

Hey Kids, IT'S A CLARINET



The Clarinet is the only single-reed instrument in the symphony orchestra. The tone of the clarinet is dark and hollow sounding. The clarinet player is referred to as a clarinetist.

History

The symphonic clarinet was invented by a German inventor named Johann Christoph Denner in the first part of the 18th century. Vivaldi and Handel were the first of the great composers to write music for the clarinet. Mozart and Beethoven followed with beautiful chamber works for this instrument, but Romantic Era composers like Carl Maria von Weber, Schumann, and Brahms were the ones who really showed the full potential of the clarinet as a solo instrument.

How It's Played

The clarinetist blows air into the mouthpiece causing the reed to vibrate. This vibration is what makes the sound. To play notes, the clarinetist covers various combinations of tone holes with fingers or keys. Each new note requires a different finger combination, allowing the air to travel through a different length of tubing before it escapes out of the uncovered holes and the bell.

How It's Made

The symphonic clarinet is commonly made from grenadilla wood which also is called African Blackwood. Clarinets begin as a block of wood that is shaped on a lathe into a wooden tube with a hole in the middle. Clarinets have a cylindrical bore which means that the hole is shaped like a paper towel roll - staying one size from one end to the other. Tone holes are then drilled, followed by keys, a mouthpiece, a single reed, and a ligature (the thingy that holds the reed on). Student clarinets are made from plastic resin to make the instrument more affordable.



The Clarinet Family

The most common instruments in the clarinet family include the Eb clarinet, the soprano Bb clarinet which is by far the most popular, the alto clarinet, the bass clarinet, and the contrabass clarinet.

Fun Facts

One of the most popular symphonic clarinet solos is the one in George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. The opening for Gershwin's 'jazz concerto' features the clarinet ascending from a low note to a high note followed by a melody. During the rehearsal of the piece for the premier performance in 1924, the clarinet soloist decided it would be funny to glissando (slide) up to the high note rather than play the written chromatic scale notes. Gershwin liked it so much that it has been played that way ever since!

The clarinet sometimes is referred to a licorice whip. Next time you visit a music store give one a lick and see what you think!