Brass Family

A brass instrument is a musical instrument that you play by blowing through a mouthpiece to change the pitch or note.

Brass players use their breath to produce sound. Instead of blowing into a reed they vibrate their lips by buzzing them against a metal cup-shaped mouthpiece. The mouthpiece helps to amplify the buzzing, which creates the sound. Watch this video to demonstrate this:

Most brass instruments have valves attached to their long pipes; the valves look like buttons. Pressing on the valves makes them open and close different parts of the pipe.

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Trumpet



A trumpet is a brass instrument used mainly in Classical music and jazz music. Early trumpets did not have any valves. Watch this video:

The most common type of trumpet is a B♭ trumpet, meaning that if the player plays a C, it will sound like a B♭ in concert pitch. Watch part of Haydn's trumpet concerto



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Trumpets are used often in fanfares:

and also in jazz:

The sound on a brass instrument can be altered by placing a 'mute' in the bell of the instrument. There are different types of mute, all creating different sound effects.

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French horn

The very first horns were made from animal horns. By cutting off the tip of the horn and buzzing their lips, players could sound notes to give directions to hunters. By the 1400s, horns were being made of metal tubing wound in a circle. These horns were small instruments, sometimes with just one loop and no valves. Hunting calls - a couple of notes played to a rhythm - were played by hunters while on horseback



The french horn is made of many pieces of brass tubing, which are soldered together. Rotary valves and valve tubing are placed in the middle of the outer circle of tubing. If you were to unwind a French horn, the brass tubing could be up to twelve feet long.



To make a sound on the french horn, the player buzzes his/her lips into a cone-shaped mouthpiece. If you were to watch a french hornist play, you would see that they keep the right hand in the bell all the time. This helps the instrument with tuning and tone production, giving it a haunting and distant sound. The french horn player can also place the hand tightly inside the bell for a special effect called "stopped horn." This effect gives the french horn a muffled and tinny, yet highly penetrating tone.

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Watch part of Mozart's Horn Concerto.

Now watch a horn section playing the music of Jurassic Park.

How would you describe the music? Note down any features of the music that you notice – *e.g. tempo, beats in the bar, other instruments etc.*
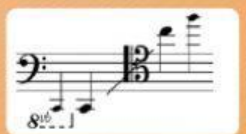
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Trombone



The trombone is the odd one out in the brass family because it uses a slide instead of valves. The player pushes and pulls on its slide to change the length of the tube.

Together with vibrations from the player's lips, the trombone can play a wide range of notes. Its music is normally written in the bass clef, but some high parts can be written in tenor clef. The trombone is the loudest instrument in the symphony orchestra.



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The forerunner to today's trombone was called the sackbut. It was first used in the 16th century during the Renaissance era of music.

Now watch the trombone playing a famous solo called 'The Acrobat' – watch from 1 min 35. This piece uses a 'glissando' or 'sliding' technique, made possible by the trombone's slide:

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Tuba



The Tuba is the largest and lowest sounding member of the brass family. Its sound is very round and mellow. The tuba, along with the string basses and bassoons, provide the lowest sounds for the orchestra. The tuba is the youngest of all the brass instruments. It was invented in the middle of the nineteenth century, replacing the ophicleide. In the 1800s it joined the military band. About 100 years later the tuba was included as a regular member of the symphony orchestra.

The brass tubing for the tuba begins at the mouthpiece, and bends and folds until it finally flairs, forming a large bell. If you were to stretch the metal tubing out it would be eighteen feet long.

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