

# CONTEMPORARY, HISTORICAL AND TRADITIONAL MULTICULTURAL INSTRUMENTS

The factors that result in the distinctive sound of each classroom instrument are the same as those that combine to produce the unique sound of every contemporary, historical and traditional multicultural instrument with the exception of electronic ones. That is, every instrument regardless of time or place derives its particular sound as a result of the combination of (1) method of sound production, (2) construction materials(s) and (3) size, shape and density. Therefore, you can hear and see contemporary, historical and multicultural instruments with consideration of those factors in order to understand why each produces its unique sound.

Most likely your instructor will want to provide you with the opportunity to sample a few of the wide range of instruments that existed historically and that are played today in locations around the world. He/she might provide photos, recordings and videos to you so that you can see and hear some of the many instruments. However, through online searches, you will be able to access these resources yourself. In that way, you will gain familiarity with some of the instruments that people now and in the past use(d) in their attempt to communicate their feelings through sound and music. Simultaneously, you will become aware of resources that you will be able use in your future classroom so that your students, too, can see and hear them. Your instructor will determine the categories of instruments for your online search(es) and other specifics of the assignment(s).

## CONTEMPORARY INSTRUMENTS

The term “contemporary instruments” is used here to denote instruments currently used in music ensembles many places in the world. Some of the instruments typically have been associated with specific genres of music. Your research probably will result in finding instruments that you recognize from seeing and hearing them in a variety of ensembles. Technology is providing performing musicians and composers with opportunities to share and combine styles, so the same instrument often is heard playing many types of music. You might find a familiar instrument in an unexpected place. If your instructor wants you to search for contemporary instruments, here are some categories for getting started.

### Orchestral Instruments

Orchestras have not lost their appeal. Cities around the world have orchestras. Some are gaining audiences as they present outdoor concerts and appear in malls. Orchestral instruments are categorized into four families, labeled according to method of sound production and/or material: strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. As you gain information about the instruments, be aware of the factors that contribute to the unique sound of each, comparing and contrasting within and between the members of the families.

Begin the search with “instruments of the orchestra” to see pictures of the instruments and probably charts of typical seating arrangements of the performers. For hearing the sounds of individual instruments, search for “orchestral instruments sounds.” In some cases, recorded samples of the sounds will be presented while videos will be available in others. To hear the full orchestral sound, search for “symphony orchestra performance” or “symphony orchestra concert” perhaps with the name of a city such as London, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia or a city near you. Add the name of your video service to be sure that you will be able to watch and listen.



### Band Instruments

Bands are prevalent in American culture and so are the instruments that comprise them. The basic band instruments are the same as those in an orchestra but minus the strings. Look up “band instruments” and you’ll see pictures of the familiar instruments. For the sounds of individual instruments, add “sounds” but you’ll probably get the same list as resulted from a search of “orchestral instruments sounds” so you’ll have to sort out those specific to bands.



Not all bands are alike and some instruments are unique to the specific band type. To hear the sounds of a variety of types of bands and see some of the special instrumentation, search by “name of ensemble type + performance + video or name of your video service.” These are some of the most common band ensembles: concert band, symphonic band, marching band, military band, brass band, jazz band, Latin band, steel drum band but there are even more. You’ll find enough videos to keep you watching for hours!

## Electronic Instruments

Electronic instruments are being used in a wide variety of genres. Chances are that hardly a day goes by when you do not hear some electronic instruments. They permeate popular music including dance, video and movie music. As was mentioned previously, they are the only instruments that do not rely on the usual factors for tone production. One of the advantages of electronic instruments is that a single instrument can produce a wide variety of tone colors. Sometimes the electronic instruments imitate other instruments and sometimes they produce original sounds. Because electronic instruments have taken a legitimate place in music making and their types and popularity most likely will continue to grow, your research into electronic instruments will become increasingly valuable.

The key search words are “electronic instruments” or “electronic music instruments.” Follow the procedure outlined above including adding the name of your video service. However, you might be more successful with a search for “electronic music composers” to hear the music and see videos. As you explore the contemporary composers, you might recognize the names of some of their film scores.



