual voices of a chord shared across an orchestral section, or give a tremolo passage in the second violins a more distinct position in the mix while the first violins play sustained notes. When using the panning illustration, keep in mind that instruments in some sample libraries are already positioned within the stereo image. Even so, it can be worth experimenting with their placement and stereo width to create a wider sound or prevent one instrument from being masked by another. Particularly in smaller ensembles, you may want to help the listener distinguish the individual instruments more clearly.

The placement of percussion instruments is particularly flexible in practice since various instruments are often played by one musician. Where possible, they are grouped near the centre; larger setups may require them to be spread out more widely. In this chart, drums and timpani occupy the central area, with tuned percussion on the left and smaller percussion instruments on the right. The position of the horns also varies: rather than sitting on the left, they may be placed more centrally or even slightly to the right.




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# Orchestra Types and Sizes

- **Chamber Ensemble**

  A small ensemble in which each part is generally played by a single musician. Examples include different kinds of duos, trios, quartets and quintets (see illustrations).

- **Small String Orchestra**

  The number of players in each section depends on the work.

  ***Example 1:***
  *6 first violins, 6 second violins, 4 violas, 4 cellos and 2 double basses.*

  ***Example 2:***
  *4 first violins, 3 second violins, 3 violas, 3 cellos and 3 double basses.*

- **Large String Orchestra**

  The same instrument groups as a small string orchestra, but with more players per part. The section sizes may resemble those of a symphony orchestra's string section.

- **Chamber Orchestra**

  A smaller orchestra, often with up to around 40–50 musicians, although much smaller ensembles are also possible. Instrumentation and player numbers depend on the work.

- **Baroque Orchestra**

  Strings and basso continuo, with instruments such as harpsichord or organ providing the continuo harmonies.
  Wind instruments and timpani are included as required by the work. Larger ensembles are also possible.

- **Symphony Orchestra**

  An orchestra of around 60–100 musicians, sometimes expanding to 120 or more for large-scale works.

  ***Example:***
  *16 first violins, 14 second violins, 12 violas, 10 cellos and 8 double basses, 3 flutes, 1 bass flute and 1 piccolo, 3 oboes, 1 cor anglais, 3 clarinets and 1 bass and/or contrabass clarinet, 3 bassoons and 1 contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 tenor trombones, 2 bass trombones, 1 contrabass trombone and 1 tuba and/or contrabass tuba. Percussionists may switch between several instruments within a single work. Timpani are usually played by a dedicated timpanist.*

- **Symphonic Wind Orchestra**

  Woodwinds and brass, including saxophones, together with percussion and sometimes double bass.

  ***Example:***
  *10 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 10 clarinets, 1 alto clarinet, 5 bass clarinets, 2 contrabass clarinets, 7 alto saxophones, 2 tenor saxophones, 2 baritone saxophones, 10 trumpets, 6 horns, 6 trombones, 1 bass trombone, 5 euphoniums, 6 tubas, 7 percussionists and 1 double bass.*

- **Big Band / Jazz Orchestra**

  Typically around 17–20 musicians, including the rhythm section.

  **Example:**
  *5 saxophones (2 alto, 2 tenor and 1 baritone), 4 trumpets, 4 trombones and a rhythm section of piano, guitar, bass and drums.*

- **Film Orchestra**

  Instrumentation and player numbers vary according to the score. A string orchestra or symphony orchestra often forms the basis of the ensemble.

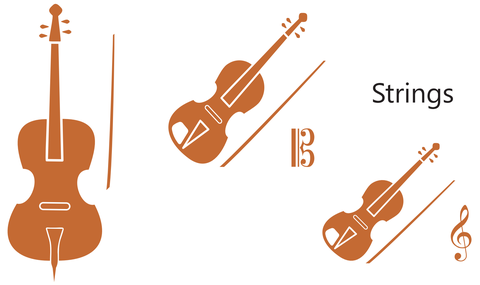
  ***Psycho — Bernard Herrmann, 1960***
  *13 first violins, 13 second violins, 10 violas, 8 cellos and 5 double basses.*

  ***Star Wars — John Williams, 1977***
  *13 first violins, 13 second violins, 10 violas, 10 cellos, 6 double basses, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 8 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, 2 harpists, piano & celesta, 1 timpanist and 2 additional percussionists.*

**Duo**



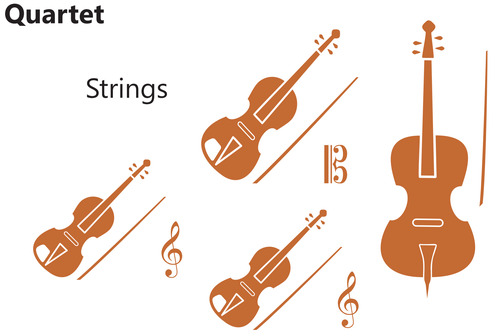

**Trio**



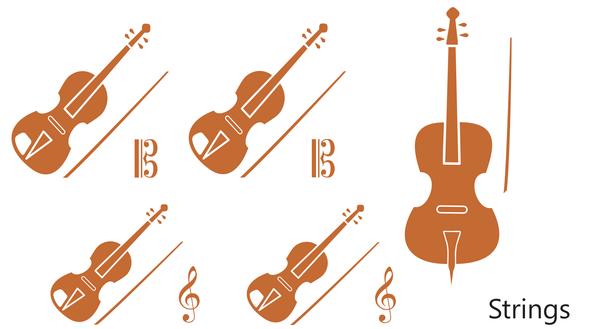




**Quartet**

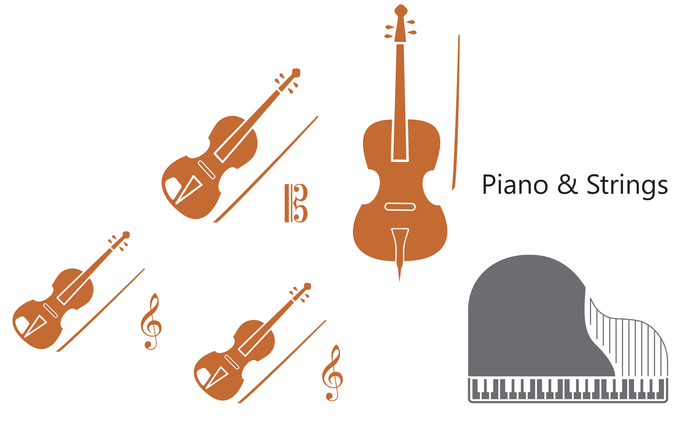



**Quintet**










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