

Creating and Editing Parts in Sibelius

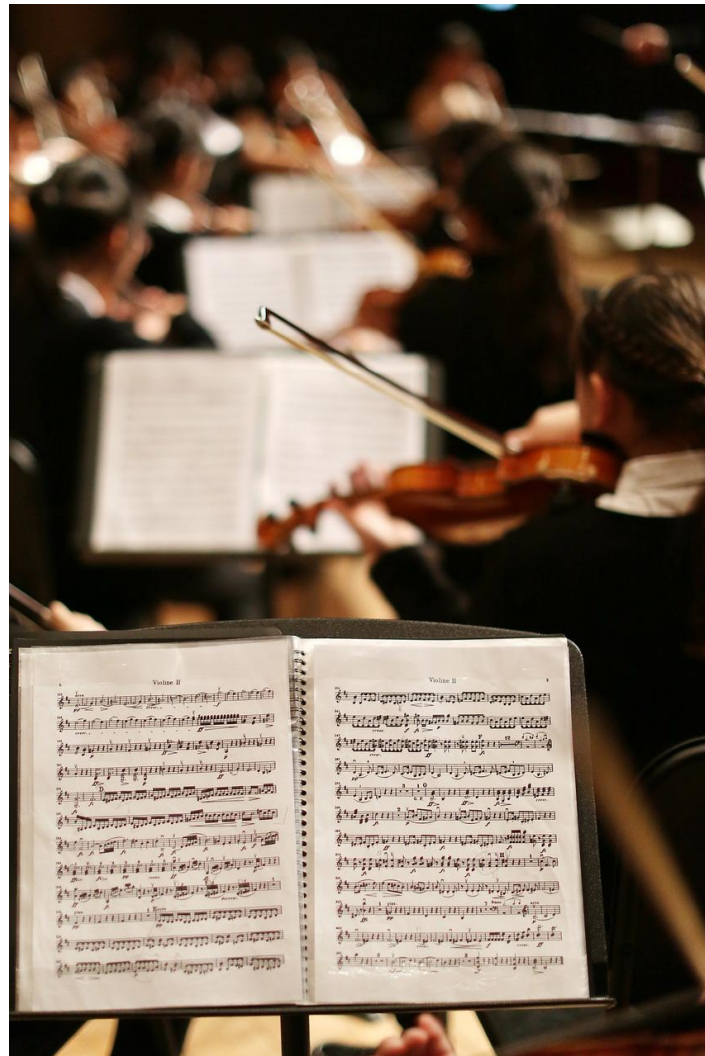


Image Credit: StockSnap from Pixabay

Creating parts – as simple as pressing a button and hitting print, surely?

Ah, if only it were!

This blog will take you through the process of extracting parts from orchestral scores, focusing initially on the problem of shared lines and stems, which you will (or should) find in wind and brass, and how that impacts on part creation.

First steps

The simplest way to prepare parts is to write each line separately in the score from the outset. Certain styles of music will demand this approach anyway:



A musical score for three flutes, labeled F1.1, F1.2, and F1.3. The score consists of six measures. Each measure contains complex, multi-measure passages for each flute part, often involving triplets and various articulations. The notation is dense and includes many accidentals and dynamic markings.

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But you may have written your score out (correctly) with shared staves:

