

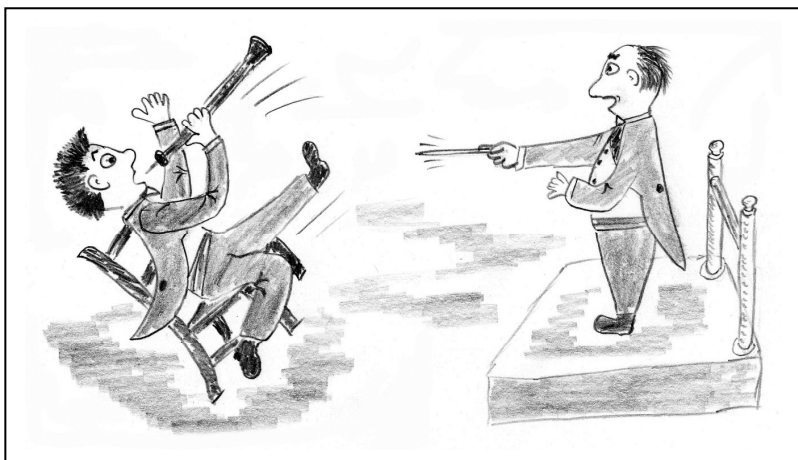
Essential reading for every conductor

The Conductor's Handbook

Everything the up-and-coming maestro needs to know
in one convenient volume

By

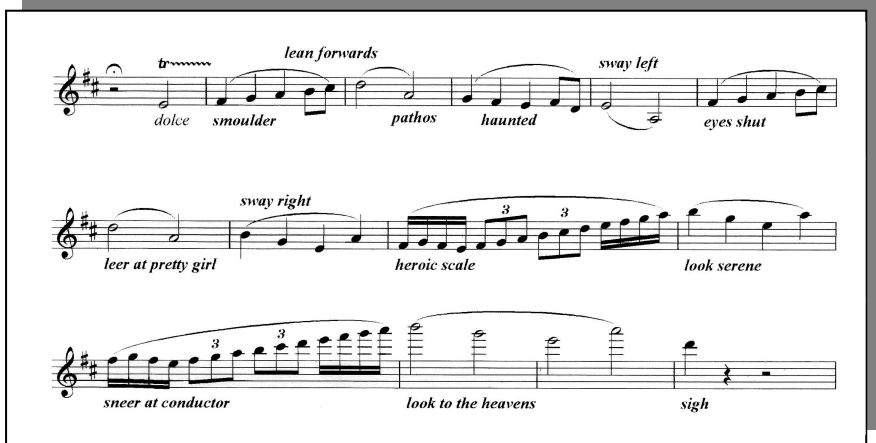
Imrich von Wörstenbeat



The Conductor's Handbook

*Dedicated to my wife Mandy,
and my daughters Lucy and Alice*

Ross A Cohen ARCM – Viola

A musical score for a violin concerto, presented on three staves. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a trill on the first note, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. Expression markings above the staff include 'lean forwards' and 'sway left'. Below the staff, the words 'dolce', 'smoulder', 'pathos', 'haunted', and 'eyes shut' are written. The second staff continues the melodic line with a 'sway right' marking. Below, the words 'leer at pretty girl', 'heroic scale' (marked with a triplet of eighth notes), and 'look serene' are written. The third staff features a triplet of sixteenth notes, followed by a long, sustained note. Below, the words 'sneer at conductor', 'look to the heavens' (marked with a triplet of sixteenth notes), and 'sigh' are written. The score is enclosed in a rectangular frame with a grey border.

A section from a well-known violin concerto demonstrating expression markings (see ‘Violinists’, Chapter Seven).

Foreword by Rufus Fasttick

I have to say, I was bloody well chuffed to be asked to write this foreword for my dear old chum and colleague Imrich von Wörstenbeat, or Tichy Richie as he used to be called back at the good old R C of C. Actually, he got called a lot of other things as I recall, but we'd better stick with Tichy. You know, I could never understand why he was called him Tichy, as he was a good six footer and a damn fine pace bowler into the bargain, but that's what the ladies used to call him when he was out of earshot. Arms like a bloody windmill, though. Cricket; best training ever invented for becoming a conductor, I reckon. I shudder to think how much time young conductors waste goggling at manuscripts these days when they should be down at the nets learning how it's really done. If I've learned one thing in life, it's never trust a conductor who bowls on the leg side, and pace is everything.

