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Hi everyone, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast where we explore the stories behind classical music, one composer at a time. I'm your host, Carly Seifert, creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so glad you're here today.

Over the past three episodes, we've been spending time with one of the most famous composers of the Baroque period — Antonio Vivaldi. We learned about his life in Venice, we listened closely to *The Four Seasons*, and most recently, we explored what happens when two violins have a musical conversation in his *Concerto for Two Violins in A Minor*. If you haven't heard those episodes yet, I'll link to all three in the show notes so you can go back and listen.

But today, I want to zoom out a little. Because after all that time with the violin, you might be wondering about the violin. Today we're going to learn more about it, and meet all of its relatives as well.

The instrument family we're talking about today is called the string family — and it's one of the four main instrument families in a classical orchestra. (The other three are brass, woodwind, and percussion — and we'll get to those in future episodes.)

The string family has four members: the violin, the viola, the cello, and the double bass.

Now, even though these four instruments look a lot alike — they all have the same basic shape, they're all made of wood, and they're all played with a bow — they each have their own unique size, range, and personality. Today we're going to meet each one, and I want you to listen carefully as we go, because you might be surprised by how different they sound from each other.

Let's start with the one you already know best: the violin

The **violin** is the smallest member of the string family, and because it's small, it can play higher notes than the other string instruments. You've been hearing a lot of violin over the past few episodes — it was

Vivaldi's favorite instrument to write for, and it's easy to understand why. The violin can sing, it can dance, it can race through fast passages, and it can whisper the most delicate melodies. In the orchestra, violins usually sit at the front, and there are more of them than any other string instrument.

Next is the viola.

Now, the viola looks almost identical to the violin — in fact, if you saw one sitting on a table, you might not even notice the difference right away. But the viola is slightly larger, and that extra size gives it a warmer, darker, and richer sound than the violin.

Think of it this way: if the violin is a bright, sunny morning, the viola is a quiet, golden afternoon.

The viola often plays the middle notes in a piece of music — not the highest, not the lowest, but somewhere in between. Because of this, it sometimes gets called the "middle child" of the string family. It doesn't always get the spotlight the way the violin does, but without the viola, the whole orchestra would sound thinner and less full.

You may remember the cello from Episode 30, when we listened to Bach's Cello Suites together. The cello is significantly larger than the violin and viola — so large, in fact, that you can't tuck it under your chin the way a violinist does. Instead, the cellist sits down and rests the cello between their knees, with a small metal peg at the bottom holding it up off the floor.

Because of its size, the cello plays much **lower, deeper notes** than the violin or viola. Its sound is often described as warm and rich — almost like a human voice. Some people say the cello is the instrument that sounds most like singing.

And finally, the **double bass** — the biggest member of the string family.

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The double bass is so tall that players usually either stand up to play it or sit on a very high stool. And its sound is deep and low in a way that you don't just hear — you almost feel it.

In the orchestra, the double bass usually plays along with the cello to give the music its deepest, most grounded sound. It's the foundation that the whole string section builds on top of.

Now I want to try something fun. I'm going to play a short clip of each instrument one more time, one right after the other in this order: violin, viola, cello and bass. I want you to listen for the differences.

Could you hear the differences? The bright, singing sound of the violin... the warm, slightly darker tone of the viola... the deep, rich voice of the cello... and the low, grounding rumble of the double bass. Together, these four instruments make up the heart of the classical orchestra — and after all the time we've spent listening to Vivaldi's music, I hope you're starting to hear them in a new way.

If you'd like a fun activity to go along with today's episode, I've created a String Family Spotter sheet that you can download from the show notes. As you listen to music over the next few weeks — whether it's from this podcast or something else — you can use it to check off which string instruments you hear. It's a great way to keep those listening ears active.

You can find it in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/176, along with a link to a playlist of all the music from today's episode as well, which is perfect for using with your String Family Spotter sheet! Again that's at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/176.

Thank you so much for listening today. I hope meeting the string family gave you a new way to listen to the music you've been hearing all along — and I hope the next time you hear a piece with strings, you find yourself wondering, "Is that a violin? Or is that a viola?"

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Because that kind of curiosity is exactly what this podcast is all about.

I'll see you in the next episode, and until then — I'm cheering you on as you listen, learn and create music.

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