Electronic instruments are being used in classical music. If want to hear some, search “contemporary classical electronic music” and try adding “performances” in order to hear and see the musicians. If that does not yield results, go back to “electronic music composers” and browse articles and database descriptions for classical composers or your instructor might provide some names. Choose one and search by name. Most are living and many have a website on which you can sample the compositions. Or you could select a specific composition and then search for a recording or a video. This might not be easy, but will yield results if you’re determined to find examples.

## HISTORICAL INSTRUMENTS

Contemporary stringed, wind and percussion instruments evolved across many centuries. The roots of today’s instruments can be found by investigating prehistoric and ancient music instruments. Online searches for these instruments will reveal our musical heritage.

### Prehistoric and Ancient Music Instruments

The human voice probably was the first instrument followed by rhythmic body percussion sounds and some made by striking indigenous objects such as fallen trees. Most flutes in prehistoric times were made from bone. You can find more information on these early instruments by searching for “prehistoric music instruments.”

A search for “ancient music instruments” will yield articles and photos of paintings of ancient Egyptians and Greeks with instruments. Most likely, you also will see articles about ancient Chinese and Roman instruments that include pictures or drawings. As you look at them, you will be able to see the origins of the instruments we have today: wind instruments which are blown, string instruments which are plucked or bowed (scraped), and percussion, most of which are struck or shaken. So, notice that the methods of sound production are the same as those we still use, but also notice the use of construction materials available at that place and time as well as the wide variety of sizes and shapes. In just a few minutes of research, you will see the origins of today’s instruments.



### Medieval Music Instruments

Medieval music instruments are those that were played in Europe during the Middle Ages, from approximately 450 to 1400. You may want to do a quick search of “medieval times” or “medieval life” to get an array of pictures that will give you a general feeling of that historical period. To see pictures of the instruments and people playing them, search for “medieval music instruments” or “medieval music



instrument performers.” You will notice that many of the instruments bear a resemblance to those seen today. Again, be alert to the methods of sound production, the construction materials and the sizes and shapes of the various instruments. By adding the name of your video service, you probably will find some videos of performers playing replicas so that you can hear the distinctive sound of the Medieval music instruments. Don’t forget to check the related lists.

### Renaissance Music Instruments

Renaissance instruments were played in Europe from approximately 1400 to 1600. To see pictures of people during that time, search for “renaissance life” or “renaissance period.” If you search for “renaissance music instruments” or “renaissance music instrument performers” you will see pictures of the instruments with people holding and/or playing them. Samples of the sound of Renaissance instrumental ensembles can be found by adding the name of your video service to the previous search and/or by searching for “renaissance music ensembles + the name of your video service.” Searching the related videos listed on the page could bring even more success. As you look at the instruments and hear their sounds, compare and contrast them to current instruments. Notice which methods of sound production and construction materials were being used. The variety of sizes of the instruments may surprise you.



### Baroque Music Instruments

The Baroque period lasted from approximately 1600 to 1750. Think of those years in terms of American history to give it perspective. To see pictures of life at that time, search “baroque era” or “baroque life.” For instruments, begin simply with “baroque music instruments” to see pictures. To hear the instruments, check for “baroque music ensembles + the name of your video service.” Also, check for related videos to be sure that you both see and hear the instruments. You’ll notice that some look much like those of today while others do not. This is part of the evolution; some continued to develop while others were dropped. This process continued through the Classical and Romantic periods in European music history and still continues today as musicians search for ways of best reflecting the feelings of contemporary life through sound and music.



## TRADITIONAL MULTICULTURAL INSTRUMENTS

People who want to preserve their heritage continue to perform music that has been passed from generation to generation. They play instruments of their musical tradition, most unfamiliar to typical Americans. Much of the richness of their culture and legacy is preserved through the music they perform.

The sound of the music of each culture is unique primarily because the original instruments were made of different indigenous materials and evolved into diverse sizes and shapes. Yes, the methods of sound production are the same in all cultures, but the instruments are greatly different. Music from different continents, ethnic areas and countries is distinctive. Your instructor probably will want you to see and hear some multicultural instruments. This experience will be valuable in your classroom as you teach your students about the peoples of the world.

