

# NORTHWIND QUINTET

## Classic Fun

**Art Form: Music**

**Style: Orchestral**

**Culture: European, North American**

### MEET THE ARTIST:

The **NorthWind Quintet** is a Los Angeles-based chamber music ensemble composed of one brass-wind and four woodwind instruments. For over 30 years, the group has performed music that appeals to both the chamber music novice and the confirmed enthusiast. Their extensive experience in schools includes work with special needs students. The group was one of four ensembles chosen to participate in a national symposium on performances for young listeners, held at Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio. They have toured in Mexico, Holland and Germany, and were featured artists at the 'International Congress on Women in Music' at the United Nations in New York.

Locally, members of the NWQ are active in the film and recording industries, and in symphony orchestras such as the Los Angeles Mozart Orchestra, Riverside Symphony and Los Angeles Camerata. You may also have heard them in the orchestras of the Los Angeles productions of Broadway musicals such as *Ragtime* and *The Lion King*.

### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

*Classic Fun* with the NorthWind Quintet is a lively, interactive program that introduces its audience to the world of orchestral wind instruments, specifically the flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon and French horn. (The tiny piccolo makes an appearance, too.) Students and teachers will enjoy a variety of musical selections that feature the wind instruments and demonstrate their unique capabilities. Each player presents his or her instrument, demonstrates the sound it makes and explains how that sound is produced. The program introduces famous composers, basic music principles, music orchestration, and composition. Highlights include excerpts from Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto #3*; Mozart's *Magic Flute*; Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*; Dukas' *Sorcerers' Apprentice*; Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever*; and popular themes from *Star Wars*, *Titanic* and *The Lion King*. A question and answer period is followed by a grand finale, with volunteers performing on percussion instruments.



### PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The family of instruments we classify as woodwinds are the flute, piccolo, clarinet, oboe, English horn, bassoon and saxophone. At one time, all but the saxophone were made of wood, as the family name implies. Now, however, we find the piccolo, flute and saxophone are generally made of metal.

How are musical sounds produced on woodwind instruments? The answer is based on a simple principle: the player blows through a hole in the end of a tube to make the column of air inside vibrate. The length of the vibrating column determines the pitch of the sound produced.

In flute-type instruments, the player sets the air in motion by blowing breath across the mouthpiece opening of the instrument. In reed instruments, the player's breath causes a reed or reeds to vibrate within the instrument's pipe. The clarinet and saxophone use one reed which rests against a mouthpiece. The oboe, English horn and bassoon use two reeds, tied together, to vibrate when played.

Modern woodwind instruments are capable of producing a range of notes. When all the holes along the body of the instrument are covered, the instrument produces its lowest pitched sound because the air is able to vibrate through the entire length of the tube. As each hole is uncovered -- allowing air to escape through it -- the column of vibrating air is shorter and the pitch is higher.

The number of holes to be covered or uncovered would be limited to the number of fingers on both hands if instrumentalists had not discovered other methods for altering pitches, such as a system of keys, levers and pads that aid in raising and lowering pitches.

In brass instruments such as the French Horn, air is also used to produce sound. The player presses his or her lips against the mouthpiece and blows into it, causing the lips to vibrate. The vibrations travel through the metal tube to create a sound. To vary the pitch, the left hand presses on valves that change the length of the coiled tubing.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Which musical selection did you like the best? Why? What did it make you think of? What did it make you feel like doing?
- What differences did you notice in the instruments? Describe. (sound quality, high or low pitch, volume, shape, size, material) What do they have in common?
- Which of the instruments' sounds did you find the most appealing? Why?
- To play an instrument well takes a lot of practice. What other areas of life require a lot of practice?
- How is the sound produced in the instruments you saw in the performance?
- How is teamwork involved in a chamber music ensemble?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

As a class, make a chart that identifies the pitch, sound and appearance of woodwind instruments. List the instruments down the left side of the chart; across the top, write Pitch, Sound and Appearance. Write down words that describe the instrument in each of the three categories. Here are a few examples:

Instrument	Pitch	Sound	Appearance
Flute	High	Warbling, Birdlike	Long, Silver, Metal, Cylinder

Then by yourself or with a partner, pick one instrument from the performance.

Write a few descriptive sentences about your instrument, using the words from the chart or other words you find. Share your sentences in small groups or with the class.

