

### Instruments of the String Family

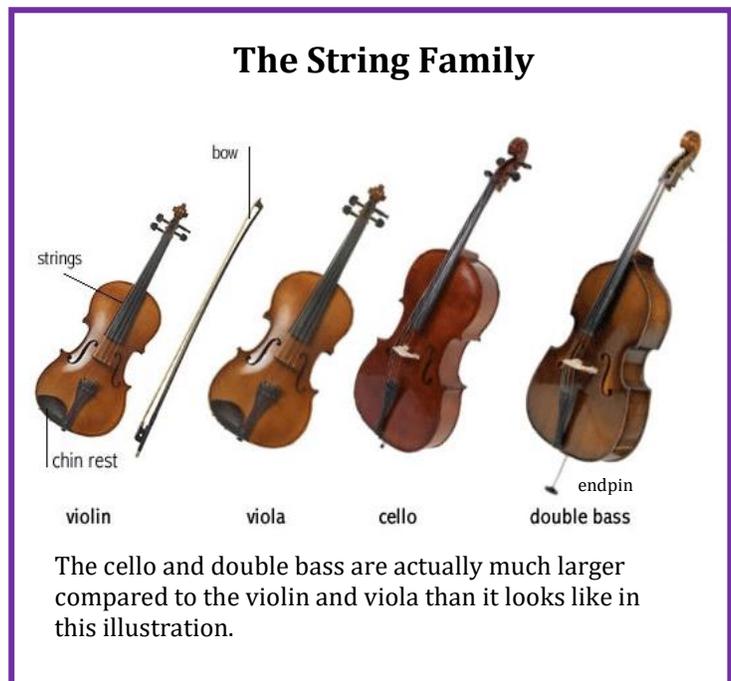
There are three string instruments played by the four members of the Quapaw **Quartet**: Two violins, one viola, and one cello. The full orchestra includes two additional string instruments, the double bass and the harp. Except for the harp, these instruments are played by the right hand, either with a bow or plucking the strings with your fingers. [See short examples of all five instruments on YouTube played by college students at the University of Texas: String instruments of the orchestra [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxFNHeXKmrY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxFNHeXKmrY) May 22, 2011.]

The violin, sometimes called the fiddle, is the smallest of the instruments in the string quartet. It is played by resting the belly of the instrument on your left shoulder, placing your chin on the chinrest, and holding the neck, or the skinnier part, of the violin in your left hand. Violins play the highest notes because its strings are the shortest and thinnest of all string instruments.

The viola is the medium-sized instrument in the string quartet and plays lower notes than the violin. This is because its strings are longer and thicker than those on the violin. It is held the same way as a violin and looks exactly like a violin except for that fact that it is slightly larger.

The cello (also called the violincello) is the largest instrument in the string quartet and plays the lowest notes. Cellos have a pin at the bottom so they may be played by standing them up on their ends without damaging them. This pin is called an endpin. A player holds a cello by placing it between his or her legs while holding the neck in the left hand.

The double bass (not generally in a string quartet) is also called an upright bass or contrabass. Its notes are even lower than the cello. Because of its large size, the double bass is played by either sitting on a stool or standing next to the instrument, holding the neck in the left hand and standing it on its end. The double bass also has an endpin to help support it. (Find the endpin in the picture.)



