

B Strings

A compilation of music for various bowed string instruments selected from the “Bs” in my collection. From Bach to Bruch

I’ve tried to select some unusual instruments and some lesser known pieces as well as some more familiar pieces

The usual suspects Violin, Viola, Cello and Double Bass



are there and in addition the following more unusual instruments.

Viola d'amore



Viola d'Amore from 1760

The **viola d'amore** is a 7- or 6-stringed musical instrument with sympathetic strings used chiefly in the baroque period. It is played under the chin in the same manner as the violin.

Structure and sound

The viola d'amore shares many features of the viol family. It looks like a thinner treble viol without frets and sometimes with sympathetic strings added. The six-string viola d'amore and the treble viol also have approximately the same range of playable notes. Like all viols, it has a flat back. An intricately carved head at the top of the peg box is common on both viols and viole d'amore, although some viols lack one. Unlike the carved heads on viols, the viola d'amore's head occurs most often as Cupid blindfolded to represent the blindness of love. Its sound-holes are commonly in the shape of a flaming sword known as "The Flaming Sword of Islam" (suggesting the instrument's development was influenced by the Islamic World) but more likely representing the flame of love. This was one of the three usual sound hole shapes for viols as well. It is unfretted, and played much like a violin, being held horizontally under the chin. It is about the same size as the modern viola.

The viola d'amore usually has six or seven playing strings, which are sounded by drawing a bow across them, just as with a violin. In addition, it has an equal number of sympathetic strings located below the main strings and the fingerboard which are not played directly but vibrate in sympathy with the notes played. A common variation is six playing strings, and instruments exist with as many as fourteen sympathetic strings alone. Despite the fact that the sympathetic strings are now thought of as the most characteristic element of the instrument, early forms of the instrument almost uniformly lacked them. The first unambiguous reference to a viola d'amore without sympathetic strings does not occur until the 1730s. Both the types continued to be built and played through the 18th century.[2]

Largely thanks to the sympathetic strings, the viola d'amore has a particularly sweet and warm sound. Leopold Mozart, writing in his *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, said that the instrument sounded "especially charming in the stillness of the evening."

Viola Da gamba



The **viol**, **viola da gamba**, or (informally) **gamba**, is any one of a family of bowed, fretted and stringed instruments that first appeared in Spain in the mid to late 15th century and was most popular in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Early ancestors include the Arabic rebab and the medieval European vielle, but later, more direct possible ancestors include the Venetian viole and the 15th- and 16th-century Spanish vihuela, a 6-course plucked instrument tuned like a lute (and also like a present-day viol) that looked like but was quite distinct from the (at that time) 4-course guitar (an earlier chordophone).

Although bass viols superficially resemble cellos, viols are different in numerous respects from instruments of the violin family: the viol family has flat rather than curved backs, sloped rather than rounded shoulders, c holes rather than f holes, and five to seven rather than four strings; some of the many additional differences are tuning strategy (in fourths with a third in the middle—similar to a lute—rather than in fifths), the presence of frets, and underhand ("German") rather than overhand ("French") bow grip.

All members of the viol family are played upright between the legs like a modern cello, hence the Italian name *viola da gamba* (it. "viol for the leg") was sometimes applied to the instruments of this family. This distinguishes the viol from the modern violin family, the *viola da braccio* (it. "viol for the arm"). Currently, the term "viola da gamba" without qualification generally refers to the tenor viol. A player of the viol is commonly known as a gambist, violist, or violist da gamba. "Violist" shares the spelling, but not the pronunciation, of the word commonly used since the mid-20th century to refer to a player of the viola. It can therefore cause confusion if used in print where context does not clearly indicate that a viol player is meant, though it is entirely unproblematic, and common, in speech.

