

## NAMING SIZES OF RECORDER

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A great deal of confusion arises in the naming of recorders by pitch ... There are several sources of this confusion resulting in a plethora of terms which are particularly confusing for the higher and lower members of the recorder family.

Size naming terms have been derived from their relationship to

- the alto recorder – e.g. third flute, fourth flute, fifth flute ...
- the bass recorder – e.g. bass, sub-bass, contrabass, double bass ...
- tessitura, specifically to the vocal parts played – e.g. soprano, alto, tenor, bass, descant, treble ...
- their fundamental – e.g. soprano in C<sub>5</sub> soprano in C5, soprano in c<sup>2</sup>, soprano in c<sup>2</sup> (these all refer to the same instrument)

They also vary by

- language – e.g. garklein flutlein, flûte de voix, treble, basset
- period – e.g. an alto recorder in G<sub>4</sub> was commonly used for the soprano line in music of the Renaissance

As if that wasn't enough, terms from these various sources are often combined, resulting in heterogeneous sequences such as *garklein Flütlein*, sopranino, soprano, alto, tenor, bass, great bass, contrabass ...

Inevitably, a great deal has been written on this subject (see References), but we still lack a consistent system of unambiguous terms to apply to recorders in modern use. I note that this problem is by no means unique to the recorder and similar situations exist with respect to other families of woodwind instrument such as the flute, clarinet and saxophone.

It seems to me that we can resolve this by adopting a size naming system based on easily interpreted terms consistently applied by language, tessitura and fundamental pitch. Such a schema is presented in the following table in which the fundamental pitches are designated in American Standard Pitch Notation (ASPN).

<b>PREFERRED NAME</b>	<b>FUNDAMENTAL PITCH (ASPN)</b>	<b>ABBREVIATION (1case sensitive)</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE NAMES</b>
<b>piccolino</b>	F <sub>6</sub>	p	
<b>piccolo</b>	C <sub>6</sub>	P	<i>garklein Flötlein</i>
<b>sopranino</b>	F <sub>5</sub>	s	
<b>soprano</b>	C <sub>5</sub>	S	descant
<b>alto</b>	F <sub>4</sub>	A	treble
<b>tenor</b>	C <sub>4</sub>	T	
<b>bass</b>	F <sub>3</sub>	B	bass in F4 basset
<b>sub-bass</b>	C <sub>3</sub>	b	bass in C3 great bass
<b>contrabass</b>	F <sub>2</sub>	C	bass in F2 double bass
<b>sub-contrabass</b>	C <sub>2</sub>	c	bass in C2 double great bass
<b>octobass</b>	F <sub>1</sub>	O	bass in F1 double contrabass
<b>sub-octobass</b>	C <sub>1</sub>	o	bass in C1 triple great bass

I welcome your constructive [comments and suggestions](#) on this schema.



Piccolino recorder, by Santi Occorso



Paetzold by Kunath sub-octobass recorder in C<sub>1</sub>

## References

- Lasocki, David R. G. 2000. *Not Just the Alto: Sizes of Recorder in the Baroque and Classical Periods.* Instant Harmony.
- Lasocki, David R.G., and Robert Ehrlich. 2023. *The Recorder.* Yale Musical Instrument Series. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Thalheimer, Peter. 2000. “In Quinten und Quarten: Zur Geschichte des Blockflötenstimmwerks [In Fifths and Fourths: The History of the Various Sizes of Recorder].” *Tibia* 25 (1): 16–24.