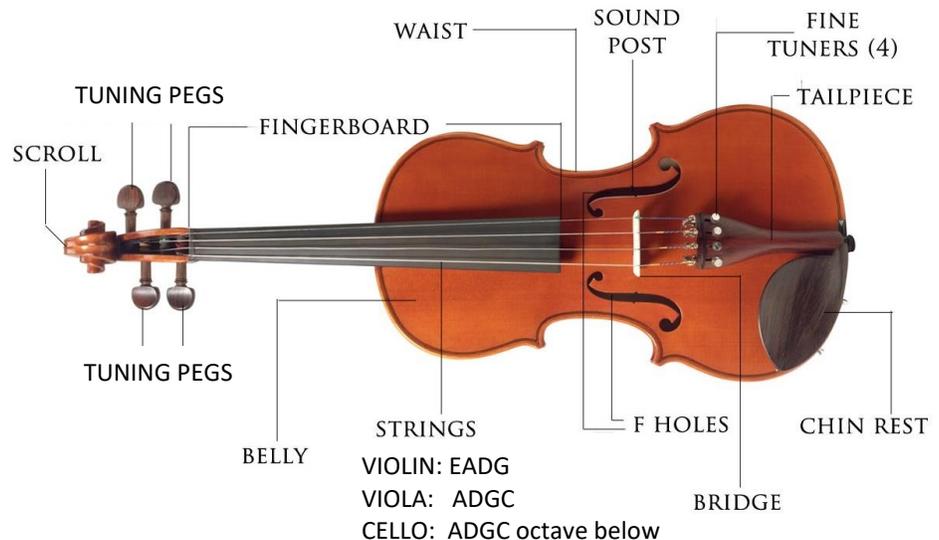
# Parts of the String Instruments

String instruments have two sections: The belly and the neck. The neck is made up of the scroll, the pegbox, and the fingerboard. The carved scroll makes the instrument more beautiful. The pegbox is the home for four tuning pegs, to which each of the four strings is attached. The pegs are used to tune each string. The player places his or her left hand on a string and presses down on the fingerboard to create a certain **pitch** or note. Pressing a string at different spots creates different pitches. The longer the distance between the finger and the sound post, the lower the note.

You will find the f-holes, bridge, tailpiece, and chinrest on the top part of the belly. The belly has a top and bottom soundboard from which most of the sound is projected. On a cello or double bass, the endpin replaces the chinrest.

The f-holes also project sound. The bridge holds the strings up so they can

vibrate and produce sound. Look at the diagram to find: 1) Where the strings attach to the tailpiece and, 2) The fine tuners which can be used to tune the strings very accurately.



**Articulations** (ways of playing the same note, but making different sounds) There are many different ways (or techniques) to play a string instrument. These techniques have Italian names because Italian composers were first to experiment and create these sounds. You can play the instrument with a bow or you can pluck the strings (like a guitar), called **pizzicato**. Normally, the bow is drawn over the strings half way between the end of the fingerboard and the bridge, termed **arco**. But composers write on the score if other techniques are to be used. In **sul tasto**, the bow is played over the end of the fingerboard to create a soft, thin sound. **Sul ponticello** means to draw the bow close to the bridge, creating a scary, screechy sound. **Col legno** means to strike the strings with the wooden side of the bow by: 1) Bouncing the bow or 2) Drawing the wood over the string, each creating a soft, but very different sound.

Other articulation styles are **legato** and **staccato**. **Legato** means "connected" in Italian or like a smooth melody. It tells a musician to play the music without space between the notes and several notes are played in one draw of the bow. **Staccato** in Italian means "separated" so there is a tiny break in sound between the notes.

## Composers of the Quartets Being Performed



**Franz Joseph Haydn** is remembered as the first great symphony composer and is credited with essentially inventing the string quartet. Starting in about 1757 and continuing until 1806, three years before his death, Haydn composed 68 string quartets. As with his symphonies, Haydn used quartets to develop the classical style. Many of his symphonies and quartets have been given individual names such as the 'Sun', the 'Prussian' and the 'Apponyi'. Featured on this program will be his **Quartet Op. 74, No. 2, Movement 1** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeYjiGOAywQ>).

