

Music of the World

Chordophones - The modern string family: Viola and Cello



The modern **Viola** is larger than a violin being between one to 4 inches longer than the violin (14 inches) to a length of about 16 inches. Before the 18th century, the instrument varied greatly in size and shape. Some luthers have widened and experimented with size resulting in sounding more like a cello. The viola is tuned like a cello and octave higher: C-G-D-A and music is

written in the alto clef and the treble clef in upper ranges.

What is the difference between a violin and a viola?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Llgc3ffkiMI>

Here is a \$45,000,000 viola being performed by David Aaron Carpenter playing the *Bach Suite No. 3*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xe11Pp1g39I>

The **Cello or Violincello** was first a bass violin (shown right). Like the violin, it is tuned in 5ths and is an octave lower than the viola being played like the earlier viola da gamba, with an endpin with the cello body held between the knees. It was transitioned into the cello in northern Italy during the late 17th century. Wire wound strings were invented to create an improved bass sound. Bolognese luthers created a smaller cello, actually cutting down the bass violins into a smaller pattern made by Stradivarius. The cellos of the Baroque era differed in neck angle, bass bar (which is a “bar” of wood inside the body of the instrument) and gut strings. Modern cellos have a higher string



tension and use either a metal or synthetic core to the wound strings, with fine tuners added which helped tuning greatly. The sound is partially transmitted through the endpin to the floor making it more resonant.

Here is cellist Alisa Weilerstein playing the Bach *4 Cello-Suite*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbBaQblpb3U>

Listen as cellist YoYo Ma plays with jazz great Diane Krall:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8Zp2mdwOrs>

