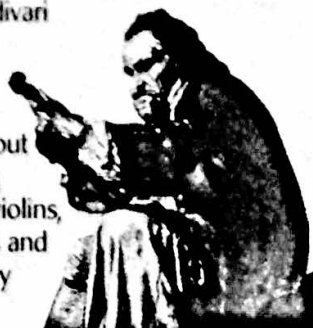


String instruments

Antonio Stradivari (1644 -1737), known as Stradivarius. There are about 100 surviving Stradivarius violins, but his violas and cellos are very hard to find.



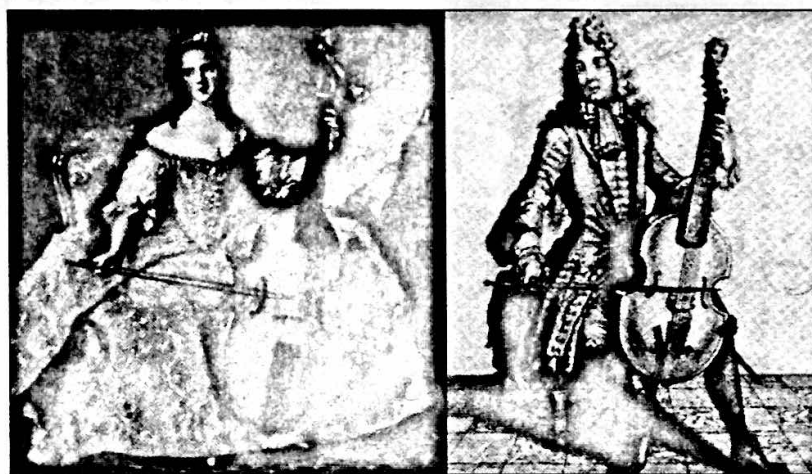
The viol, also called the viola da gamba, was very popular at the beginning of the Baroque period. Similar to a violin but narrower and with more sloping shoulders, the viol came in different sizes, and was always held between the knees. Its voice was not loud, however, and as violins with their brilliant sound began to be more fashionable, viols gradually died out.

Violins are descended from the medieval fiddle rather than from the viol family. Some of the finest violins, violas and cellos were made in Italy during the Baroque period by the Stradivari and Guarneri families. They have never been surpassed in their richness of tone. Stradivarius and Guarnerius violins are still being played, but they are very rare and expensive.



Violin making methods have scarcely changed since the Baroque era. One of the craftsmen from this engraving could walk into a modern workshop and not feel too out of place.

These early versions of the viol were used in Spain during the 13th century.



The bass viol was the last of the viol family to be played by the late 1700s. This picture shows one of Louis XV's daughters playing a bass viol.

Gentleman Playing the Viol, by Nicholas Bonnard.



The viol has six strings and a fingerboard with frets like a guitar to show where to put the fingers. The player always held the bow from below.

The Baroque orchestra

Orchestral music became very important during the Baroque era. The instruments of the orchestra became more like our modern instruments, and players began to play faster, more expressively and with more control than before.

At the beginning of the period, orchestras were not always the same, but were made up of whatever instruments were on hand. Sometimes the composer would not even specify which instrument was to play which notes, and the orchestra would play the music with whatever was available.

But as the Baroque era progressed, the orchestra grew more standardized. By the end of the period, a composer could count on the orchestra containing flutes, oboes and bassoons, trumpets and drums, and a string section made up of first and second violins, violas and cellos, all held together by a keyboard instrument such as a harpsichord or an organ. It remained a small ensemble, however, nothing like the modern philharmonic orchestra.

The instrument builders of the Baroque period were designing improved instruments that allowed composers to write music that called for very advanced playing techniques. The virtuoso violin music written by Corelli, and Domenico Scarlatti's harpsichord sonatas, are examples of music written for these new, improved instruments and the musicians who had mastered them.



A small ensemble of wind instruments in 1616



During the Baroque period in Germany, musical people often met to play together, frequently in coffee houses as shown here.



This is the title page of a manual on playing the flute and oboe, published in 1720.