

The Guitar Orchestra - what is it?

Derek Hasted's Guitar Ensemble School

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1st Movement - Theme

In this section we'll meet the Guitar Orchestra

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Introduction

Definitions

In this modern world, it's becoming increasingly difficult to agree on what exactly a particular word or phrase means. I'd like to define a few words and phrases before we get into the nitty-gritty.

- Duet, trio, quartet...
A group of players with music in 2, 3, 4... parts, where each part is played by one player
- Ensemble
A group of players with music in 2, 3, 4... parts, where each part has several players.
- Orchestra
A group of players with music in 2, 3, 4... parts, playing Guitar Orchestra instruments.

Guitar Orchestra instruments? I can hear the question from here! Read on....

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What is a Guitar Orchestra?

I'm convinced that a Guitar Ensemble is an excellent way to make music.

Look at the advantages....

- If one player is ill, that part is still covered by other players .
- Players can transfer easily from part to another .
- Music is widely available, both mixed ability and uniform ability

But what is a Guitar Orchestra?

In the same way that a Brass Band, or a String Quartet or a Recorder Consort gets a full and rich sound by incorporating different sizes of the same basic instrument, so a Guitar Orchestra comprises guitars both smaller and larger than the normal Classical Guitar.

What advantages do Guitar *Orchestras* give us?

- A richer and more satisfying overall sound .
- Greater musical contrasts as instruments play or are silent .
- A clearer and tighter sound for the players to follow

But there are disadvantages too... .

- Extra expense in purchasing new instruments .
- Limited choices of music .
- In a mixed ability group, the easiest line may not be for the least experienced player's instrument.

Clearly there is some mileage in being confident within a normal Guitar Ensemble before venturing into an area where the rewards are higher, but so are the stakes!

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What are the Orchestra Instruments?

And here is where we reach the first pot of ointment and the first fly....

Permit me to speak in generalities.

There are two common types of Guitar Orchestra, that which might be termed Mexican, and that which might be termed Japanese. It's perhaps an oversimplification, but it's important to start trying to have a first cut at distinguishing the wood from the trees or we shall disappear in a forest of definitions!

The Mexican Orchestra contains

- The Requinto, (which, despite its name, is tuned a fourth above a Classical Guitar)
- The Classical Guitar
- The Bass or Contrabass (which is an octave below the Classical), or its Mexican equivalent, the Baja.

Note that the bass instrument has two different names, the former of which is about to confuse us when we read on.

The Japanese Orchestra, pioneered by Dr Niibori, models itself on the string, brass and saxophone families, and contains

- The Alto (which is tuned a fifth above a Classical Guitar)
- The Prime (the Classical Guitar)
- The Bass (which is a fourth below a Classical Guitar)
- The Contrabass (which is an octave below a Classical Guitar)

There is also a Soprano or Piccolo Guitar, an octave up, but it is seldom featured in the bulk of the Niibori-compatible Orchestra music.

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Meet The Instruments

What do they look like?

The most striking thing about Guitar Orchestra instruments is that they are all essentially built in proportion, meaning that they look just like guitars.... The Requinto, showing its slight different origins, often has a cutaway on the upper bout like a Jazz Guitar, which allows the player to reach even higher with ease. The Japanese instruments, on the other hand, have been designed to fit with the Prime Guitar as part of a unified family.





Avril (Classical - 650mm) : Geoff (B Bass - 700mm) : Elaine (Requinto - 530mm)

[What are these measurements?](#)



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