Viola d'Amore

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704)



Biber was one of the most important composers for the violin in the history of the instrument. His technique allowed him to easily reach the 6th and 7th positions, employ multiple stops in intricate polyphonic passages, and explore the various possibilities of scordatura tuning. He also wrote one of the earliest known pieces for solo violin, the monumental passacaglia of the Mystery Sonatas. During Biber's lifetime, his music was known and imitated throughout Europe. In the late 18th century he was named the best violin composer of the 17th century by music historian Charles Burney. In the late 20th century Biber's music, especially the Mystery Sonatas, enjoyed a renaissance. Today, it is widely performed and recorded.

Partita VII for two Viole d'Amore Praeludium, Alleman...

Instrumentation: Marianne Ronez & Ludwig Hampe-Viole d'Amore, Arno Jochem-Viola da Gamba.

Michael Freimuth Theorbo (a large lute with the neck extended to carry several long bass strings, used for accompaniment in 17th and early 18th century music).

Ernst Kubitschek-Harpsichord.

Biber's violin music was possibly influenced, on one hand, by the Italian tradition of Marco Uccellini and Carlo Farina, and on the other, by the then-nascent German polyphonic tradition as exemplified by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, who may have been Biber's teacher. Biber's achievements included further development of violin technique—he was able to reach the 6th and 7th positions, and his left-hand and bowing techniques were far more advanced than those of contemporary Italian composers. He also excelled at counterpoint, frequently writing fully polyphonic textures, with much use of multiple stops. Yet another area in which Biber made a substantial contribution was the art of scordatura, i.e. music for

alternative tunings of the instrument. Finally, much of Biber's music employs various forms of number symbolism, affekten, programmatic devices, etc., as seen in, the symbolic retuning of the violin for the Resurrection sonata of the *Mystery Sonatas*.

The second work in which Biber explored scordatura techniques is *Harmonia artificioso-ariosa* (1696), his last known published collection of instrumental music. It contains seven partitas for two instruments and basso continuo: five for two violins, one for two violas d'amore, and one for violin and viola. Six of the partitas require scordatura tunings, including those for viola and two violas d'amore; Biber utilises the full potential of the technique, including all possibilities for complex polyphony: some of the pieces are in five parts, with both of the melodic instruments carrying two. Interestingly, no other chamber works by Biber use such devices, and the only other pieces to use scordatura are two of the sonatas included in *Sonatae violino solo* of 1681. That collection comprises eight sonatas for violin and basso continuo, all noted already by Charles Burney in late 18th century, for the brilliant virtuosic passages and elaborate structures. In contrast to both *Mystery Sonatas* and *Harmonia*, these works consist mostly of pieces in free forms (prelude, aria) or variations, rather than dances.

Violin

Samuel Barber (March 9, 1910 – January 23, 1981)



Samuel Osborne Barber II was an American composer of orchestral, opera, choral, and piano music. He is one of the most celebrated composers of the 20th century: music critic Donal Henahan stated that "Probably no other American composer has ever enjoyed such early, such persistent and such long-lasting acclaim."

Violin Concerto Allegro

Instrumentation: Isaac Stern and New York Phil conducted by Bernstein

In 1939, Philadelphia industrialist Samuel Simeon Fels commissioned Barber to write a violin concerto for Fels' ward, Iso Briselli, a graduate from the Curtis Institute of Music the same year as Barber, 1934

The first movement—*allegro molto moderato*—begins with a lyrical first subject announced at once by the solo violin, without any orchestral introduction. This movement as a whole has perhaps more the character of a sonata than concerto form. The second movement—*andante sostenuto*—is introduced by an extended oboe solo. The violin enters with a contrasting and rhapsodic theme, after which it repeats the oboe melody of the beginning. The last movement, a *perpetuum mobile*, exploits the more brilliant and virtuosic character of the violin.

The concerto is scored for two each of [flutes](#), [oboes](#), [clarinets](#), [bassoons](#), [horns](#), and [trumpets](#), [timpani](#), [snare drum](#), [piano](#), and [strings](#).

Viola

Hector Berlioz (11 December 1803 – 8 March 1869)

Berlioz was a French Romantic composer, best known for his compositions [Symphonie fantastique](#) and *Grande messe des morts* (Requiem). Berlioz made significant contributions to the modern orchestra with his *Treatise on Instrumentation*. He specified huge orchestral forces for some of his works, and conducted several concerts with more than 1,000 musicians.

