

All About the Recorder

The **recorder** is a woodwind musical instrument in the group known as *internal duct flutes*—flutes with a whistle mouthpiece. Recorders are made in different sizes with names and compasses roughly corresponding to different vocal ranges. The size most commonly in use today is the soprano recorder. Groups of recorders played together are referred to as "consorts." Recorders have historically been constructed from hardwoods and ivory, sometimes with metal keys. Since the modern revival of the recorder, plastics have been used in the mass manufacture of recorders. The sound of the recorder is often described as clear and sweet, and has historically been associated with birds and shepherds.

In normal playing position, the recorder is held with both hands, covering the finger holes or depressing the keys with the pads of the fingers: four fingers on the lower hand, and the index, middle and ring fingers and thumb on the upper hand. In standard modern practice, the right hand is the lower hand, while the left hand is the upper hand. The technique of inhalation and exhalation for the recorder differs from that of many other wind instruments in that the recorder requires very little air pressure to produce a sound, unlike reed or brasswind instruments. The pitch and volume of the recorder sound are influenced by the speed of the air travelling through the windway, generally speaking, faster air in the windway produces a higher pitch.

The recorder is first documented in Europe in the Middle Ages, and continued to enjoy wide popularity in the renaissance and baroque periods. From the 15th century onwards, paintings show upper-class men and women playing recorder. King Henry VIII of England was an avid player of the recorder, and at his death in 1547 an inventory of his possessions included 76 recorders in consorts of various sizes and materials. Composers who have written for the recorder include Monteverdi, Lully, Purcell, Handel, Vivaldi, Telemann, Johann Sebastian Bach, Paul Hindemith, Benjamin Britten, Leonard Bernstein, Luciano Berio, and Arvo Pärt. Today, there are many professional recorder players who demonstrate the instrument's full solo range.