Some Strings

Strings make up the largest section in an orchestra.

They can make wonderful sounds via a sound box which is usually made of wood. These sounds can be subtle and feeling such as in the Barber Violin Concerto or vibrant and raucous such as from a guitar or some of the banjo /bluegrass pieces.

Strings can also produce the heavenly sounds made by the harp.

We start today with the violin. The **violin** is a [string instrument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_instrument), usually with four [strings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strings_(music)) tuned in [perfect fifths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perfect_fifth). It is the smallest, highest-pitched member of the [violin family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_family) of string instruments, which includes the [viola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola), [cello](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cello), and bass.

The parts of a violin are usually made from different types of [wood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wood) and it can be strung with [gut](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catgut), [nylon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nylon) or other synthetic, or steel strings.

Someone who plays the violin is called a violinist or a fiddler. The violinist produces sound by drawing a [bow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bow_(music)) across one or more strings (which may be stopped by the fingers of the other hand to produce a full range of pitches), by plucking the strings (with either hand), or by a [variety of other techniques](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playing_the_violin).

Here is the Barber Violin Concerto from which I have chosen the first movement.

In 1939, Philadelphia industrialist [Samuel Simeon Fels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Simeon_Fels) commissioned Barber to write a [violin concerto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_concerto) for his ward, [Iso Briselli](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Iso_Briselli&action=edit&redlink=1), who graduated from the [Curtis Institute of Music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curtis_Institute_of_Music) in the same year as Barber, 1934. There was much toing and froing between Barber and others but it finally emerged in February 1941.

Barber Violin Concerto movement 1

In a complete contrast historically and in style we now move to Vivaldi. *The Four Seasons* ([Italian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_language): *Le quattro stagioni*) is a group of four [violin concertos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_concerto) each of which gives [musical expression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_expression) to a season of the year. These were composed around 1718−1720, when Vivaldi was the court chapel master in [Mantua](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantua). At this time of year it seems most appropriate to play Spring.

Vivaldi 4 seasons – Spring

The Arpeggione is a six-stringed [musical instrument](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_instrument) fretted and tuned like a [guitar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guitar), but with a curved bridge so it can be bowed like a [cello](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cello), and is thus similar to the bass [viola da gamba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viol). It enjoyed a brief period of popularity for perhaps a decade after its invention around 1823, by the [Viennese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna) instrument luthiers [Johann Georg Stauffer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Georg_Stauffer) and [Peter Teufelsdorfer](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Peter_Teufelsdorfer&action=edit&redlink=1). The only notable extant piece for the arpeggione is a [sonata with piano accompaniment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arpeggione_Sonata_(Schubert)) by [Franz Schubert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Schubert), which was not published until 1871, when the instrument was long out of vogue. As there are virtually no arpeggiones now existing this sonata is commonly played on the [cello](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cello) or [viola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viola), but we will hear John Williams playing it on a guitar.

The guitar is a [plucked string instrument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plucked_string_instrument), usually played with fingers or a [pick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guitar_pick). The guitar consists of a body with a rigid neck to which the strings, generally six in number, are attached.

Schubert Arpeggione Sonata mvt 1

The harp is a multi-[stringed instrument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stringed_instrument) which has the plane of its strings positioned [perpendicularly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perpendicularly) to the [soundboard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_board_(music)).

All harps have a neck, [resonator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resonator) and [strings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strings_(music)). Some, known as *frame harps*, also have a pillar; those without the pillar are referred to as *open harps*. Depending on its size, which varies, a harp may be played while held in the lap or while it stands on a table, or on the floor. Harp strings may be made of [nylon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nylon), [gut](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catgut), [wire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wire) or [silk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk).

Geoffrey Simon was the Artistic Director of the project to bring sixteen harpists from the top tier of European orchestras together to participate as one group. The church of St Jude-on-the-Hill in Hampstead Garden Suburb was chosen as the venue. A range of pieces both classical and popular was recorded some of which we will now hear.

First, we hear the second movement of Berlioz Symphonie Fantastique – “Un Bal”.

Next to lead us up to the interval we have Prelude in F minor by Bach.

INTERVAL

Continuing with the harp we now hear three pieces made popular by Edith Piaf, a French singer, lyricist and actress. Noted as France's national [chanteuse](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/chanteuse), she was one of the country's most widely known international stars.

Piaf's music was often autobiographical, and she specialized in [chanson réaliste](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chanson_r%C3%A9aliste) and [torch ballads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torch_song) about love, loss and sorrow. We will now hear, played on the harp, three of her most widely known songs

La vie en rose, L’hymne à l’amour and Non, je ne regrette rien.

Piaf selection

Next we come to some really lively music from a CD called Dueling Banjos.

The **banjo** is a four or five stringed instrument with a piece of plastic or animal skin stretched over a circular frame. Simpler forms of the instrument were fashioned by [enslaved](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_the_United_States) [Africans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa) in [Colonial America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_America), adapted from several African instruments of the same basic design.

The banjo is usually associated with [country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music), [folk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music), [Irish traditional music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music_of_Ireland) and [bluegrass music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluegrass_music). Historically, the banjo occupied a central place in [African traditional music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American_music), before becoming popular in the [minstrel shows](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minstrel_show) of the 19th century. In fact, slaves influenced early development of the music that became country and bluegrass, through the introduction of the banjo and through the innovation of musical techniques for both the banjo and fiddle. The banjo, along with the fiddle, is a mainstay of American [old-time music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music).

Banjo music

First in a tune of the same name as the CD - Duelling Banjos

This is followed by Little Maggie

Next comes Orange Blossom Special

Finally we have The hills and home

The Concierto de Aranjuez is a [classical guitar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_guitar) [concerto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concerto) by the Spanish composer [Joaquín Rodrigo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joaqu%C3%ADn_Rodrigo). Written in 1939, it is by far Rodrigo's best-known work, and its success established his reputation as one of the most significant Spanish composers of the 20th century.

The *Concierto* was inspired by the gardens at the [Royal Palace of Aranjuez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Palace_of_Aranjuez), the spring resort palace and gardens built by [Philip II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Spain) in the last half of the 16th century and rebuilt in the middle of the 18th century by [Ferdinand VI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_VI_of_Spain). The work attempts to transport the listener to another place and time through the evocation of the sounds of nature.

I have chosen to pay the second movement

Concierto de Aranjuez

To finish I have chosen a selection of music played on the balalaika**.**

The balalaika is a [stringed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_instrument) [musical instrument](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_instrument) popular in [Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia), with a characteristic [triangular](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triangle) body and three strings.

The balalaika *family of instruments* includes instruments of various sizes, from the highest-pitched to the lowest, the prima balalaika, secunda balalaika, alto balalaika, bass balalaika and contrabass balalaika. All have three-sided bodies, spruce or fir tops, backs made of 3-9 wooden sections made usually from maple, strung usually with three strings.

The prima balalaika is played with the fingers, the secunda and alto either with the fingers or a [plectrum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plectrum), depending on the music being played, and the basses and contrabasses (equipped with extension legs which rest on the floor) are played with leather plectrums.

The music on the CD is played by the Ossipov Folk Orchestra

Balalaika music – Green grass

and to finish a really lively piece

Balalaika music - Faun