

Hey Kids, It's a String Bass



The String Bass is the largest member of the string family. It is also known as the contrabass, upright bass, bull fiddle, bass fiddle, bass violin, or just bass. It is the largest member of the string family. In our modern orchestra it is common to see eight string basses. It plays the lowest notes of any instrument in the string family and an octave lower than the cello.

History

The original String Bass appeared in the early 1500's along with the rest of the string family. Its design changed a lot over the next three or four centuries. In the 18th century they experimented with the number of strings. They tried three strings ... nope, too few. Then five strings ... nope, too many. Then four strings ... perfect! During this same time, instrument builders also enjoyed constructing super-sized String Bases.

They required two people to play them; one to finger the notes and another to hold the bow. A few of these super-sized String Bases still survive in museums.

How It's Played

Because the String Bass is way too big to put under your chin, the instrument sits on the floor, supported by an endpin. The bassist has the choice to sit or stand when they play. The player's left hand is responsible for fingering the notes, while the right hand plucks (pizzicato) or bows (arco) the strings. Because the String Bass is larger than the other instruments in the string family, the left hand finger positions are further apart. Beginning bassists often like to tape the fingerboard to help remind them of left hand finger placement.

How It's Made

The String Bass is typically made of various woods that are chosen to enhance the performance of the instrument. The top is made of spruce with maple for the back and sides. The neck is made of maple and ebony, the preferred wood for the fingerboard because of its hardness and beauty. These parts are carefully carved



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and shaped and then glued together with a special glue. After the body of the String Bass is assembled and varnished, the four strings and bridge, tailpiece, endpin, and various smaller pieces are added.

The biggest difference between the String Bass and the rest of the string family of the symphony orchestra is the way the pegbox is made. The String Bass uses machine heads with small gears to tune the strings rather than friction pegs that are used on the violin, viola, and cello.

