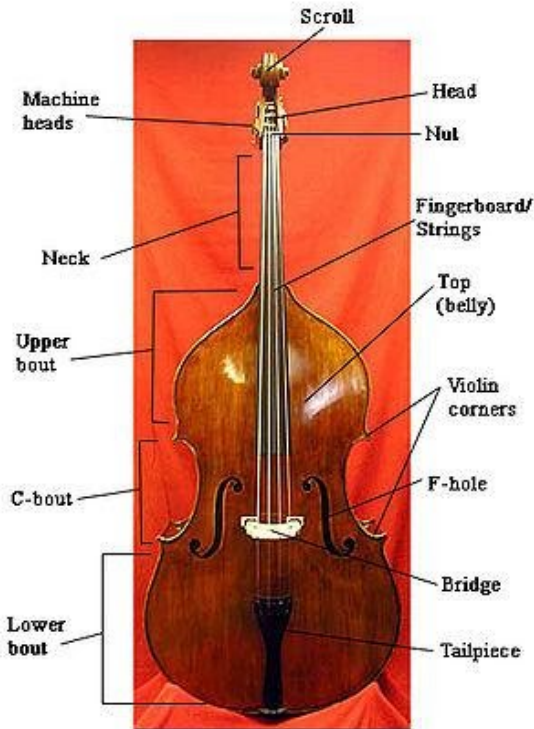


Music of the World

Chordophones - The modern string family: Double Bass



The **Double Bass** is not part of the violin family but may be derived from the viola da gamba (viol) family. It is tuned in fourths and not in fifths. Some experts also say that the modern double bass is neither a true member of the viol or violin family. The full-sized bass stands six feet from scroll to endpin, but many players perform on smaller sizes ($\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$) depending on stature or hand size. The development of overwound gut strings in the 1650's was key to the ability to play lower notes in rapid succession. Experts claim the instrument would not have survived without them. The use of

steel strings and a re-engineering of the neck has allowed bassists to play further down (higher pitches) the fingerboard extending the range and allowing for better bowing technique.

Bass bows can be either French, shown on top (right), which is similar to the violin family (overhand) or German, below, which is played in handshake or “hacksaw” position.



Various techniques have been developed for other genres such as slap bass and pizzicato.

Bassists use the length of the index finger vertically to pull the string for pizzicato.

The development Octobasses have been made recently which utilize the overtone series of the instrument to its correct dimensions. “We’re gonna need a bigger van (boat).”



Here is one of my favorite videos, *Flight of the Bumblebee*, by Lev Weksler:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLvC1046t7w>

Here is **Esperanza Spalding** with her chamber ensemble which includes violin, viola, cello and guitar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBZa7-2bG2I>

Performers of the string family use methods such a vibrato to color the sound. Since there are no frets, one must know where to place fingers on the fingerboard (see <https://www.bayorchestra.com/> Reference: Fingering Charts). There are finger patterns, shifting methods, thumb position (on cello and bass) and other techniques that make playing challenging but rewarding. As always, a qualified instructor is the key to success.