The brass quintet is made up of five brass instruments—two trumpets, horn, trombone and tuba.

A brass instrument is a wind instrument made out of metal (not always brass) with either a cup or funnel shaped mouthpiece. A vibration is produced by the player’s lips. This sets the column of air in motion.

The pitch (high or low) is determined by the length of the tube. Different notes are produced by opening or closing valves or moving the slide. This changes the length of the tube. The tension of the players lips and the air flow are also involved in producing different pitches on a brass instrument.

The members of the Southwest Florida Symphony’s Brass Quintet are all professional musicians who earn their living by playing and teaching music. They have all had many years of musical study, including the study of music in college. In addition to performing together as a brass quintet they all perform as members of the full Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra. You may ask them about the differences between performing as a quintet and their roles when they are one of 80 or more musicians in the full orchestra. The performers also play in other orchestras throughout the state, requiring them to travel quite a bit. Some of them also teach students to play brass instruments.

The Southwest Florida Symphony was founded in 1961. Concerts are given at Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall, as well as at locations in Cape Coral and Sanibel Island. The Symphony family also includes a Youth Orchestra, and a volunteer organization called the Symphony Society. For a one-time $15 membership fee, students can join the Campus Chord Club and then purchase concert tickets for $5 for themselves and their families. Call (239) 418-0996 for information.

The Program—Brass Music Through the Centuries

Excerpt—William Tell Overture by Rossini
Die Bankelsangerlieder by anonymous
Chorale by Praetorius
Canzona per sonare No. 2 by Gabrieli

Semper Fidelis by Sousa
The Entertainer by Joplin
That’s a Plenty by Pollack
Farewell Song
Brass Music Through the Centuries

The First Horns

Brass type instruments originally appeared as crude animal horns cut off at the small end. The first historic record of one comes from the Eastern Civilization—the Hebrew instrument called the *schofar*. This was made from a ram’s horn. The *schofar* is still used today in various Jewish festivals.

The Greeks and Romans had both straight and curved horns. They were also found in Ireland and Denmark. Ancient German armies used cow horns to signal mealtimes and to announce the start of sporting events. Throughout Asia as well as in North and South America conch-shell trumpets were used to announce ceremonies or to call the people to processions as long as 2,000 years ago.

Giovanni Gabrieli (around 1555-1612) was an Italian composer and organist. Not much is known about his early life but he probably studied with his uncle, the composer Andrea Gabrieli.

In 1584, Giovanni became an organist at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice. The following year he was appointed principal composer. He became one of the most noted composers in Europe. He composed mostly sacred vocal and instrumental music, much of it written specifically for that space. He often used a choir or instrument group on one side of the church, with a response group on the other side, and often a third group on a stage near the main altar in the center. He was one of the first composers to specify what instruments to use and volume markings.

Renaissance Brass

In the early fifteenth century, trumpets and other brass instruments resembling modern-day instruments were often used to herald royalty or for military purposes. These were *natural* trumpets, without valves, which limited the possible pitches to those that could be produced by the player’s lips and air flow. By 1450, the *sackbut*, a forerunner of the trombone was also in use. Curved horns were often used for signals in hunting.

In 1597, Italian composer Giovanni Gabrieli, then the organist at Saint Mark’s Cathedral in Venice, composed the earliest known piece to call for specific brass instruments, *Sonate pian’forte*.

Brass Instruments in the Baroque

In the late 1600’s improvements were made by German instrument makers to the brass instruments. A larger bell with more flare was added to give a brighter sound. Crooks, a detachable piece of metal tubing, were used to change the length of the pipes and to produce more notes.

Royal courts had court trumpeters who went through training, then took a test to join a guild. Only guild members were allowed to do certain types of work like feasts or processions. Trumpeters specialized in the low register (*principal players*) or the high register (*clarion*) where the notes were closer together and they could play melodies.
Valves

Around 1814 valves were added to horns, and around 1826, to trumpets. The valves are operated by the players fingers, directing the air through additional lengths of tubing. Valves may be piston valves or rotary valves. Piston valve are common on the trumpet while rotary valves are usually found on the horn and tuba. The valves, used individually or in combination, allow the brass player to play all of the notes within the range of the instrument. Valve instruments were quickly accepted and by 1900 were used almost exclusively except by performers specializing in early music.