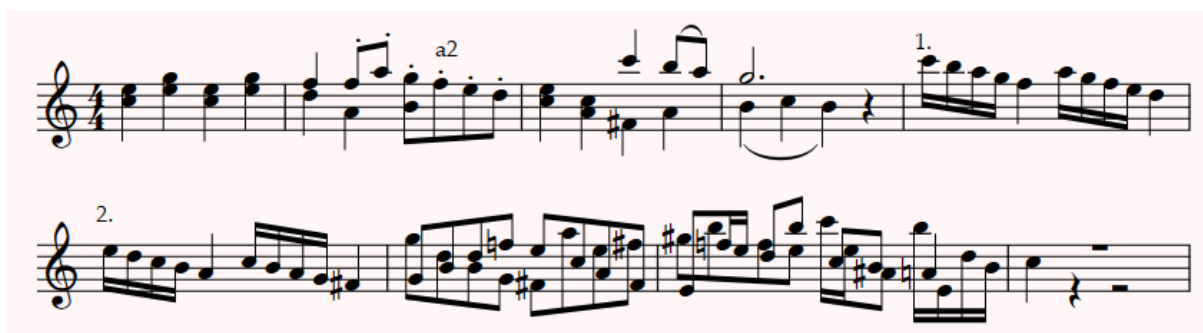


A musical score for Flutes 1, 2. The score consists of a single staff with shared stems and articulations. The notation includes various accidentals and dynamic markings, and is labeled with 'a2', '1.', and '2.' to indicate specific parts of the score.

And this is indeed how it should look when preparing full scores. Note the single shared stems; a2 when both instruments play in unison; 1. to indicate first flute only; 2. to indicate second flute only.

This convention is not always observed by some composers, but it is implemented by editors.

So, how do you get from here to separate parts? A quick look at the part itself shows a highly unsatisfactory outcome:



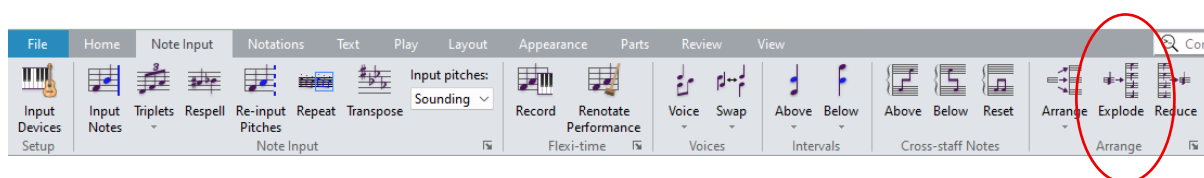
A musical score for Flutes 1, 2, showing the result of separating the shared stems into individual parts. The notation is highly unsatisfactory, with many overlapping notes and stems, making it difficult to read. The score is labeled with 'a2', '1.', and '2.' to indicate specific parts of the score.

Don't be tempted to do this! Players won't thank you, especially for those last three bars, which are very hard to read and unpick, with their voices criss-crossing.

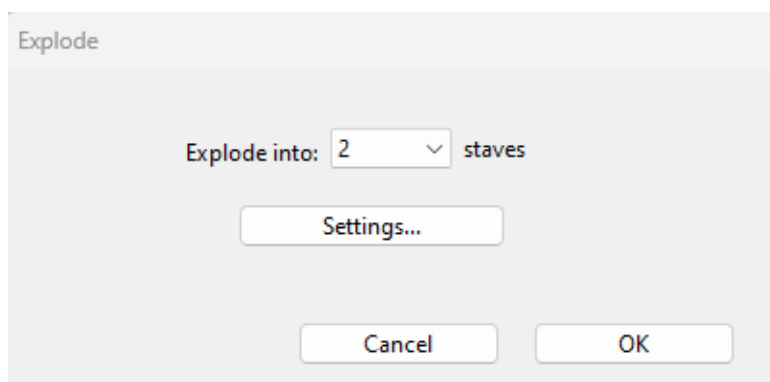
Untangling shared staves

So, if you've already written shared staves, it's time to untangle them. I usually create a copy of the whole file specifically for parts. Make sure that you have edited as far as you can in your main score, because from now on you will have two files to correct and keep up to date.

Working in this copied file, in the full score select the entire line (triple click) of your chosen instruments (here, flutes). Then in the Note Input tab, press the enticingly named 'Explode' on the right:



and the following will appear, so give it the OK:



This leads to setting up your destination staves where the two flute parts will be separated. Explode into two staves (cover your ears if need be) then OK. Next comes up the following:

Explode Destination

☒ Create new destination staves:

Name:

Number from: ▼

☐ Use existing staves as destination:

☒ Below source staff

☐ Specific staves:

Part 1: ▼

Part 2: ▼

Part 3: ▼

Part 4: ▼

The result is this:

Flute 1

Flute 2

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

This is better, but not perfect. It still needs editing. The a2 hasn't made its way into the second part, and we didn't get back to two parts in the third bar (perhaps because of the mixture of one and two voices in the original typography).

