

Tafelmusik

TEACHER'S GUIDE



Teacher and student materials

Prepared by Alison Mackay
Tafelmusik Double Bassist

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MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME Teacher's Guide

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Double Bass

Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra

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Tafelmusik also gratefully acknowledges
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What does the word "Tafelmusik" mean?

The German word "tafeln" means to dine or to feast. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, German composers used the word "Tafelmusik" to describe music specially composed for a banquet.

What music does Tafelmusik play?

Tafelmusik plays music from the beginning of the Baroque period until the end of the Classical period, from Monteverdi to Beethoven. For large choral works the orchestra is joined by the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir.

The baroque music which the orchestra has most frequently performed and recorded is by the Italian composers

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741),

the French composers

Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687)

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764),

the English composer

Henry Purcell (1659-1695),

and the German composers

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) and

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767).

The three most important composers from the classical period are, of course

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827).

All three of these composers spent most of their lives in Austria.

Tafelmusik also enjoys exploring, performing and recording works by less famous composers.

What kind of instruments does Tafelmusik use?

The musicians of Tafelmusik play on the instruments for which baroque and classical composers created their music. Orchestral instruments have altered a great deal over the years to reflect changing tastes in sound quality and dynamic range. The violins and bows used in Monteverdi's orchestra were different from those in Bach's orchestra; by Mozart's time they had changed again. Tafelmusik is always striving to reproduce the sound that the composer had in mind by using old instruments or exact reproductions of original instruments.

How have the musicians learned what kind of instruments to use?

1. Many old instruments still exist in museums and in private collections. Some are in their original condition and can be studied by historians and players. Other instruments are in playing condition and are available for purchase. Most of these are old violins, violas, cellos and basses and most players of these instruments in Tafelmusik play on originals. In the case of oboes, bassoons, flutes, trumpets and harpsichords there are very few existing instruments in playing condition, and the players use reproductions.
2. Historical documents such as old method books, first hand descriptions of musical events and old illustrations of players are invaluable sources of information about the construction of instruments. The Tafelmusik musicians have had to inform themselves about these historical matters and constantly try to keep up to date with the latest research.

How have the players learned the old techniques for playing their instruments?

The same approach to historical materials which the players use with regard to their instruments is necessary for learning about old playing techniques and musical styles. Old method books, old pictures of players and old descriptions of performances go together to teach the player how to hold the instrument, how to finger or bow, how to make reeds, how to phrase, whether or not to use vibrato, etc. Playing an original instrument with historical style involves a combination of inspiration from teachers and performers, years of practice and constant attention to historical evidence.

How big is the Tafelmusik Orchestra?

The size of the orchestra depends on the music being played. Pictures, pay lists in account books and contemporary descriptions are informative about the number of musicians available to each composer. Monteverdi's orchestra for his opera Orfeo used a small number of bowed strings and a large number of plucked strings such as lute, harp and harpsichord. Classical orchestras at the time of Mozart often used large string sections, winds, brass and percussion.

Tafelmusik has a resident core of 8 violins, 3 violas, 2 cellos, 1 double bass, 1 harpsichord, 2 oboes and 1 bassoon. If appropriate to the repertoire, this group is supplemented by flutes, horns, trumpets, percussion, lutes, recorders or extra string players.

How does Tafelmusik sound different from a modern orchestra?

1. Old instruments have a distinctively different sound colour from modern ones. The stringed instruments look very similar to their modern counterparts but sound more mellow because their inner construction causes them to vibrate in a way which produces a softer sound with more overtones in each note. Early bow designs and the use of gut strings encourage a lighter, more articulate approach to sound production.

The wind instruments both look and sound very different from modern ones; their construction also causes them to vibrate in a different way from their modern counterparts, producing a sound which is more blending but which contains more overtones on each note. They contribute a strikingly distinctive colour to the orchestra.

2. One of the most striking distinguishing characteristics of a baroque orchestra is that the harpsichord is almost always present, doubling the line played by the cello and bass in the left hand at the same time as filling out the harmonies with chords. The harpsichord player reads from the same part as the cello and bass and improvises the added chords. The harpsichord makes the orchestra sound fuller because of the added resonance it provides. Because its strings are plucked it also adds clarity to the bass line and a special rhythmic incisiveness to the entire performance.

This function, called "continuo" because of its continuous participation in the ensemble, is sometimes taken over by different chordal instruments. J.S. Bach generally favoured organ continuo for his church music. Seventeenth-century Italians loved the combination of organ and lute. Special festival pieces sometimes call for larger continuo groups. Tafelmusik usually performs Handel's Messiah with harpsichord and organ. When Monteverdi performed his opera Orfeo in 1609 he used 2 harpsichords, a harp, 3 lutes, and 2 chamber organs!