Berlioz: Harold in Italy Op16 (Serenade)

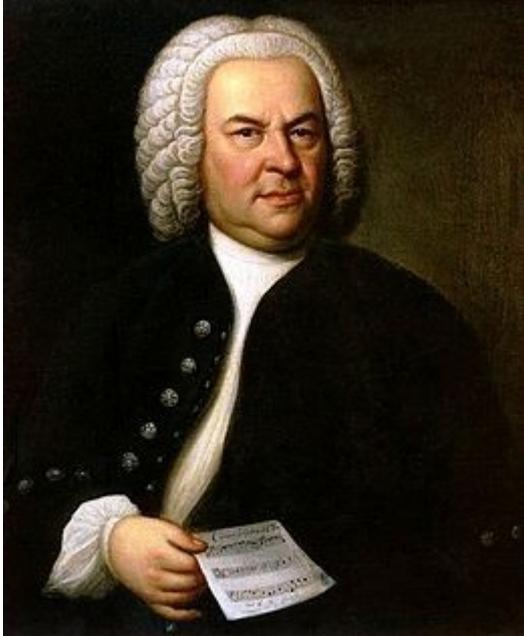
Instrumentation: Nobuko Imai Viola, LSO and Sir Colin Davis

On 30 December 1831, Berlioz left France for Rome, prompted by a clause in the *Prix de Rome* which required winners to spend two years studying there. Although none of his major works were actually written in Italy, his travels and experiences there would later influence and inspire much of his music. This is most evident in the thematic aspects of his music, particularly *Harold en Italie* (1834), a work inspired by Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*. Berlioz later recalled that his "intention was to write a series of orchestral scenes, in which the solo viola would be involved as a more or less active participant [with the orchestra] while retaining its own character. By placing it among the poetic memories formed from my wanderings in Abruzzi, I wanted to make the viola a kind of melancholy dreamer in the manner of Byron's Childe-Harold."

In 1834, virtuoso violinist and composer Niccolò Paganini commissioned Berlioz to compose a viola concerto, intending to premiere it as soloist. This became the symphony for viola and orchestra, *Harold en Italie*. Paganini changed his mind about playing the piece himself when he saw the first sketches for the work; he expressed misgivings over its outward lack of complexity. The premiere of the piece was held later that year. After initially rejecting the piece, Paganini, as Berlioz's *Mémoires* recount, knelt before Berlioz in front of the orchestra after hearing it for the first time and proclaimed him a genius and heir to Beethoven. The next day he sent Berlioz a gift of 20,000 francs, the generosity of which left Berlioz uncharacteristically lost for words.^[42] Around this time, Berlioz decided to conduct most of his own concerts, tired as he was of conductors who did not understand his music. This decision launched what was to become a lucrative and creatively fruitful career in conducting music both by himself and by other leading composers.

Viola da gamba

J.S.Bach (31 March 1685 – 28 July 1750)



Bach was a German composer and musician of the Baroque period. He enriched established German styles through his skill in counterpoint, harmonic and motivic organization, and the adaptation of rhythms, forms, and textures from abroad, particularly from Italy and France. Bach's compositions include the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *Goldberg Variations*, the Mass in B minor, two Passions, and over three hundred cantatas of which around two hundred survive. His music is revered for its technical command, artistic beauty, and intellectual depth.

Sonata for viola da gamba 3 in G minor BWV 1029 I. Vivace

Instrumentation: Hille Perl; Viola Da Gamba, Michael Behringer Harpsichord

The musicologist Philipp Spitta has described this sonata as being "of the greatest beauty and most striking originality."

The sonata begins with a theme by the viola da gamba, which is soon joined by the harpsichord.

