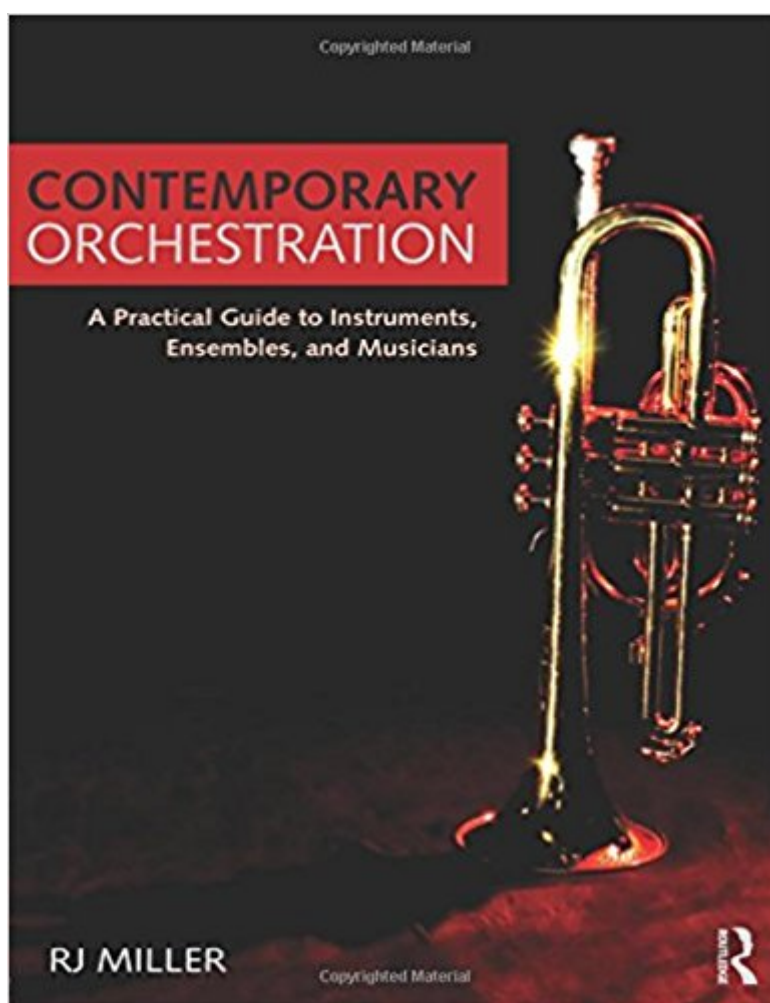




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# Contemporary Orchestration: A Practical Guide To Instruments, Ensembles, And Musicians



## Synopsis

Contemporary Orchestration: A Practical Guide to Instruments, Ensembles, and Musicians teaches students how to orchestrate for a wide variety of instruments, ensembles, and genres, while preparing them for various real-world professional settings ranging from the concert hall to the recording studio. Unlike most orchestration texts, it includes coverage of contemporary instruments and ensembles alongside traditional orchestra and chamber ensembles. Features Practical considerations: Practical suggestions for choosing a work to orchestrate, and what to avoid when writing for each instrument. Pedagogical features In the Profession: Professional courtesies, considerations and expectations. Building the Score: Step-by-step construction of an orchestration. Scoring Examples: Multiple scoring examples for each instrument. Exercises: Analyzing, problem solving, and creating orchestration solutions. Critical Thinking: Alternate approaches and solutions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

RJ Miller has composed, orchestrated, arranged, conducted, and/or produced recordings with the London Philharmonic and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, and for such films as the digital re-release of the original The Last of the Mohicans and The Lost World. His credits appear on over 300 CDs, videos, film and television productions. His courses at the Metropolitan State University of Denver include Arranging and Orchestration, Arranging for Music Educators, and Scoring for Film and Television.