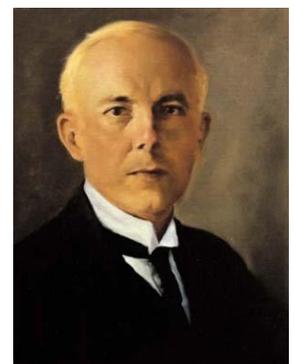
**Bedřich Smetana** was born in 1824 in Bohemia, a part of Austria. Today, it is part of the Czech Republic. Smetana began his musical training early in his childhood. He had his first piano performance at the age of six. Smetana became completely deaf but continued to write music. He wrote a work called 'My Fatherland' that musically described Bohemia. It became a favorite in his country and around the world. Smetana died in Prague when he was 60 years old. A portion of his **Quartet No. 1, Movement 1** will be played. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONR68E5KGHE>)



**Antonin Dvorak** was born in 1841 in a tiny village in Bohemia near Prague (the Czech Republic). He went to a village school and learned violin, viola, piano and organ and then to the Organ School in Prague to learn to be a composer. He played viola in the Provisional Theatre Orchestra and composed music as a young man. Soon Dvorak toured Europe with his new compositions and became very famous. He was invited to America in 1892 at the age of 51 and taught at the National Conservatory in New York for 3 years. Dvorak was very interested in African American folk music. He was among the first to teach African American musicians in the 1890's in New York when they had few other opportunities. This program will feature a portion of his **Quartet No. 13, Op. 106, Movement 2**. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnwsGWJwKOM>)



**Bela Bartok** was born March 25, 1881, in what was then Hungary. His mother gave him his first piano lessons and his progress was so rapid that at 10 he made his initial public appearance as composer-pianist. In 1899 Bartok entered the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest. He began collecting Hungarian folk music soon after he left the Academy. In all he gathered more than 6,000 folk songs. Bartok came to the United States for the first time in December, 1927. From 1940 until his death in 1945, Bartok lived in New York. He added several works to his long list of compositions. His **Quartet No. 4, Movement 4** will be featured during this performance. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejC2eI850gg>).



## Three Historical Periods of Music



**Classical (late 1700's and early 1800's):** Classical composers such as **Haydn** wrote works according to an accepted set of rules. They wrote **melodies** based upon short ideas called themes. Within a piece of music, a composer used multiple themes and often repeated the same music that was played at the beginning (exposition) again at the end (recapitulation). During the middle section (development), the composer modified the themes which made the music more dramatic. Like music of this era, buildings and rooms in them were plain and **symmetrical** (the same on either side and more ornate in the middle).

**Romantic (mid to late 1800's):** **Architecture** of this era added rounded walls and porches to make buildings look grander. Painters pictured elegant people, scenes from their national history or nature and showing various emotions, such as peacefulness, fear, anger or love. During the Romantic era, composers like **Smetana and Dvorak** incorporated the folk music of their homeland, which sometimes resulted in long, flowing and beautiful melodies. Composers used contrasting loud and soft **dynamics** and thin and thick **textures** in the music to show feeling and emotion. They used **harmony** that sometimes clashed with the melody to increase the feeling of tension. A late Romantic piece, **Two Movements for String Quartet**, by **Sergei Rachmaninoff** is also featured on this concert. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L6\\_yO7WSow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L6_yO7WSow))



**20<sup>th</sup> Century:** Composers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, such as **Bartok**, often focused on abstract art that is not as easy to understand at first hearing. In music composed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, you can hear traditional and new instruments to create new sounds. Melodies you will hear are more difficult to sing back because they jump around. Composers focused on what they thought were interesting sounds and created music using those sounds. Another 20<sup>th</sup> Century composition featured on this concert is **Quartet No. 2, Movement 3** by **Sergei Prokofiev**. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aca-1hEltAU>)

### Vocabulary

*architecture* - style or design of a building

*Classical* - an era of art and music making with focus on form and balance from about 1750 to the early 1800's

*composer* - a person who writes music

*dynamics (in music)* - how loud or soft the music is

*harmony* - a musical term for notes used in a musical piece that provide background for the melody

*melody* - a long passage of music forming a theme that you can recognize as in a song

*Romantic* - an era of art and music making which reflected strong emotions and feelings from the early 1800's to the early 1900's

*texture (in music)* - the way the melody, rhythm and harmony combine in a composition

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