There are also some well-meaning but debatable cues given in bars 5 and 6; not really necessary in this situation. More on cuing later.

So, a certain amount of basic editing is still required! This is why I prefer to write first with separate lines for each instrument, then condense the material later.

Problems in parts

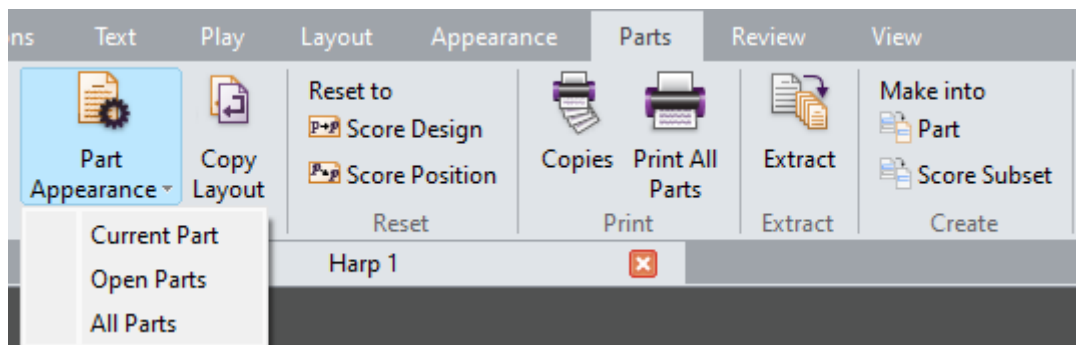
Now let's look at the sort of problems that can occur with a single instrument when setting up the part. Here's an example from a harp part:

Harmonization of a single melodic line for Harp 1. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system (measures 108-109) shows a treble and bass staff with a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass. The second system (measure 110) shows the continuation of the melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

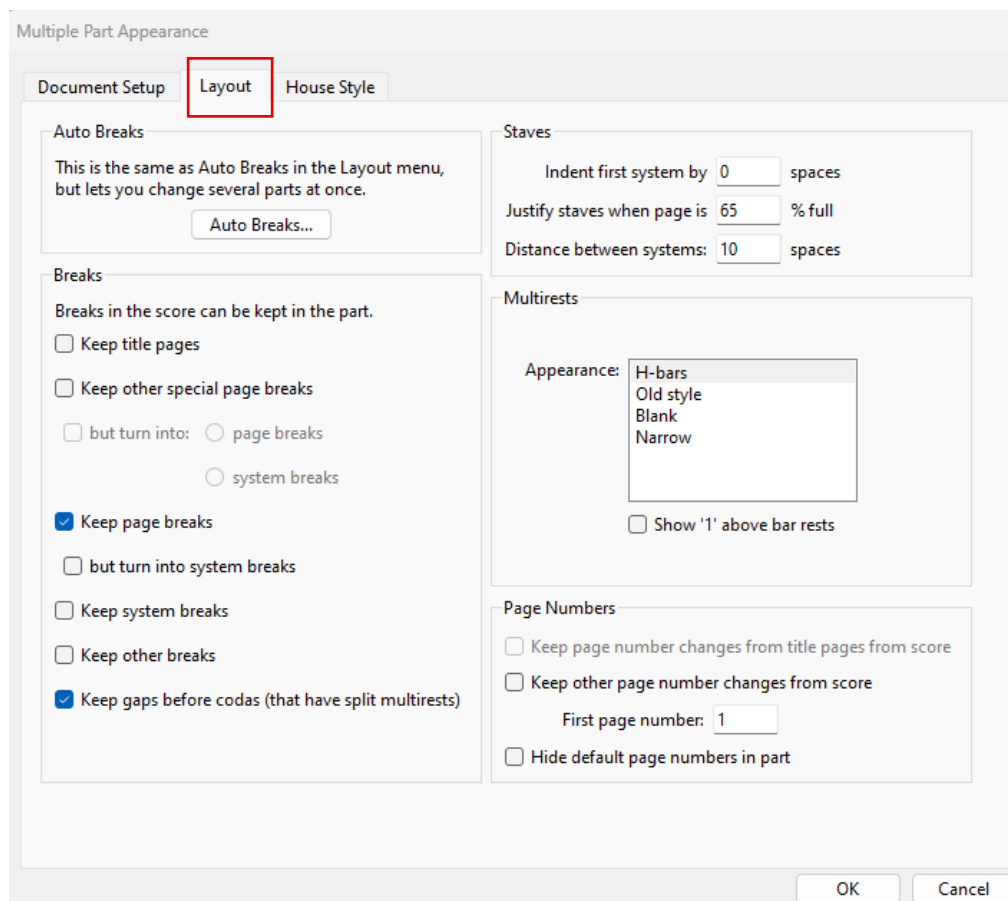
Continuation of the Harp 1 part, measures 111-113. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system (measures 111-112) shows a treble and bass staff with a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass. The second system (measure 113) shows the continuation of the melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

