

Topic Page: [recorder](#)

Definition: **recorder** from *Musical Terms, Symbols and Theory: An Illustrated Dictionary*

an instrument in the wind family, popular from the 16th to 18th centuries and, in limited applications, again in modern music. It is constructed of wood or plastic, and has a series of air holes. Four sizes and ranges are the soprano (descant), alto (treble), tenor, and bass. See also *fipple*; *flute*; *wind family*.



Image from: [The woodwind family of musical instruments is an... in Philip's Encyclopedia](#)

Summary Article: **recorder**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

musical wind instrument of the flute family, made of wood, varying in length, and having an inverted conical bore (largest end near the mouthpiece). Its tone is produced by an air stream against an edge, like that of the flute, but the air is conducted by a mouthpiece through a channel to the edge; intonation is somewhat less flexible on the vertical recorder than on the transverse flute.

The recorder has a soft, sweet timbre which makes it an ideal chamber instrument. It was known in Europe as early as the 10th cent., and at first was the principal flute instrument. By the 16th cent. it was made in a variety of

sizes, and in the 17th and early 18th cent. it was a very important solo, chamber, and orchestral instrument. Until c.1750, the term *flute* referred to the recorder; the transverse flute was always distinguished by a qualifying adjective. After that time the recorder was too weak for the continually growing orchestra, and it fell into disuse until the revival of interest in older music and instruments in the early 20th cent. Since it lacks keys and a complicated embouchure, the recorder is one of the few instruments of artistic importance easily played by an amateur, a fact that has contributed to its growing popularity. It has a huge literature of solo and ensemble music from the 16th to 18th cent., to which many 20th-century composers have added. Related to the recorder is the flageolet, which differs mainly in that it has fewer holes, usually six, two of which are closed by the thumbs. It was known as early as the 16th cent. and has seldom figured in serious music.

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