



*Joseph Haydn playing quartets, Anonymous, from the StaatsMuseum, Vienna*

# Countdown to Chamber Music

3/27/2017

## Lesson Outline

Title	Countdown to Chamber Music
Time Frame	35-40 minutes
Standards	M.AP.1, M.HP.3, M.HP.5, M.CA.3
Objective(s)	Students will learn about the makeup of chamber ensembles and listen to different types of chamber ensembles.

### Cross-Curricular Connections

**Math:** Counting and Cardinality

**ELA:** Word relations, Latin roots

**Modern Languages:** Connection to French & Spanish

### Musical Selections

Jacques Ibert – *Three Short Pieces*

Giovanni Gabrieli – *Canzona Per Sonare No. 1*

Ludwig van Beethoven – *String Trio in Eb, op. 3*

Steve Reich – *Nagoya Marimbas*

Helen Gillet – *La Fete*

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## Lesson Content

### Lesson/Connections

#### Preparatory Exercise

We know how to count to five: One, Two, Three, Four, Five.

What are some other ways of talking about different numbers of things? For example, fill in the blank:

**First, Second, \_\_\_\_\_, Fourth, Fifth**

It's "Third"! When we are talking about what order something comes in, we use these words.

We have different ways of referring to groups of different numbers.

**What do you call things that come in "twos"?**

(hint: think about a \_\_\_ of shoes)

The answer is "pair".

#### Guided Instruction

We have more of these words in music to describe small groups of musicians based on how many musicians. The general term for these are **chamber ensembles** (pronounced ON-sahm-bull).



Here are the standard terms we use:

1 = solo; 2 = duet; 3 = trio; 4 = quartet; 5 = quintet  
6 = sextet; 7 = septet; 8 = octet; 9 = nonet; 10 = decet

If you spoke French or Spanish, these might look close to their translations!

**French:**

"alone" = seul; 2 = deux; 3 = trois; 4 = quatre; 5 = cinq  
6 = six; 7 = sept; 8 = huit; 9 = neuf; 10 = dix

**Spanish:**

"alone" = solo; 2 = dos; 3 = tres; 4 = cuatro; 5 = cinco  
6 = seis; 7 = siete; 8 = ocho; 9 = nueve; 10 = diez

Let's learn about some of these ensembles by listening and counting down!

### Listening and Discussion



#### **Five – Quintet**

Listening link: <https://youtu.be/PmFh5E6BC1g>

Jacques Ibert – Three Short Pieces  
(Trois Pièces Brèves), I. Allegro

A **woodwind quintet** consists of five instruments: one flute, one oboe, one clarinet, one bassoon, and one French horn. The French horn is not technically a woodwind, but it often plays very closely with woodwinds in music.

Watch this recording. Though woodwind quintets are more often seated while they play, this ensemble stands in a shallow curve. This allows them to see each other and play together.



**Did you notice how much they move?** There is a lot of freedom in playing in a chamber ensemble because there are fewer musicians involved than in an orchestra.

**Where was their sheet music?** It's common for ensembles like this to memorize their music so that they can watch each other to react to each other's music.



#### **Four – Quartet**

Listening link: <https://youtu.be/lql6AydiJ4k>

Giovanni Gabrieli Canzona Per Sonare No. 1

Though brass ensembles are usually **quintets** containing two trumpets, one French horn, one trombone, and one tuba, you can also find them as **brass quartets**, especially in music from the Renaissance era like music by Giovanni Gabrieli. In this clip, you will see two trumpets, a trombone, and a **euphonium** (also referred to as a **baritone**).



**What is different from the woodwind quintet?** This ensemble is seated. They also have music stands. They do still move their bodies, but less than the woodwind quintet. What else did you see?

**Where is the conductor?** Very few chamber ensembles use conductors until there several instruments. The first trumpet player simply breathes and plays, and the others follow suit.



### **Three – Trio**

Listening link:

<https://youtu.be/1t4dbvwOhlc>

Beethoven String Trio in Eb, op. 3 Allegro con Brio

The most common string ensemble is a **string quartet**, consisting of two violins, one viola, and one cello. However, there are also many pieces written for **string trio**, which is most often one violin, one cello, and either one viola or violin. This trio is for violin, viola, and cello.



**Do you hear something right before the music starts?** String players don't use air to produce the sound on their instruments, but you can often hear the musicians drawing a breath before they play. This helps them to play together, much the same way a conductor's hands come up before a piece starts.

**Can you tell the feeling of the music from the faces and bodies?** Music often has an emotional feeling. Performing in a group like this can feel like acting on a stage! Think about how a musician playing a string instrument can communicate emotion while they play.



### **Two – Duet**

Listening link:

<https://youtu.be/Y53Ocb2-uMk>

Steve Reich – Nagoya Marimbas (1994)

We're really counting down now!



With just two musicians, we have a **duet**. Duets are often composed of two people playing the same instrument, although you can also combine different ones. We haven't yet heard from the percussion family, so let's take a look at this performance from the Meehan-Perkins Duo (**duo** is another way of saying "duet").

**How are their instruments positioned?** Marimbas are very large instruments! The bars are also much larger on the left side of the instrument than the right. In order for the musicians to see each other, their instruments are positioned so that they can respond to each other.

**Where are they looking?** Marimba requires careful hand-eye coordination, so these two percussionists are always looking down at their instrument for accuracy. However, they can see each other out of the corner of their eyes to play together. (This is called **peripheral vision**). How much work would it take to do this?



### **One – Solo(?)**

Listening link: <https://youtu.be/AQqjO7f6oh0>

Helen Gillet – "La Fete"

Hold the presses! How can one person be considered an "ensemble"? Many musicians now use technology to play a duet (or trio, or quartet, etc.) with themselves! A **looping pedal** uses a microphone to record a short **loop** of music and play it over and over again. Let's watch New Orleans-based cellist Helen Gillet.

**Watch her foot!** You can see her stomp the pedalboard when she sets a new loop. She can record many pieces of music on top of each other.

**Can you count the different parts?** I don't know if I can! Every few seconds she adds another part, including drumming on her cello, plucking notes (**pizzicato**), and playing harmonics.

## **Enrichment**

### **Option 1**

Look up some other "ensembles" of one. Some recommendations include trombonist Christopher Bill (<https://youtu.be/ZxODzxY6AvI>) and vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Jacob Collier (<https://youtu.be/pvKUttYs5ow>)

### **Option 2**

You can also have larger ensembles! Check out some different-sized ensembles. Many of these start with a standard ensemble and add instruments. For example:

Rhythm and Brass = Brass Quintet + percussionist: <https://youtu.be/W5fQ-BbnVc0>

Some are even made up of a single family of instruments. Here is a large clarinet choir made up of several different "sizes" of clarinets (they are joined on this piece by a string bass): <https://youtu.be/lnzPVygN7ME>