### Vocabulary:

*Dynamics* -- the volume (loudness or softness) of musical sounds

*Pitch* -- the highness or lowness of sound (determined by the frequency of vibration)

*Tempo* -- the rate of speed at which music is played

*Timbre* (TAM-bur) -- the quality of sound

Legend:

- ☉ Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ☉ Bring in eight plastic water bottles. Figure out how to create the pitches of the scale by filling the bottles with different amounts of water.
- ☉ Make your own wind instrument with paper drinking straws. Pinch one end of the straw. Cut a tiny piece from each corner of the pinched end. Blow, placing the pinched end between the lips. Next, cut off an inch or more from the open end. Blow again. The pitch should be higher. (This should reinforce the relationship between pitch and length.)
- ❖ Think about the following: "What would the world be like without music? Write a paragraph of your thoughts about this quotation. Share, and listen to what your classmates wrote.
- ❖ Pick one of the instruments you found interesting in the performance. Imagine you are that instrument. Introduce and describe yourself to a partner, or write a paragraph about yourself describing yourself as an instrument character.
- ▶ Almost all cultures have flute-like instruments. Think of other instruments that are similar to the flute. What are their names? Where did they originate? How are they different from the flute in the performance? If you have one at home, bring it in to show the class. (e.g., penny whistle, panpipe, recorder)
- ⇒ Listen to a piece of music in which wind instruments are featured. See if you can identify the different instruments as they are played. (*Peter and the Wolf* by Prokofiev; *Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saens, etc.)
- \* Discuss the use of music in films and television programs. How do music and certain instruments set the mood, call attention to a specific action or describe a character? Give examples.



Clarinet

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Dearling, Robert, General Editor. *The Encyclopedia of Musical Instruments*. Carlton Books, Ltd., Smithmark Publishers, New York, 1996.

Rademacher, Johannes, *Musical Instruments – An Illustrated Historical Overview*. Barron's Educational Services, Inc., New York, 1997.

See and hear instruments online:

<http://www.dsokids.com/2001/instrumentchart.htm>

# THE INSTRUMENTS: NORTHWIND QUINTET - CLASSIC FUN

## **Flute**

The modern flute, usually made of nickel-silver, has 16 padded keys and is composed of three sections which fit together to form a long slender tube. It is held horizontally to the right. Its tones are considered 'silvery' and often represent the sounds of birds. The piccolo, half as long as the flute, produces shrill high notes which can pierce through the sound of a full orchestra. Popularity of the flute today is due in part to the talent and charm of Irish virtuoso James Galway, who can be seen in concert and on television.

The flute is known as one of the oldest instruments. Ancient flute-like instruments have been discovered in Egypt, Greece, Africa, India and China.



Piccolo

## **Double Reed Wind Instruments: Oboe, English Horn, Bassoon**

### **Oboe**

The oboe consists of a two-foot long tube of dark wood, with a bell-shaped end. It has the highest pitch of the double reed family and it is probably the hardest to play. Its reed consists of a thin piece of split cane, folded and tightly inserted into the top of the instrument. The player must force air at high pressure through the tiny opening. (This takes strong cheek and stomach muscles!)

The oboe is descended from the shawn, an instrument brought to Europe from the Orient during the Crusades. The shawn was used by folk musicians, shepherd boys and snake charmers. The oboe was invented in the mid-1600s; its development and refinements came mostly from French oboe makers, who improved the instrument's harsh tone quality. Many composers have written music featuring the oboe, including Handel, Vivaldi, Bach and Mozart. In Prokofiev's delightful 1936 piece *Peter and the Wolf*, the duck is represented by the oboe.

### **English Horn**

Related to the oboe, but larger and lower in pitch.

### **Bassoon**

The versatile bassoon is known as the 'gentleman' and the 'clown' of the woodwinds because it can produce both lyrical and comic tones. In the orchestra, the bassoon plays the low, deep registers; in small ensembles, it plays the bass (continuo). Nearly 8' long, its tubing must double back upon itself, resembling two big sticks tied together. Bassoons are usually made of maple or rosewood; its keys are nickel silver or silver plated.

A familiar example of the bassoon is the 1897 Dukas piece *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* in which the bassoon represents the broom.

### **Clarinet**

The single-reed clarinet has the greatest range of the woodwind instruments. Its lower notes are mellow, its middle tones are clear, and its upper notes are brilliant and almost shrill. The opening solo clarinet phrase of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) is a good example of the clarinet's sweeping range. In *Peter and the Wolf*, the clarinet represents the cat.

### **French Horn**

The modern-day horn has its supposed origins in France, which is why it is called the French Horn. It consists of more than 12 feet of tubing, coiled into a circular shape and ending in a large bell. It produces warm, mellow tones; a vibrant, metallic sound can be created when the right hand is inserted in the bell. In ancient times, animal horns were used for sending signals. By the late 1300s, the European brass horns such as the bugle were used in hunting and the military.

In 1717, Handel used the early horn in his *Water Music* and Bach in his first *Brandenburg Concerto*. Horns with different lengths of tubing were used to produce varying pitches. With every key change, the player had to put down one instrument and pick up another with a different length tube! Later, crooks and piston or rotary valve horns were developed to more easily change the pitch.