Although you could begin your search by continent, such as “Asian music instruments,” “African music instruments” or “South American music instruments,” you will be more successful by immediately narrowing the search to music of a specific country in that continent. For instance, a search by country such as “Chinese music instruments,” “Japanese music instruments” or “Indian music instruments,” will yield more useable results than the broad continental one. Similarly, rather than searching for African instruments, search by country such as “Liberian music instruments,” “Kenyan music instruments,” or “Nigerian music instruments.” Look for “Peruvian music instruments,” “Brazilian music instruments” or “Chilean music instruments,” not South American ones. If you do not get quick results, try changing the order of the search words. Also, you’ll have to follow the usual search procedure to hear performances. When you do, you will quickly differentiate between the sounds of the instruments played by people on the three continents previously mentioned. Notice the similarity of methods of sound production and the differences in construction materials and the sizes and shapes of the instruments.



Rather than searching by the name of a country, you might search by a geographical region that includes several countries but is not as large as a continent. Regional searches include “Middle Eastern music instruments,” “Balkan music instruments” or “Latin music instruments.” Don’t hesitate to rearrange the search words and remember to look at the related materials the search reveals.



Perhaps your search will focus on an area or ethnicity within a country. “Native American music instruments,” “Appalachian music instruments” and “Creole music instruments” fit into this search category. The United States is rich with cultural diversity and with multicultural music ready for you to discover. So, you can search for music near or far to see and hear the instruments that people are using to preserve their culture.



## VOCAL TONE COLOR

Vocal tone color is important in conveying an appropriate mood for a song. Sing “Are You Sleeping?” and while retaining the same tempo for each performance, change the tone color of your voice to reflect the mood in these situations:

1. John has been sleeping for hours and is long overdue to get out of bed;
2. You did not know that John was still sleeping and came into the room where you are surprised, though not angry, to find him in bed;
3. Today is John’s birthday and you are sneaking into his room to surprise him with a gift;
4. John has been sick, so even though it is morning, you are pleased that he is resting comfortably.

As you changed tone color, other aspects of the performance such as loudness or quietness probably changed too. If you concentrate on tone color to set a mood, other expressive factors automatically and unconsciously will be affected.

Sing other songs you know or have been taught in class, such as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” or “Oh, Where, Oh, Where Has my Little Dog Gone?” Find an appropriate tone color to communicate the intended feeling of each song in order to bring it to life.

This would be a good time to go to the "Appendix." Your instructor might direct you to the names of specific songs. The titles sometimes are descriptive enough to convey the mood or spirit of the song. Find some and say the title with a vocal tone color that reflects the meaning of the words in the title. Or, perhaps you can search for the song online but look for lyrics only and read the words with descriptive tone color. Then find a performance and decide whether or not the tone color is appropriate for the song. If possible, listen to more than one performance. You’ll be learning how to discriminately select songs you find on the internet.

Vocal tone colors vary according to the genre of the music being sung. For instance, a pop singer, a country singer and an opera singer have distinctly different vocal tone colors. If your instructor wants you to hear a variety of genre-appropriate vocal tone colors, a search for “famous (name of genre) singers” will take you directly to some outstanding performers. From there you might continue your search by using the singer’s name, perhaps with the name of your video service added. Some genres you might want to hear are country, folk, gospel, jazz, Latino, opera, pop, R & B, rock and/or soul. You may find the same singer included in several searches. If so, you could listen to detect a subtle change in vocal color to suit the genre.



Like solo singers, some groups of singers can be identified by their tone color. Certainly, the type of music determines the tone color used, but some groups specialize in a certain genre while others change according to the piece they’re performing. To hear some examples of groups that specialize in a particular genre, search by the group type such as “show choir,” “gospel choir,” “glee club,” “barbershop quartet,” “boychoir” or “madrigal singers,” then add “performance + either videos or the name of your video service.” To hear changes in vocal tone color according to the genre of each song, search for “concert choir” with or without specifying “men’s” or “women’s” and listen to several pieces.