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The page turns have been copied over literally from the score, creating unwanted space below the systems. To stop this happening, under the Parts Tab, click on Part Appearance and All Parts:



In the box that comes up go to Layout and **untick** where it says 'Keep page breaks', (the first blue box below), then press OK:



This will improve the part layout, making it more independent of the score:

Harp I 3

Harp I 4

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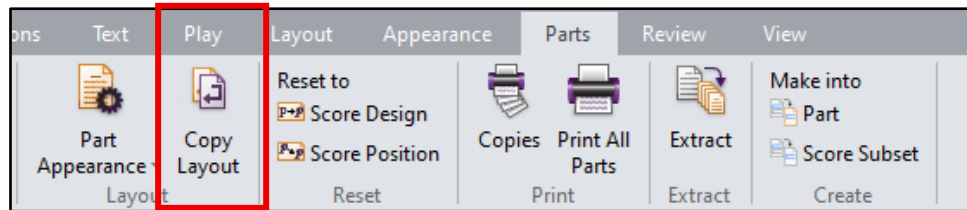
Copying over layout

Another useful trick, when you have formatted and edited one part and want to save a bit of time setting up a similar part, is to copy over the layout. Let's say, for example, you have the following layout of systems in Violin 1 that you want to carry over to Violin 2 with similar material:

