

Percussion

Music

Pitched and unpitched percussion, and what each is used for.

Pitched — plays notes

- Timpani — tuned by pedal, the orchestral anchor
- Xylophone — bright, wooden, short
- Marimba — lower, warmer, longer bars
- Vibraphone — metal, with a sustain pedal
- Glockenspiel — small metal bars, very bright
- Tubular bells — struck at the top edge

Unpitched — colour and rhythm

- Snare drum — rolls, marches, accents
- Bass drum — weight and thunder
- Cymbals — crash, suspended, hi-hat
- Triangle — cuts through anything
- Tambourine, woodblock, castanets
- Gong / tam-tam — the biggest crescendo available

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

The percussion section is the only one where a single player routinely covers a dozen instruments in one piece.

Timpani are notated on a bass staff with real pitches. Most unpitched percussion uses a single-line staff.