Your vocal tone color listening experiences would not be complete without including children's voices. Perhaps you've seen children auditioning for TV singing competitions. These children are exceptional or they would not have attained that status. Do not think that most children sound like these performers. They don't! So, to hear typical children like you might someday find in your classroom singing the types of songs that they might sing, search for "elementary children's choirs" with the usual additions of "performance" perhaps with "videos" or the name of your video service. These children will have rehearsed for their performance, so you will have an idea of what children can accomplish using their natural voices.



## COMBINING INSTRUMENTAL AND VOCAL TONE COLORS

As a result of your explorations, you should now be able to predict the sound(s) an object can make and/or to select or manipulate objects to produce a particular, intended sound. You might have listened to a variety of instruments, some contemporary, some historical and/or some traditional multicultural ones. Also, you should be aware of your ability to change the tone color of your voice and learned that vocal tone colors vary according to the genre of the performed songs. To apply what you've learned, use instruments, environmental objects, body percussion and/or your voice in the following creative experiences.

Using available sound sources to imitate another sound can be fun. For this experience, your instructor might want you to work with other class members in order to combine several sounds. Your instructor might assign one of the following sounds, let you make a selection or provide other examples. Imitate (1) the sound of rain on a rooftop, (2) walking in dry leaves, (3) tires in gravel and/or (4) gentle wind growing into a storm. Play the "piece" for your class. Your instructor might want you to describe the process you used to determine the objects you selected and combined.

In order to heighten your awareness of tone color as an expressive component of music, try creating a 20- to 30-second composition that reflects the feeling of (1) mist in a valley, (2) twinkling stars with a crescent moon, (3) the sun rising and/or (4) being lonely. Remember that you are trying to communicate the feeling of the situation and not to approximate actual sounds you might hear. Choose your tone colors carefully and be sure that your composition has a definite beginning and ending. Your instructor will give you directions regarding the specific class members involved, the sound sources permitted and the amount of time allowed for composition. As before, perform the compositions and discuss. Perhaps the listeners can identify the topic by listening without being told the title of the composition. If so, the composition has successfully expressed the feeling.

A picture or a poem or a short story can be used as a stimulus for further manipulation of sound. In some instances you might want to imitate actual sounds while in others you might want to convey a general mood. Perhaps your instructor will want you to participate in these interesting experiences.

As you became aware by singing "Are You Sleeping?" in various ways, tone color affects the mood of existing pieces. Care must be taken to choose not only effective vocal tone color but appropriate instrumentation for accompanying songs. Using instruments, body percussion and/or environmental sounds, create an eight-beat percussion score of one or two parts that would be appropriate for one of the fictitious songs listed below.

1. Marching Down the Street
2. A Horse is a Cowboy's Best Friend
3. At a Mexican Fiesta
4. Drifting Clouds
5. Do-si-do Your Partner
6. Riding on a Train

Perform the accompaniment for other members of your class and see if they can identify which song you had in mind because of your choice of tone colors.

Now apply your learning further by adding instrumental accompaniments to songs you know. You could use the beat, melodic rhythm, metric accent or a combination of the three. For instance, decide what instruments would enhance the mood of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” then play an accompaniment as you sing with a tone color that communicates wonder and awe. Go on to “The Bear Went Over the Mountain.” Obviously both the vocal tone color and the accompanying instruments must change to fit the heavy, lumbering bear. Perform the song with the accompaniment.

Your instructor might want you to explore instrumental and vocal tone colors in other songs. Perhaps you’ll be asked to turn to the “Appendix.” Your instructor might specify songs or you could choose some. Decide on an appropriate tempo and tone color, perhaps reading the lyrics and then selecting instruments that could provide an appropriate accompaniment.

Also, you might be asked to listen to instrumental and vocal combinations in contemporary, historical and/or traditional multicultural music. These search words will help you find the performances. For a combined choir and symphony, look for “symphony chorus + the name of your video service.” You could specify the name of a city if you have a preference. For an historical ensemble, search “(name of historical period) music performance” again with the name of your video service. If you do not immediately find a vocal and instrumental group, check the related videos. For traditional multicultural performances, enter “(name of continent, country or geographical area) vocal music” with the name of your video service. Most times, vocal music is accompanied, so you’ll hear the vocal and instrumental tone colors. The list of related videos will help with any difficulties. Through your investigation, you will hear and see samples of the vocal and instrumental music that has communicated the feelings of people in the past and continues today.