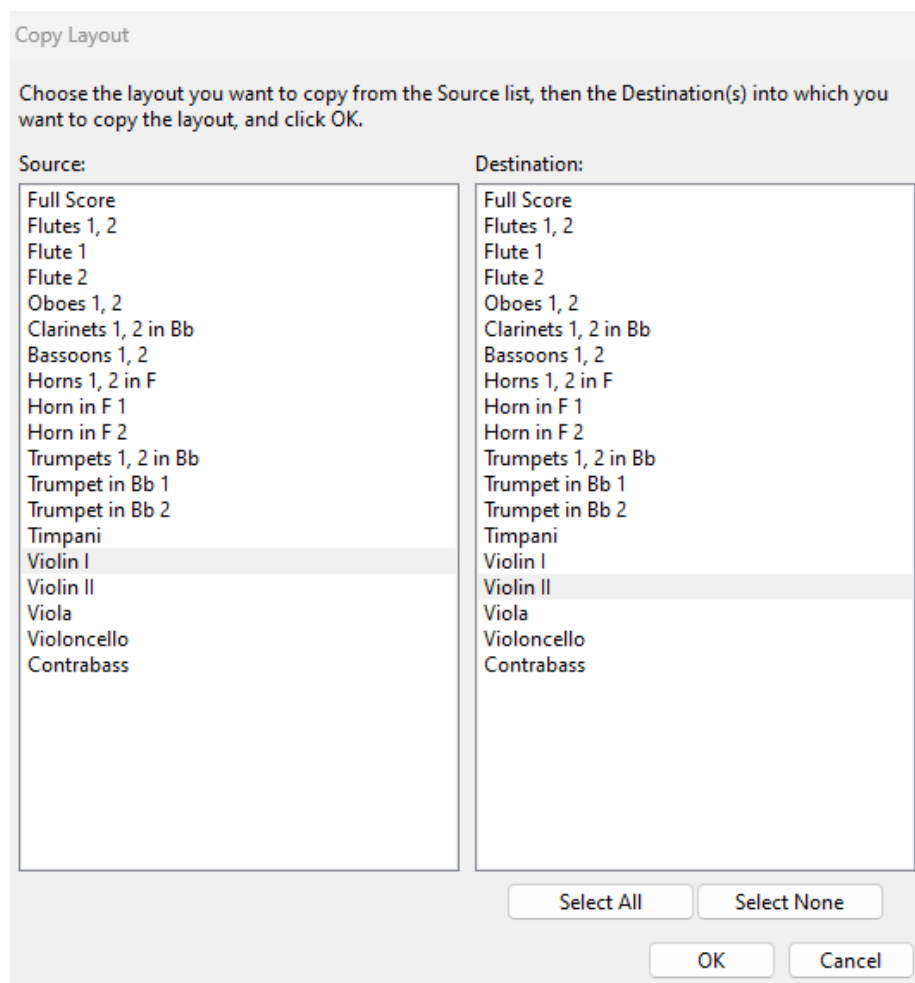
Violin I

Violin II

Here, the firsts are laid out neatly, but the seconds are rather cramped. This one really is fixed by a single click. (But do check!) Go to the Parts Layout again and now click on Copy Layout:



The following will appear, so select Violin 1 in the source and Violin 2 in the destination. The machine will ask if you *really* want to do this (as if you were insane to even contemplate such a manoeuvre), but just go ahead and do it anyway.



The result:

Violin II



Insanity has paid off this time!


Cues

As always, it's well worth referring to *Behind Bars* by Elaine Gould for a really good breakdown on cues (pp. 566–77), but I will give you some basics here to be going on with.

In general, if the part has rests longer than 12 bars, you need to put in a cue; multirests of hundreds of bars simply won't be helpful to the performer.

What cues should you put in? As a rule of thumb, an instrument very nearby or a particularly loud instrument. Don't cue something that has already been playing for sometime – try and cue an instrument that has a fresh entry, so it's more obvious to the ear. Avoid cues which have identical entries spaced apart by rests. These can be confusing to the performer.

Flute

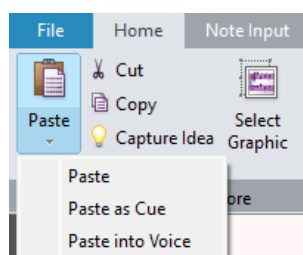


In the example above, it's fine to use the cue in bar 6 (marked here in red). But don't use just the cue in bar 1 and not bar 6, as they could be confused for the same entry!

Two ways to create cues in Sibelius

If you have a higher version of Sibelius, you're in luck, as there is a very simple cueing mechanism which does the work for you.

Having seen in the part where you need to cue, go back to the full score, select and copy the cue you want. But now, rather than just pasting it straight in to its destination, go to the Home tab, and under Paste, select 'Paste as Cue':



Alternatively, use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl + Shift + Alt + V** when pasting. The good news is that this will hide the cue in the score and only show it in the part. But there's still more to do. Let's have a look at an example of what's just happened as it looks in the part:



This looks reasonable enough; smaller font with stems in one direction, and the main rests showing for the instrument of this part. But there is some cramping of the line, and we also don't need to see slurs or dynamics for cues. Take those out manually, then select the whole line and simply press **Ctrl + Shift + N**. This will space the notes out more evenly:



If you have an earlier version of Sibelius, you may need to cue using a longer route.

In the full score:

1. Copy the cue and paste it into the destination part.
2. Make it cue size (keypad, blue regions as below)



3. Remove unnecessary dynamics, articulations and slurs.
4. To add main instrument rests, select the first note, press Ctrl + N, then create the second voice via the keypad (if you like), then press the semibreve rest (green regions below) successively for each bar.



The bad news is that this will not be automatically hidden in the main score, which is why it's simpler to use a separate score for parts. To hide it in the score, right-click on the selected cue and press:

Hide or Show

Show in Parts

And it's as simple as that...

Ivor McGregor August 2025

(written without using ChatGPT)

Ivor McGregor is a professional music proofreader, editor and typesetter. Need help presenting your written music? Visit ivormcgregorproofreading.co.uk