Cello

J.S. Bach - Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major BWV1007

The six **Cello Suites**, [BWV 1007](#) to [1012](#), are suites for unaccompanied [cello](#) by [Johann Sebastian Bach](#). They are some of the most frequently performed and recognizable solo compositions ever written for cello. Bach most likely composed them during the period 1717–23, when he served as a

[Kapellmeister](#) in [Köthen](#). The title of the [Anna Magdalena Bach](#) manuscript was *Suites á Violoncello Solo senza Basso* (Suites for cello solo without bass).



Sally Beamish

Sally Beamish was born in London. Initially a viola player, she moved from London to Scotland in 1990 to develop her career as a composer. Her music embraces many influences: particularly jazz and Scottish traditional music. The concerto form is a continuing inspiration, and she has written for many internationally renowned soloists.

The Wise Maid

Instrumentation: Robert Irvine

The Wise Maid was commissioned by Gerry Mattock as an Encore piece. It draws on an Irish fiddle tune and is a set of demanding and virtuosic variations, stretching the limits of cello technique to an almost absurd extent.

Viol and Violin and Lute

Edward Benjamin Britten, Baron Britten, (22 November 1913 – 4 December 1976)



Britten was an English composer, conductor and pianist. He was a central figure of 20th-century British classical music, with a range of works including opera, other vocal music, orchestral and chamber pieces.

Courtly Dances from 'Gloriana'

Instrumentation: Lute, Flute Tabor, Viol & Violin, Julian Bream, Julian Bream Consort

Gloriana was the name given by the 16th-century poet Edmund Spenser to his character representing Queen Elizabeth I in his poem *The Faerie Queene*. It became the popular name given to Elizabeth I. It is recorded that the troops at Tilbury hailed her with cries of "Gloriana, Gloriana, Gloriana", after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

The opera depicts the relationship between Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex, and was composed for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953. Several in the audience of its gala opening were disappointed by the opera, which presents the first Elizabeth as a sympathetic, but flawed, character motivated largely by vanity and desire. The premiere was one of Britten's few critical failures, and the opera was not included in the series of complete Decca recordings conducted by the composer. However, a symphonic suite extracted from the opera by the composer (Opus 53a), which includes the Courtly Dances, is often performed as a concert piece.

Cello

Ludwig van Beethoven (17 December 1770^[1] – 26 March 1827)

Cello Sonata No3 in A Op69 I. Allegro ma non tanto

Instrumentation: Jacqueline Du Pre Cello & Daniel Barenboim Piano

Ludwig van Beethoven's **Cello Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69** was written in 1808, Beethoven's second compositional period. Composed in the same year were the two piano trios of Op. 70 and the Choral Fantasy; in the same year Beethoven also completed and published his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies.¹ The sonata was dedicated to Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein and first performed in March 1809 by cellist Nikolaus Kraft and pianist Dorothea von Ertmann. Beethoven composed five sonatas for cello and piano over his lifetime; Steven Isserlis described his third sonata as the first cello sonata in history to give equally important parts to both of the instruments.

The third sonata, the A major, Op 69, inhabits a different world altogether. Beethoven worked on this sonata between 1806 and 1808; by then, his deafness was acute, if not quite complete. In his tragic letter known as the Heiligenstadt Testament, written in October 1802, Beethoven had admitted that he had harboured thoughts of suicide. "It was only my art that held me back. Oh, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt was within me." Yet this sonata - in common with several other works from the same period - is one of the most positive works imaginable; from the opening phrase, it radiates serenity, humour and joy. There is not a note that is trivial, however. The A major Sonata is a thoroughly classical work, its proportions carefully measured, the themes answering each other in perfect symmetry. It is also the first equal sonata for cello and piano. Previous cello sonatas had either been cello solos with continuo accompaniment or, like Beethoven's first two, piano sonatas with cello obbligato. Here, every theme is perfectly conceived for both instruments; Beethoven had invented a new genre.

Double Bass

Giovanni Bottesini (22 December 1821 – 7 July 1889)

The Paganini of the double bass



Bottesini with his Testore bass around 1865

Bottesini was widely acclaimed, and his virtuosic skill in the bass paralleled that of Paganini himself on the violin. Because of the contributions of Bottesini (along with those of [Spenger](#) and [Dragonetti](#)) to bass technique, many have come to view the double bass as a diverse and versatile instrument. Most notably there are many virtuoso bass players who draw inspiration from the early renaissance of the double bass.

