



Size of the String Section in Popular Music Recordings

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Abstract

This document lists the size of the string section in a number of popular and jazz music recordings. String section numbers for symphony and chamber orchestra are given for comparison. Document history: created 13/11/2004, update 3/5/2010, 28/11/2010, 11/4/2015, 20/7/2018.

1 Introduction

Many artists in popular and jazz music like to record with a studio orchestra, containing a *string section*. Frequently, the number of string players is limited for production cost reasons. Therefore, the size of the string section in these orchestras is smaller than in the regular symphony orchestra.

Average string section sizes for a contemporary full *symphony orchestra* are given in [1, 2, 3, 6, 4]. Writing for a more limited size string section in *popular music* is discussed in [5, 7]; these books contain many examples of string writing with numbers of players indicated. The analogy with the string section from the orchestras in the Classical and Early Romantic Period (Haydn to Beethoven) is evident.

This document contains a compilation of data from popular and jazz music recordings with a string section as part of the studio orchestra. These data may help to get a feel for the relation between the actual sound and the numbers of string players. For comparison the numbers for an average size string section in a symphony or chamber orchestra are also listed.

2 Overview of string section size

Table 1 presents the data for a number of recordings. On most of these the string section is part of a studio orchestra (including winds, brass and percussion). Sometimes the liner notes do not indicate the number of 1st and 2nd Violins separately; in that case the total numbers of violin players is indicated. Note that the string section will frequently lack a string bass player, since that part is provided by the (plucking) double bass player in the rhythm section.

3 Size of the string section in classical music

Table 2 presents the numbers as given in a number of textbooks for either symphony, chamber or studio orchestra.



Table 1: Size to the string section in music recordings. **Vi1**: 1st violins, **Vi2**: 2nd violins, **Va**: violas, **Vc**: cellos, **DB**: double bass.

Recording Artist	Vi1	Vi2	Va	Vc	DB	Arranger/Orchestrator
American Jazz Philharmonic	16	-	4	4	2	Various
Andromeda Mega Express Orchestra	3	-	2	2	0	Daniel Glatzel
Michael Brecker	1	1	1	1	0	Brecker, Goldstein
Ruud Breuls Metropole Orkest	8	8	5	4	3	Schneider, Mendoza, Brookmeyer
Clifford Brown	6	-	2	1	0	Neal Hefti
Elvis Costello	22	-	8	5	0	Burt Bacharach
Martin Fondse	1	1	1	1	0	Fondse
Richard Galliano	3	3	2	2	1	
Stan Getz	14	-	6	4	0	Eddie Sauter
Stan Getz	11	-	0	2	0	Claus Ogerman
Steve Kuhn	9	-	3	3	1	Carlos Franzetti
Henry Mancini	12	-	4	4	0	
Werner Müller RIAS Tanzorchester	9	-	3	3	0	Arno Flor, Werner Müller
Metropole Orkest	9	7	5	4	2	Various
George Michael	22	-	6	6	5	Mathes, Zito, Mounsey
Joni Mitchell	29	-	12	11	6	Vince Mendoza
Wes Montgomery	9	-	2	2	0	Don Sebesky
Rundfunk Orchestra Hannover des NDR	10	8	6	4	3	Bernard Ebbinghouse
Don Sebesky	14	-	0	4	1	
Don Sebesky	10	-	3	2	1	
Kamasi Washington	8	-	7	3	1	Kamasi Washington
Robbie Williams	33	-	15	11	8	Steve Sidwell
Brian Wilson	2	-	1	2	0	Brian Wilson
Dhafer Youssef	1	1	1	1	0	Kjetil Erling Bjerkestrand



Table 2: Size of the string section (textbooks). **Vi1**: 1st violins, **Vi2**: 2nd violins, **Va**: violas, **Vc**: cellos, **DB**: double bass.