3. Modern orchestras tune to a standard pitch of $a' = 440$ cycles per second. This was adopted by an international conference held in London in 1939. This pitch replaced a slightly lower pitch of $a' = 435$ which was the old standard fixed by the Paris Academy in 1859.

Before 1859 different pitches were used in different places at different times. Old church organs, old wind instruments and old tuning forks provide evidence about what pitches were used by different composers.

Tafelmusik has adopted several different pitches which have become standard for early-music performers. The most commonly used ones are $a' = 415$ for most baroque music and $a' = 430$ for classical repertoire. These lower pitches contribute to the mellow sound of the orchestra and also allow for the use of certain rare original wind instruments.

4. The most important contribution to the distinctive sound of Tafelmusik is made by the players and their style of playing. Listeners will immediately notice that there is very little use of vibrato, an effect which was considered an ornamental device to be used for special effects by baroque and classical composers. This is partly because a wide vibrato produces a varying pitch on each note and distorts the pureness of the intervals in each chord. The orchestra's approach to phrasing is detailed and meticulous, taking into account the different playing styles appropriate to each composer and using a wide variety of articulations.

Does Tafelmusik have a conductor?

Tafelmusik is directed by its principal violinist, Jeanne Lamon. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries orchestras were often led from the harpsichord or from the first violin, often by the composer of the music.

Rehearsals are led by Ms Lamon but she welcomes the participation of the players in making decisions about how the music will be performed.

During performances she leads as she plays, and the group works as a chamber ensemble. Most of the players have been in the orchestra for years and have developed a strong sense of playing together as an ensemble.

The Tafelmusik Choir is directed by Ivars Taurins, the principal violist in the orchestra. When large choral works with orchestra such as Handel's Messiah are performed, Mr. Taurins conducts from the podium.

Occasionally Tafelmusik also works with guest conductors for special projects.

What kind of music does Tafelmusik read from?

The orchestra uses three types of music for its performances:

1. A number of works were published in the lifetime of the composer in typeset or engraved editions which are still readable for modern players. Some of these early editions are available in facsimile form and are very useful since the composer's intentions have not been reinterpreted by a modern editor.
2. The orchestra also uses modern editions. Wherever possible they are checked against original scores to make sure that dynamic markings and bowings are accurate.
3. Where no appropriate modern edition is available, score and parts are specially prepared for the orchestra by the group's harpsichordist and librarian, Charlotte Nediger. She often spends hours deciphering illegible manuscripts to produce beautiful editions on her Mac computer, using the Music *Finale* program.

Do the musicians always* play exactly what is on the page?

As well as the tradition of improvisation already discussed with regard to continuo playing it was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for players of solo parts to decorate the music with improvised ornaments. This is a very fine art for musicians today because it must be done in the style of the composer and with good taste. Some composers, such as Bach and Mozart, wrote in such an ornamental style that additional decoration is almost unnecessary. Many old textbooks of ornamentation still exist and provide useful guides for the modern performer.

The Instruments of the Tafelmusik Orchestra

The Baroque Violin

Many of the differences between the "baroque" violin and its modern counterpart are not immediately noticeable to the eye since the basic exterior construction of the body of the instrument has remained unchanged to this day.

A violin leaving the workshop of Stradivarius, however, would have sounded very different from a Stradivarius as it is used today, since many alterations have been made in the fittings of the instrument to give it enough power to fill modern concert halls. The added strength and penetrating quality of the modern violin sound have been gained at the expense of the mellowness and clarity which greater numbers of overtones give to the baroque violin. This different sound is influenced by these factors:

1. The use of gut strings
2. The baroque bridge was generally lower and stiffer because of a different placement of the holes
3. The modern violin's raised bridge necessitated a corresponding elevation of the fingerboard. Thus the neck was tilted back to provide a steeper angle, increasing the string tension and exerting greater pressure on the bridge and the belly of the instrument
4. To distribute the load and reinforce the violin against this added pressure, a longer and stronger bass bar was added to the inside of the instrument as well as a thicker soundpost.

These changes, as well as the addition of the chin rest, were implemented gradually between about 1760 and 1830.

The Violin Family

The changes to the baroque violin outlined above were also made to the viola, violoncello and double bass.

The size of the baroque viola was much less standardized than that of the violin. In seventeenth century France, for instance, a standard orchestral scoring used one violin part, basso continuo (see above) and three viola parts, each for a different size of viola.

Three instruments in cello range were used in the baroque period. The bass violin or basse de violon had a slightly bigger body than the cello and was tuned a tone lower. It was particularly popular in French orchestras. Seventeenth-century German composers preferred the G-violone, a large member of the fretted, six-stringed viola da gamba family. By the eighteenth century the violoncello, tuned as it is today, had become the most important instrument in this range.

