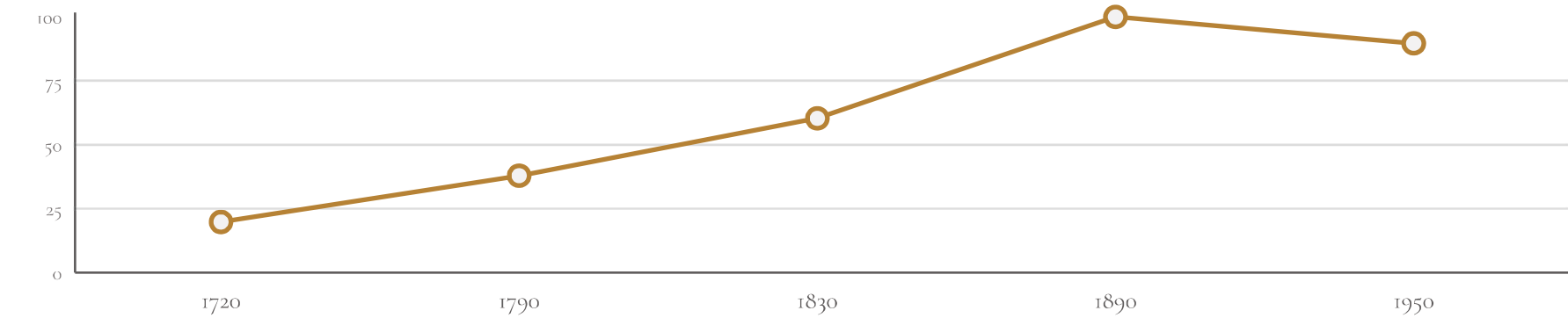


The Orchestra Through History

Two hundred and fifty years of getting louder, larger and more colourful.

The orchestra was never designed. It grew because halls got bigger, instruments got better, and composers kept asking for one more colour. The strings stayed the core the whole way through.



Baroque C. 1700–1750 20 players Strings the whole band, three or four to a part Winds oboes, recorders, one bassoon Brass natural trumpets or horns, no valves Continuo harpsichord or organ with cello, playing throughout Led from the keyboard or the first violin. No conductor. <i>Bach, Brandenburg Concertos</i> · <i>Handel, Water Music</i>	Classical C. 1750–1800 38 players Strings a proper section, five parts Winds in pairs — flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons Brass two horns, two trumpets Percussion timpani, tuned to the key New: the clarinet joins, and the continuo disappears. Wind instruments get their own lines instead of doubling. <i>Haydn, 'London' symphonies</i> · <i>Mozart, Symphony No. 41</i>	Early Romantic C. 1800–1850 60 players Strings doubled again to fill larger halls Winds piccolo and contrabassoon at the extremes Brass four horns, and trombones brought in from church and opera Extras harp, cymbals, bass drum, triangle New: valves arrive on horns and trumpets, so brass can finally play any note. The conductor with a baton becomes normal. <i>Beethoven, Symphony No. 5</i> · <i>Berlioz, Symphonie fantastique</i>	Late Romantic C. 1850–1910 100 players Strings sixteen first violins and up Winds in threes and fours: cor anglais, bass clarinet, more flutes Brass six or eight horns, tuba, extra trumpets Extras two harps, celesta, a whole percussion team New: size as expression. Composers write for colour and mass, and the score grows to thirty staves. <i>Wagner, Die Meistersinger</i> · <i>Mahler, Symphony No. 2</i> · <i>Strauss, Ein Heldenleben</i>	Modern C. 1910–TODAY 90 players Strings slightly reduced from the Romantic peak Winds standard triple, plus saxophone when asked for Brass back to four horns for most repertoire Extras piano, huge percussion, occasionally electronics New: two directions at once — enormous forces for some works, and a return to small chamber and period orchestras for others. <i>Stravinsky, The Rite of Spring</i> · <i>Bartók, Concerto for Orchestra</i>
--	--	--	---	---

■ Strings

■ Woodwind

■ Brass

■ Percussion, harp & keyboards

Figures are typical, not fixed — every orchestra and every piece differs.

WHY IT GREW Bigger rooms. Music moved from a prince's salon to a public hall of two thousand seats. More listeners needs more sound. Paying audiences. Public concerts made a large permanent orchestra affordable for the first time. Better instruments. Valves for brass from the 1830s, key systems for woodwind from the 1840s: every note, in tune, in every key. Ambition. Once a composer heard a new colour, the next one wanted two of them.	WHAT STAYED THE SAME Strings are the core. Roughly two thirds of the players in every era. Sections, not soloists. Several players share a line and blend into one. Front-desk leadership. Someone at the front of each group decides the detail. Highest at the top. The score has been laid out the same way for two centuries. The tuning A. Given by the oboe, still.	THE CONDUCTOR APPEARS For most of the Baroque, whoever played the harpsichord or led the violins kept everyone together. As the orchestra grew past forty players and the music grew more flexible in tempo, that stopped working. In the 1820s conductors began standing in front with a baton — Spohr, Mendelssohn, then Wagner, who argued that shaping tempo <i>was</i> the interpretation. By 1900 the conductor was the most famous person on the platform. Chamber orchestras today often play without one, which is a return to how it was done, not a novelty.
---	--	---