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) was an Italian composer. He wrote 39 operas as well as sacred music, songs and piano music. He was born into a family of musicians. His father was a horn player and his mother a singer. By age ten he could play piano and sing solos in church. His first known compositions date from 1804, when he was 12. He wrote his first opera at age 13 or 14. He also learned to play cello and horn. The opera William Tell was his last opera. It is about a 13th century Swiss patriot who rallied his country against the Austrians. While the opera is rarely performed, the overture is one of the most famous and frequently performed works in the classical repertoire.

John Philip Sousa (1854-1932) was a composer and conductor known for American military and patriotic marches. His nickname is “The March King.” He wrote 136 marches between 1917 and his death in 1932. His most famous marches are “The Washington Post,” “Semper Fidelis” (Official March of the United States Marine Corps) and “The Stars and Stripes Forever.”

Sousa was born in Washington, D.C. He started his study of music by playing the violin. At age 13, his father, a trombonist, enlisted him as an apprentice in the Marine Corps to keep him from joining a circus band. There he learned to play all the wind instruments. From 1880-1892 he was the head of the U.S. Marine Band. When he left the military he organized his own band, the Sousa band and toured the U.S. and Europe until 1931, giving 15,623 concerts.

Michael Praetorius (1571-1621) was a German composer, organist and writer about music. He studies divinity and philosophy at the University of Frankfurt. After studying music he served as a church organist in Frankfurt, then as a court musician in Wolfenbuttel. His first compositions date from around 1602. From about 1613 until his death he worked at the court in Dresden.

Praetorius knew about the latest Italian music including the works of composers such as Giovanni Gabrieli. His best-known work is Terpsichore which contains over 300 pieces of dance music.

Praetorius was well-known in his day as a writer about music and especially important for his encyclopedia about instruments and performance practices of his time.

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Modern Brass Instruments

Today brass instruments are often made of brass and sometimes use gold or silver plating to prevent corrosion. Brass instruments are one of the major instrument families. A symphony orchestra typically uses:

- 2-5 trumpets
- 2-8 horns
- 2 tenor trombones and 1 bass trombone
- 1 tuba

Brass instruments are also used in jazz bands, concert bands, marching bands, British brass bands, brass quintets and as solo instruments. Other brass instruments include the euphonium and flugelhorn.

**Scott Joplin** (1867-1917) was born in eastern Texas and studied music and piano with local teachers. In 1893, he traveled to Chicago for the World’s Fair where he helped to make ragtime music a popular craze. Joplin later moved to St. Louis where he wrote *The Maple Leaf Rag* in 1899 and the piece became a huge hit. It sold 75,000 copies in about six months.

In 1907, Joplin moved to New York City, living there until his death in 1917. In addition to numerous ragtime pieces he wrote an opera, *Treemonisha*. Pay attention to the rhythm in *The Entertainer*.

An important characteristic of Ragtime music is the use of **syncopation**. Syncopation is an unexpected disturbance in the regular flow of the rhythm. The accents, or strong beats, occur where they normally wouldn’t go. For example, we would expect a pattern of four to have the strong beat on beats 1 and 3 (1,2,3,4 / 1,2,3, 4). Syncopation would occur if we placed the strong beat on beats 2 and 4 (1,2,3,4 / 1,2,3,4). Do you hear the syncopation as the quintet plays *The Entertainer*?

**Terms**

- **Bankelsanger**—a man who came to town and announced the news by singing
- **Bugle**—a form of the trumpet without valves, often used by the military
- **Dynamics**—markings that tell the musicians how loud or soft to play
- **Ensemble**—two or more musicians performing together
- **Ornaments**—are flourishes that are not necessary for the melody but that are used to decorate the melody
- **Quintet**—an ensemble of five musicians
- **Ragtime**—type of music that reached its peak popularity from 1897 to 1918. It is a modification of the march with the characteristic syncopated rhythm.
- **Syncopation**—rhythmic device where the strong beat occurs where it normally wouldn’t go
- **Valves**—piston or rotary, mechanical devices that allow brass players to change the length of the tubing by using their fingers