Two types of double-bass instruments were in use in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The double-bass viola da gamba or D-violone which had six strings and frets was particularly popular in early seventeenth-century Italy and in Germany throughout the baroque period.

Double-bass violins were used throughout Europe. They varied a great deal in size and shape and had from three to five strings. Some of these instruments adopted the frets of their viola da gamba cousins.

The Bow

The use of baroque and classical bows affects the sound of the Tafelmusik orchestra almost as much as the instruments themselves.

In the early baroque period bow designs varied from country to country. Short straight bows were favoured in France where dance music dominated the repertoire; longer bows were used for the sonatas and concertos played in Italy.

By the early eighteenth century bows became more standardized. The sticks were often fluted and were appreciably lighter and shorter than those of modern bows. The point of balance was usually nearer to the frog because of the lightness of the head which was tapered to a fine point. Baroque bowing technique exploited this feature of the bow and distinguished between strong down bows and light up bows; it did not try to eliminate the difference between them because it helped to express an essential stylistic feature of the music itself, a subtle hierarchy of stress within the phrase.

Baroque bows had fewer hairs which were under less tension than a modern bow. The old bows thus yielded slightly when brought in contact with the string, providing a natural articulation which Mozart's father, Leopold Mozart, called "a small, even if barely audible softness at the beginning of each stroke".

During the second part of the eighteenth century bow design was gradually modified to incorporate a more squared-off shape at the tip and a longer stick, resulting in an increase in overall weight and a shift in the balance of the bow which made it more suitable for the new musical style of classical chamber music and symphonies.

The Baroque Oboe

The baroque oboe is the common name for the version of the oboe in use from about 1690 until about 1760. Double-reed instruments had been in use for several centuries and this new version probably began life in France around 1670 and then quickly found its way to the rest of Europe.

The baroque oboe uses only two keys, as opposed to the twenty or so found on a modern oboe. It also has a larger and more irregular bore and smaller tone holes than the later instrument. Because of these features the baroque oboe requires a considerably larger reed. These features help to produce a sound which is softer but with more overtones than the modern oboe.

Because of the small number of keys on all baroque woodwind instruments (including the wooden baroque flute), chromatic notes (sharps and flats) must be produced by using cross or "forked" fingerings. This gives these notes a slightly less direct, more "veiled" sound. When baroque composers wrote in advanced keys for wind instruments they had this feature in mind and used the different tone quality of these notes expressively within the composition.

The latter half of the eighteenth century saw further revisions in the acoustical design of the oboe. A somewhat smaller bore, combined with some changes in reed design extended the range of the instrument upwards, and resulted in a more penetrating sound which was more suited to the larger orchestras used by classical composers such as Mozart and Haydn. The oboe in this period had anywhere from two to seven keys and is usually called the "classical" oboe today.

The Baroque Bassoon

Like the baroque oboe, the baroque bassoon has a much larger bore, as well as a more conical shape than its modern counterpart. Its range is a little more than two and a half octaves, from Bb to G. The instrument used most commonly in Tafelmusik is a copy of a Dutch instrument from around 1750, found today in a museum in The Hague. It has five keys, necessitating the use of many forked fingerings, as on the baroque oboe.

The shape of the bore gives the bassoon more flexibility of articulation as well as a softer, less concentrated sound than the modern bassoon. This makes the older instrument much better for blending with the cellos and bass, which is its usual function in the baroque orchestra.

By the time of Haydn and Mozart the role of the bassoon in the orchestra had changed. It frequently was called upon to play solo passages and the design of the instrument changed to give it a more compact, penetrating sound. The classical bassoon most often used by the Tafelmusik bassoonist is an original instrument built around 1790 in Strasbourg. It has seven keys, making some chromatic tones more even in sound and extending the range at the top by a third.

The Recorder

When composers such as Bach and Handel called for the flute in their music it was the recorder that they meant by this name; when they used the transverse flute they always called it the "flauto traverso." The second Brandenburg concerto, which uses solo recorder, calls for "flauto" while the fifth Brandenburg concerto, which uses flute, calls for "flauto traverso".

Renaissance recorders had been played in families of different sizes and sets continued to be made in the seventeenth century. The solo recorder of choice for baroque composers, however, was the alto or treble size and there was a large repertoire of highly virtuosic music written for this instrument.

The baroque recorder was usually made in three pieces; a head, which included the mouthpiece and was mostly cylindrical in bore, a body, which was conical in bore with the widest part at the head end, and a foot which was sharply conical. The baroque period was a golden age for recorder design. Exquisite instruments were fashioned out of wood and ivory by famous families of makers such as the Denners in Nuremberg and the Rottenburghs, in Brussels; their instruments are still used as models for the many reconstructions that are played so often in schools today.