I received a free item to review. Miller has a refreshing perspective that can be summed up as "player-friendly"™. He comes across as a seasoned professional who's played enough of other peoples'™ orchestrations (and spent considerable time reworking them) to know that getting the best from players requires writing parts that respect their abilities and allow them to feel their voices and expression are valued. "Contemporary Orchestration"™ includes much about instrumental ranges and characteristic playing techniques as I'd expect from any good orchestration book. But I found the explanations of transposition and the isolated, straightforward staff examples of scored techniques and articulations so much more effective than "sliced"™ excerpts of full scores where the reader often has to dissect individual parts "and often under extreme magnification (!). While Miller includes some surprisingly broad entries in his extensive recommended listening, it's clear from the notated exercises and examples that "Contemporary Orchestration"™ is not primarily a jazz arranging book. Readers looking for specialized structural, performance, and improvisational aspects of writing for large jazz ensembles will likely be disappointed. Miller's own background and focus is orchestral film/television/musical theater-oriented. In addition to standard orchestral instruments he discusses guitar (both classical and jazz/contemporary contexts) and other instruments (as well as voices) commonly used in commercial film/TV scoring. If you've studied orchestration at any level, you know the drill: Strings, Brass, Woodwinds, and Percussion. But there are some surprises: Speaking of percussion, I found it unusual to see so much material on drum rudiments and even drum set parts that will look familiar to rock and jazz players. The chapter on scoring for voices "while admittedly not as deep as the other groups - was still welcome" many books defer choral writing to specialized texts. As a player, I found the guitar chapter provides a nice balance between classical single line ensemble scoring (popular in educational environments), solo classical, and jazz/contemporary voicings (complete with chord diagrams, although I doubt very much they're common in professional settings). Chapter 3, "Practical Problem Solving"™ really sets the book apart from other texts. Rather than simply handing the student the same musical example transcribed for various instrumental groups with minimal discussion of just how it got there (as one well-known orchestration text has done for years through numerous editions), Miller guides the reader through a detailed decision-making, measure-by-measure process of orchestrating an eight measure excerpt of a Tchaikovsky piano piece (Op. 40, No. 2) for string quartet. The author performs a harmonic analysis and reconciles that with both acoustical and practical scoring considerations, translating pedaling technique to durations for strings, "revoicing"™ chords, and thinning doublings before settling on a final

scoring. I found these "over the shoulder" guided tutorials very informative. There's a tremendous amount to be learned by studying these clearly-presented, easy-on-the-eyes examples, entering them into scoring programs, or best of all performing them yourself with others. This process is repeated throughout the book for each instrumental group and later for a number of full ensembles. Miller takes a different piano excerpt and scores it for the group in question "all the while addressing noteworthy technical points. At the close of each chapter, rather than simply listing repertoire examples to study, Miller provides excerpts of varying lengths in either their original scoring (relevant to the chapter), as well as his own orchestrations. The music for the most part is classical repertoire from the eighteenth through early twentieth centuries. After having laid out individual instruments and groups Miller logically broadens the discussion to full tutti orchestra, wind ensemble/concert band and musical theater (pit) orchestra. Towards the end a chapter on practical instrument substitutions was very interesting and something not often found in the sometimes rarified pages of texts that assume unlimited access to unlimited players. Miller's "In the Profession" asides throughout the book and the concluding "Parting Thoughts" chapter ring true and are filled with fascinating details on professional practice, musical protocol and the realities of working in the recording studio and theater. Combined with Miller's extensive career bio of some four decades it lends unmistakable credibility to the proceedings and serves to underline the "Practical" in the book's title. If I had to criticize the book I would say upfront that the lack of audio examples "even MIDI mockups" is a missed opportunity. Beginning students in particular will likely expect such illustrations; they're included in many arranging and orchestration texts these days. The counter argument (and it's a good one) is that anyone serious about learning orchestration should, at a minimum, be willing to load up notation software along with their favorite orchestral sample library and become fluent keying in score examples (or scanning and tweaking them as some programs allow), along with creating original works, transcriptions, and arrangements. (Of course there's still nothing wrong with pencil and score pad and relying on your ears, perhaps supplemented by a keyboard.) Another criticism is that Miller's emphasis on the practical occasionally runs the risk of sidestepping the artistic. Thinning out doublings (or "triplings") in a voicing by performing a harmonic analysis and identifying "superfluous" notes based on common practice harmony - without comprehending, if not embracing, the composer's artistic intent for those "superfluous" notes - risks substituting a mechanical or clichéd editorial decision for an artistic one. I understand that in a pinch, commercial arrangers and orchestrators must know how

to do such things but, however quaint it may sound, I still believe it's important to respect the composer as well as the players. Finally, the emphasis on relatively short excerpts (many up to 16 measures) may be fine and efficient for classroom study but it can overlook important elements of organizing larger pieces such as large-scale contrasts and transitions. Unfortunately, as of this writing (7/14/15) the book's website remains inaccessible so I can't comment on the supplemental video resources and information on instruments and ensembles said to reside there.

Outstanding! The most comprehensive book on orchestration I have ever seen. The material and info is very well organized and presented with great clarity. An invaluable resource for anyone studying orchestration, working on orchestration projects, refreshing their knowledge base, or working with ensembles.

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