## EXPANDING YOUR PERCEPTION

Most likely you had several online experiences in this chapter. Through your listening, you probably have started to become attentive to tone color and realize that tone color contributes to the emotional impact of music. Now let’s connect some tone colors to your feelings and expand your aural perception to include both rhythm and tone color in the same piece.

Your instructor will structure the exact assignment based on some of the pieces listed here. The selections come from three categories of music: (1) American composers who write concert music for traditional performance media, (2) American composers who have experimented with sound beyond the traditional and (3) composers and groups on “best songs” lists. As in the “Expanding Your Perception” segment in the “Rhythm” chapter, you should listen to at least 30 seconds to a minute of the selected pieces. Always listen to more if you enjoy the piece and/or are fascinated by it. This is an opportunity to learn about different genres of music.

Begin by listening with your attention on tone color, but first look over this list of descriptive words that may help you describe the tone colors that you hear. As before, feel free to modify or add to the list.

### **Descriptive words for tone color:**

*Dark or Heavy or Thick:* veiled, blurred, muffled, smooth, or hard, weighty, full, harsh or mellow, soothing, rich, moaning, warm.

*Bright or Light or Thin:* piercing, steely, edgy, sharp, eerie or crisp, bubbly, tinkling, shimmering, or gentle, liquid or breathy, airy.

Now, listen to the piece(s) assigned by your instructor and describe the sound in the manner determined by your instructor. Search by “name of composer or performer + name of music + name of your video service.”



### **From American composers who write traditional concert music**

Copland “Fanfare for the Common Man”

Barber “Adagio for Strings”

Ives “Variations on America” organ

Whitacre “Cloudburst”

#### From American composers who write experimental music

Babbitt “Philomel”

Cage “4’33’”

Crumb “Ancient Voices of Children”

Luening “Moonflight”

#### From “best songs” lists

Queen “Bohemian Rhapsody”

Led Zeppelin “Stairway to Heaven”

Jimi Hendrix “Purple Haze”

The Who “Won’t Get Fooled Again”

Thomas Dolby “She Blinded Me with Science”

In all music, the emotional impact is due to the melding of the components. So although tone color is a factor, it is not the sole factor. Therefore, listen to the same piece(s) again, this time focusing on the rhythm. Your instructor might want you to refer to this list.

#### Descriptive words for rhythm and/or tempo:

*Fast:* brisk, scurrying, skipping, vigorous, swirling

*Moderate:* easy, lackadaisical, leisurely, unhurried, strolling

*Slow:* stately, dreamy, slinking, creeping, plodding

Now listen again with attention to the intermingling of rhythm and tone color while becoming aware their effect on your feelings. Perhaps your feelings will change as you listen. That frequently happens, particularly when you are listening attentively to the components of a piece. So, now listen perceptively and then react emotionally. Here are the descriptive words to help you identify your feelings.

#### Descriptive words for feelings:

*Positive:* relaxed, calm, peaceful, reflective or happy, excited, exhilarated, uplifting.

*Negative:* nervous, tense, frightened, sad or frustrated, irritated, agitated, angry.

Could you focus on the components? Can you concentrate enough to change your attention as you listen? Can you perceive the two components simultaneously? Remember that perceptions are objective, but that feelings are subjective. Through this and other similar experiences, you not only will respond emotionally to music, but will discover why you react to pieces the way you do.

## LINKING LEARNING TO TEACHING

In this chapter on tone color, you added to your content knowledge by developing more **concepts** and **skills**. In this chapter, you first became aware of tone colors in daily life and then investigated factors that determine tone color, exploring body percussion and found sound and playing typical classroom instruments. You probably heard some contemporary, historical and/or traditional multicultural instruments and determined how the factors affected their sounds. You found that you could change your vocal tone color and might have heard tone colors characteristic of various genres of vocal performances. You created accompaniments and short compositions using a variety of tone