

	Violin	Viola	Violoncello	Contrabass
1	Soloist sound	Soloist sound	Soloist sound	Soloist. Also good reinforcing the cello line on the same octave or lower octave.
2	Really difficult to tune with each other. Doesn't sound like a section, just like two soloists play the same note.	Really difficult to tune with each other. Doesn't sound like a section, just like two soloists playing the same note. However it could be used in an emergency case as it doesn't sound as bad as two violins due to a rounder sound and lower register.	Really difficult to tune with each other. Doesn't sound like a section, just like two soloists playing the same note. However it could be used as it doesn't sound as bad as two violins (or even violas) due to a rounder sound and lower register.	It is highly recommended to NOT use two contrabasses. They would have a really hard time tuning together, it would still sound like to two basses playing together rather than a section, and it won't make the sound much bigger.
3	Really difficult to tune with each other. Doesn't sound like a section, just like three soloists playing the same note. Use in case of emergency in the second violins if absolutely necessary.	Really difficult to tune with each other. Still, it would start to sound like a very thin section, although you would still be able to listen to each player's sound.	Really difficult to tune with each other. Still it would start to sound like a very thin section.	The bare minimum to get a sound of a section. Still is not the best size for a contrabass section, but players would start to feel comfortable playing together.
4	Really difficult to tune with each other. Still it would start to sound like a very thin section, although you would still be able to listen to each player's sound.	The minimum required to sound like a section. It would still sound thin, but you won't be able to differentiate each player's sound.	The bare minimum to get a sound of a section. It would sound thin, but players would feel comfortable playing together.	The minimum to get the sound of a section.
5-7 ¹	The minimum required to sound like a section. It would still sound thin, but you won't be able to differentiate each player's sound.	The minimum required to sound like a section. It would still sound thin, but you won't be able to differentiate each player's sound.	The minimum required to sound like a section. It would still sound thin, but you won't be able to differentiate each player's sound.	(5-6) A good size for a contrabass section.
8-11	A good mid-size section.	A good mid-size section.	A good mid-size section.	(7-8) A symphonic contrabass section.
12-15	A good size for a symphonic orchestra.	A good size for a symphonic orchestra.	A good size for a symphonic orchestra.	(9-10) A full orchestra contrabass section.
16-20	A good size for a full orchestra.	A good size for a full orchestra.	A good size for a full orchestra.	Just too many...

¹ All numbers are approximations, especially when it comes to ranges.