Author	Vi1	Vi2	Va	Vc	DB	Instrumentation
Adey	16	14	12	10	8	Symphony orchestra
Adler	16-18	14-16	10-12	10-12	8-10	Symphony orchestra
Blatter	12-18	10-17	8-14	6-12	5-10	Symphony orchestra
	5-6	4	3	3	3	Chamber orchestra
Del Mar	16	14	12	10	8	Symphony orchestra
Kennan	10-16	8-14	6-12	6-12	5-10	Symphony orchestra
	4-8	3-6	2-4	2-3	1-3	Chamber orchestra
Sebesky	12		4	4		Maximum for most recordings
	8		2	2		Regular recording string group



4 List of recordings

For identifying the recordings Table 3 contains the CD data.

Table 3: CD data.

Recording Artist	Album Title	Year	Label	CD Number
American Jazz Philharmonic		1993	GRP	GRP97302
Andromeda Mega Express Orchestra	Take Off!	2009	Alien Transistor	LC 00197
Chet Baker	The Last Great Concert	1990	Enja Records	ENJA 6074 22
Michael Brecker	Wide Angles	2003	Verve	00440076 14228
Ruud Breuls	Pretty Song	2005	Vrienden van het Metropole Orkest	
Clifford Brown	Clifford Brown with Strings	1955	EmArcy	814 642-2
Elvis Costello	Painted from Memory	1998	Mercury	538002
Martin Fondse & Starvinsky Orkestar	Fragrant Moondrops	2009	Basta Music	3091972
Richard Galliano	Passatori	1999	Disques Dreyfus	FDM 36601-2
Stan Getz	<i>Mickey One</i> soundtrack	1998	Verve	531 232-2
	Focus	1997	Verve	521 419-2
	Getz for Lovers	2002	Verve Music	589-361-2
Steve Kuhn	Promises Kept	2004	ECM	1815 0675222
Henry Mancini	Mr. Lucky	1959	RCA	298-2R
Metropole Orchestra	Claudio Roditi	1996	Mons	MR 874-767
	La Musique qui fait Popp	1993	VPRO	EW 9306
George Michael	Songs From the Last Century	1999	Virgin	7243 8 48740 2 5
Joni Mitchell	Travelogue	2002	Nonesuch	79817-2
Wes Montgomery	Bumpin'	1965	Verve	539 062-2
Werner Müller	Keep Smiling	2007	Universal Music	06024 9858512
Don Sebesky	Giant Box	1987	CBS	EPC 450564 2
	I Remember Bill	1998	BMG/RCA	09026 68929 2
Kamasi Washington	Heaven and Earth	2018	Shoto Mas Inc.	YT176CD
Robbie Williams	Swing When You're Winning	2001	Chrysalis	724353 68262 0
Brian Wilson	Smile	2004	Nonesuch	7559-79846-2
Dhafer Youssef	Divine Shadows	2006	Jazzland Recordings	0602498772249

References

- [1] Christopher Adey. *Orchestral performance; A Guide for Conductors and Players*. Faber & Faber, London, 1998. ISBN 0-571-17724-7. xvi + 868 pp.
- [2] Samuel Adler. *The Study of Orchestration*. W.W. Norton and Company, New York, second edition, 1989. ISBN 0-393-95807-8. xv + 640 pp.



- [3] Alfred Blatter. *Instrumentation and Orchestration*. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, Schirmer, Belmont, CA, second edition, 1997. ISBN 0-00-02-82-864570-70-7. xix + 508 pp.
- [4] Kent Kennan and Donald Grantham. *The Technique of Orchestration*. Prentice-Hall Inc, Upper Saddle River, NJ, fifth edition, 1997. ISBN 0-13-466327-6. xiv + 411 pp.
- [5] Henry Mancini. *Sounds & Scores: a Practical Guide to Professional Orchestration*. Northridge Music Inc., USA, 1986. ISBN 0-89898-667-2. x + 243 pp.
- [6] Norman Del Mar. *Anatomy of the Orchestra*. Faber & Faber, London, 1983. ISBN 0-571-13185-9. 528 pp.
- [7] Don Sebesky. *The Contemporary Arranger*. Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., Van Nuys, CA, definite edition, 1994. ISBN 0-88284-485-7. xv + 237 pp.