Concerto for 2 Double Bases and piano

Instrumentation: Thomas Martin and Timothy Cobb, Double Bases, Christopher Oldfather Piano.

The *Gran Duo Concertante* is a single, sprawling movement and usually lasts around 15 minutes if played up to tempo, but this estimate can vary greatly due to the artists' interpretation of the music. While double concertos were generally composed for different instruments, Bottesini did not seem to consider the questionable practicality of a piece that requires two very talented double bassists.

Duetto for Clarinet & Double Bass

Instrumentation: Thomas Martin Double Bass, Emma Johnson Clarinet, English Chamber Orch. & Andrew Litton

Violin

Max Bruch (6 January 1838 – 2 October 1920)



He received his early musical training under the composer and pianist Ferdinand Hiller at the age of nine he wrote his first composition, a song for his mother's birthday. From then on music was his passion, and his studies were enthusiastically supported by his parents. He wrote many minor early works including motets, psalm settings, piano pieces, violin sonatas, a string quartet and even orchestral works such as the prelude to a planned opera *Joan of Arc*. Few of these early works have survived, however.

Concerto No1 in G Minor For Violin Op26 Adagio

Instrumentation: Maxim Vengerov Violin, Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig & Kurt Masur

The first movement is unusual in that it is a *Vorspiel*, a prelude, to the second movement and is directly linked to it. The piece starts off slowly, with the melody first taken by the flutes, and then the solo violin becomes audible with a short cadenza. This repeats again, serving as an introduction to the main portion of the movement, which contains a strong first theme and a very melodic, and generally slower, second theme. The movement ends as it began, with the two short cadenzas more virtuosic than before, and the orchestra's final tutti flows into the second movement, connected by a single low note from the first violins.

Track #	Title	Artist	Album	Duration
1	Biber: Partita VII for two Viole d'Amore Praeludium, Alleman...	Marianne Ronez & Ludwig Hampe-Viole d'Amore.	Classical	00:02:59
2	Barber: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra Op14 Adagio	Isaac Stern, The New York Philharmonic and Leonard Bernstein	Two twentieth Century Masterpieces	00:10:13
3	Berlioz: Harold in Italy Op16 (Serenade)	Nobuko Imai Viola; LSO and Sir Colin Davis		00:06:38
4	J.S.Bach: Sonata for viola da gamba 3 in G minor BWV 1029 I. Vivace	Hille Perl; Viola Da Gamba; Michael Behringer Harpsichord	Classical	00:05:05
5	Bach: Cello Suite No 1 in G Major	Casaba Onezay	Classical Chillout Gold Disc 2	00:02:28
6	Beamish: The Wise Maid, for solo cello	Robert Irvine	Bridging the Day: Works for Cello & Piano by Sally Beamish	00:03:58
7	Britten: Courtly Dances from 'Gloriana'	Julian Bream, Julian Bream Consort	Julian Bream	00:10:09
8	Beethoven:Cello Sonata No3 in A Op69I. Allegro ma non tanto	Jacqueline du Pré & Barenboim	Impressions Disc 2	00:09:22
9	Bottesini: Concerto for 2 Double Basses and Piano	Thomas Martin Double Bass, imothy Cobb Double Bass, Christopher Oldfather Piano	Bottesini: Fantasia on themes of Rossini	00:09:12
10	Bottesini:Duetto for Clarinet & Double Bass	Thomas Martin Double Bass, Emma Johnson Clarinet	Bottesini: Gran Concerto; Gran Duo Concertante	00:08:21
11	Bruch: Concerto No1 In G Minor For Violin Op26 Adagio	Maxim Vengerov, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Kurt Masur	Made Famous by Classic FM Disc 1	00:08:17
	Boccherini: Concerto in D for Cello & Strings Allegro	Walter Despaj Cello, I Solisti di Zagreb	The Classical Collection No76	00:14:39