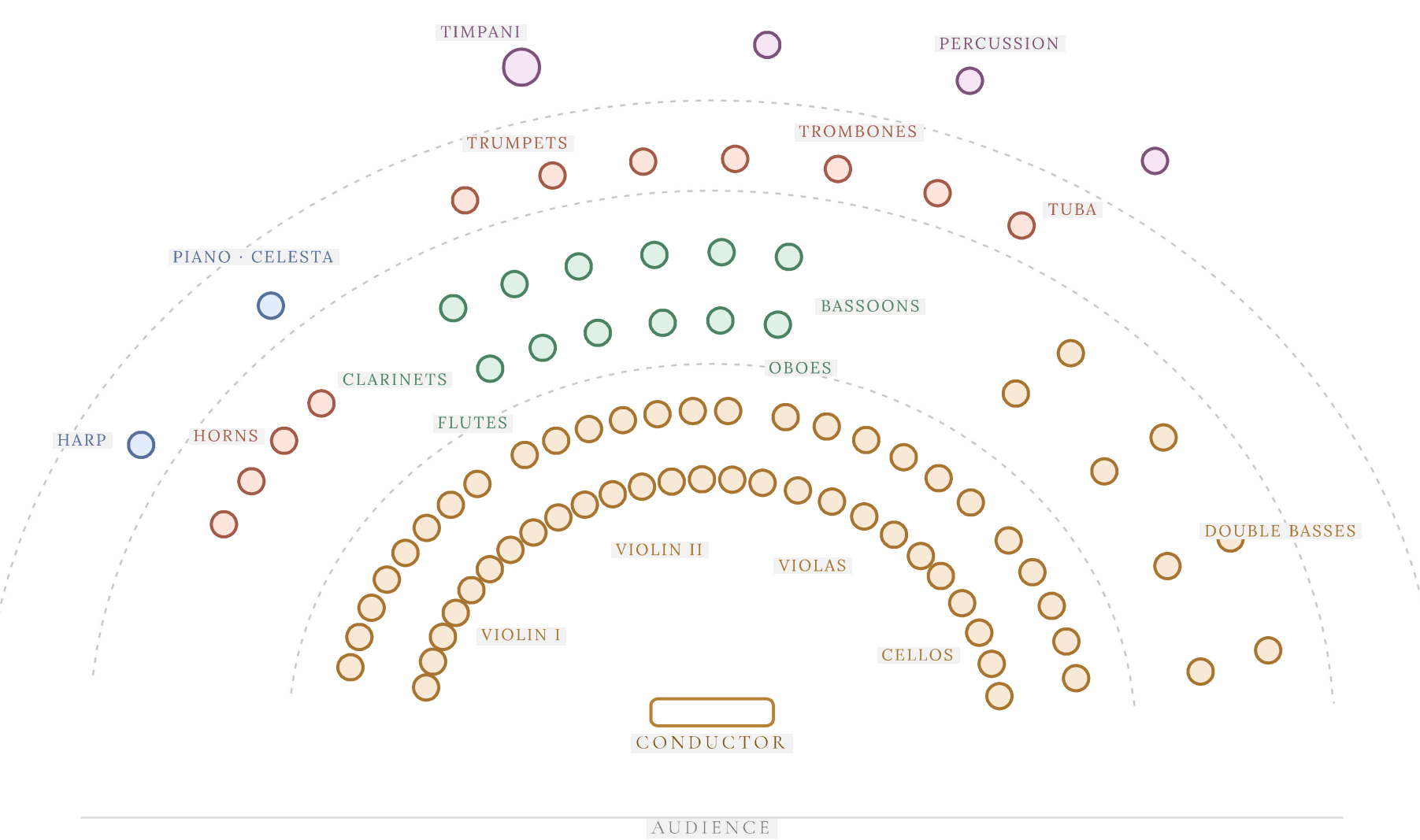


Seating the Orchestra

A symphony orchestra is arranged as a fan around the conductor, and the arrangement is acoustic, not decorative. Quiet instruments sit at the front, loud ones at the back; anything that must play as one voice sits together. Learn this plan and a concert platform, a seating list and the top-to-bottom order of a printed score all start to make sense.

PLATFORM PLAN · VIEWED FROM THE AUDIENCE

One marker = one player · about 90 on stage for a full Romantic score



WHO SITS WHERE, AND HOW MANY

SECTION	PLAYERS	POSITION AND REASON
 Strings	60	Front arc, violins to the left. The softest and most numerous group, so it takes the closest ring.
 Woodwind	12	Centre, two rows deep, directly in front of the conductor so their solo lines carry over the strings.
 Brass	11	Behind the woodwind: horns to the left, trumpets, trombones and tuba to the right. Loud, so kept back.
 Percussion	4	Back row, standing, with timpani near the centre where the players can hear the bass line.
 Harp & keys	2	Left edge, near the first violins — plucked and struck strings need to be heard, not buried.

Three rules behind the fan

Soft in front, loud behind. A single flute cannot compete with a trombone, so distance does the balancing.

Like sits with like. Players who must match tuning and articulation sit within earshot of each other.

Everyone sees the beat. The arc keeps every desk within one glance of the conductor's stick.

The score reads the other way up

On the platform the strings are nearest; on the page they are last. A score runs top to bottom: woodwind, brass, percussion, harp and keyboard, then strings at the foot. Within each family the highest instrument sits highest on the page.

SMALLER FORCES, THE SAME LOGIC

String orchestra

Violin I, violin II, viola, cello, bass — the front arc alone, often 18 to 24 players. Nothing is doubled by wind, so every inner part must be complete in itself.

Classical orchestra, c. 1780

Strings plus pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, with timpani. About 35 players: the balance Haydn and Mozart wrote for.

Concert band

The fan without its front arc: woodwind take the strings' place at the front, brass and percussion behind, with double bass often the only string.