The Transverse Flute

Simple wooden flutes had been used in Europe for several centuries. The one-keyed baroque flute as it was used in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was developed in France for use in the court orchestra of Louis XIV. It made its first appearance in 1681 in an opera by Lully.

Like the baroque recorder, the instrument was made in three separate sections: the head with its embouchure across which the player blew, the body with six finger holes, and the foot joint with a single key. The instrument was conical in bore, widest at the head and tapering towards the foot with a short expansion of the bore from the key-hole to the end. The instruments were made of wood or ivory.

Like the baroque oboe, chromatic notes were obtained by cross fingerings or by covering holes half way. Thus they had a special colour which was used by baroque composers when they wrote in complicated keys.

Variations in the pitch of a note could be made by rolling the instrument slightly toward or away from the lips. Vibrato was only added as an ornament to the clear, warm sound produced by the instrument.

When flutes began to be used in the larger orchestras of the classical period the bore was slightly changed and the embouchure was made larger in order to increase the volume. Several metal keys were added in order to increase the range and to facilitate the playing of chromatic notes.

Brass Instruments

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries natural trumpets and horns were called upon to perform many musical functions, from civic and military fanfares to the most virtuosic parts composed by Bach in works such as the Brandenburg concertos and the B- Mass.

The instruments had tubing which was twice as long as on modern ones. The trumpet had mostly cylindrical tubing; that of the horn was mostly conical. There were no valves and the music was played by producing the notes of the harmonic series with the mouth; thus the instruments were not fully chromatic although the eighteenth-century horn used crooks, additional lengths of tubing which could change the instrument's basic pitch.

The mouthpiece generally had a bowl-shaped cup, leading at a sharp angle to the throat. The rim size was usually larger than on a modern mouthpiece.

The natural trumpet was often used as a solo instrument in seventeenth-century Germany and late seventeenth-century Italy. It was also a favourite of Purcell, Handel and Bach. Natural horns were used by Bach in forty-five of his church cantatas.

By the time of Haydn and Mozart natural horns and trumpets had become standard members of the orchestra.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries trombone ensembles were often used to accompany the music sung in German and Austrian churches. They also were on occasion identified with the infernal; both Monteverdi's opera Orfeo and Mozart's Don Giovanni use them in this context.

The Timpani

Timpani were traditionally very closely associated with brass instruments because of their history as military and civic drums. Indeed they were often regarded as bass trumpets and many eighteenth-century timpani contained metal funnels in the shape of trumpet bells, fixed with the small end around the air hole at the base of the drum and projecting up into the kettle.

The timpani used in baroque and classical orchestras were quite small and shallow and they usually rested on trestles. Copper was the favoured material for the kettles and the heads were made of calf hide. The sticks were usually constructed of wood or ivory and were used with a very clear attack. The timpanist commonly used a wide variety of articulations, often imitating the tonguing techniques of trumpeters.

The Harpsichord

The harpsichord is a keyboard instrument with thin metal strings plucked by small pieces of quill. Musically and socially it was the forerunner of the piano; it was the instrument that belonged to any well-to-do household. Children were often given harpsichord lessons and it was one of the few instruments that women in the baroque period were encouraged to play since it used a lady-like posture and did not require too much exertion!

Obvious gradations of loudness and softness are not possible on individual notes of the harpsichord; unlike the piano it produces much the same volume whether the key is pressed lightly or strongly. As the instrument developed this was addressed by adding extra sets of strings for each pitch. These were activated by levers on the front of the instrument, which allowed the player to perform one section of a piece loudly by using several sets of strings at once, or softly by using only one set. Bigger instruments have two keyboards. Different sets of strings are activated by each keyboard, allowing for very quick changes from loud to soft.

Smaller harpsichords with a rectangular or hexagonal shape were often described as "virginals" or "spinets". Spinets became the equivalent of the modern upright piano in that they were smaller and less expensive than full-sized harpsichords.

The harpsichord usually has a range of 55 keys. It does not take as long to tune as does a piano but it must be tuned before every rehearsal and concert, usually by the player.

Baroque Singing

In the baroque period, vocal and instrumental music were more closely related to each other than in later times, one often imitating the other. Many vocal lines in the music of Bach, for instance, can scarcely be distinguished in style from the accompanying instrumental lines. Some of the aspects of performance practice which are shared by singers and instrumentalists include:

1. Clarity, purity and transparency of sound
2. A relaxed tone production
3. Use of vibrato as an ornament rather than an integrated part of sound production
4. Pure, harmonic intonation based on unequally tempered systems
5. Detailed articulation and carefully nuanced stress within phrases,

Decisions about articulation and stress are guided by the text; consonances and the stress of syllables are of particular importance. Most important of all, however, is a clear and dramatic presentation of the meaning of the text and an expressive communication of the emotions which were the chief preoccupation of baroque composers.