I gather this is all about conducting orchestras. Well, Tichy's your man there. Not much he doesn't know about getting his way with the band. Bloody hell! Those were the days. I remember once he managed to seduce two harpists during one rehearsal break. Of course, there was not much skirt in an orchestra in those days, just the harps for some reason - never could work out why. But, by Jove, they were a couple of corks, too. Tichy used to send the rest of the band off for a cuppa and keep the harps on for a *private* rehearsal. He always used to keep a bottle of pure malt in his music case for emergencies. I'll never forget the sight of a pair of dishevelled, half-pissed harpists during *Symphonie Fantastique*. Blowed if I know how he got away with it, but I'll bet old Hector Berlioz would have approved. Talk about getting into the mind of the composer!

Well, I admit I haven't actually read this book yet, but I'll bet it's got some really juicy anecdotes in it, if I know old Tichy.

Sir Rufus Fasttick FRCC

Introduction by the author

To be a conductor is to devote your life to music.

To be a conductor is to stand before an orchestra and in front of a crowded auditorium, and yet, at the same time, to be completely alone.

To be a conductor is to commit yourself to a solitary existence. You will rarely find yourself in the company of kindred conductors. Your career and the life you lead will be to stand at the head of the orchestra, chorus and soloists and be responsible for every note, every nuance and inflection within the music.

To be a conductor is to be the only true individual within that assembly. You do not play an instrument yet you, and you alone, are responsible for every performer on the platform. You must know the music better than anyone, yet every performance must be new and alive as if heard for the first time. Your baton is the medium through which the composer's inspiration communicates directly to the hearts of the players and listeners.

This book will, it is hoped, provide valuable insights into the unique world of the modern conductor, an existence, the like of which has no parallel within any other sphere of life and the arts.

To be a conductor is that which you are rather than what you may aspire to.

To be a conductor is your destiny.

Within these pages you will find references to many great conductors past and present. Additional biographical information is provided in the appendix.

Imrich von Wörstenbeat
Principal - Royal College of Conducting



The Author - Imrich von Wörstenbeat.



Contents

Page 1	Foreword by Rufus Fasttick
Page 2	Introduction by the Author
Page 6	Chapter One: The Philosophy of Conducting
Page 13	Chapter Two: Baton Technique
Page 30	Chapter Three: Rehearsal Techniques
Page 45	Chapter Four: Knowing the Orchestra
Page 67	Chapter Five: Do's and Don't's
Page 88	Chapter Six: In the Studio
Page 105	Chapter Seven: Repertoire and Soloists
Page 129	Chapter Eight: An Opera
Page 139	Chapter Nine: Off the Podium
Page 162	Chapter Ten: Administration
Page 175	Chapter Eleven: In Pursuit of Excellence
Page 197	About the author
Page 199	Appendix: About some of the conductors referred to in this volume





The Conductor's Handbook

By

Imrich von Wörstenbeat



Chapter One: The Philosophy Of Conducting

Why do musicians want to become conductors?

This very question has, at some time or other, been on the lips of every player in every orchestra since the dawn of time.

Or to phrase it another way:

Would a conductor ever want to be a musician?

Certainly the answer is a very complex one which has been debated for centuries. Indeed, ever since Lully (1632-1687) thumped himself on the foot with his massive baton and became the first (though not the last) conductor to die for his art. So the definitive answer, after my lifelong devotion to just this question, and having searched the music archives across five continents (my gratitude to Sir Rufus Fastick of the Arts Council for the exceeding generosity in providing the travel funds, thus enabling me to conduct my research firstly in Bermuda, then in Las Vegas, followed by a charming ski resort in the Swiss Alps, then across to Bali, and Ibiza, and of course the French Riviera followed by Tahiti, and finally the all important luxury World Cruise to complete my research away from the pressures of city life.) the answer has to be:

NO...

... A conductor is not a musician.

Ours is altogether a loftier calling. Musician is too small a word (three syllables - Ed) for the least of the duties which the world of classical symphonic music demands of the 'maestro' (just two syllables - Ed) - and I do not use the term lightly.

It typically transcends and challenges certain fundamental preconceptions that the layperson might hypothetically, or otherwise, erroneously assume to be stereotypically accepted precedents of universally social acceptance within the highest sphere of the arts in general, and specifically classical symphonic music in particular.

I am referring to...

Working hours:

There is no limit to which a conductor will strive to achieve the results which the music demands of him. Orchestras would rather, it seems, work to a regimented pattern of pre-set scheduled hours, unsympathetically resisting any suggestion that they might prefer to miss a meal or a night's sleep in order to perfect the music. For them (and it is worth noting this point), food and sleep would seem to be a priority. Strange, I realize, but I have found this to be a universal truth. However, not so for the maestro! The music lives only in the present moment, and it may be necessary and desirable to extend a rehearsal or recording late into the night to achieve the desired results. This, you will find, is one of the principal rifts separating musicians from conductors.

Dedication:

No greater love hath a conductor than that he is ready and willing, at all times, to lay down the life of his orchestra for the sake of the music. Spare no expense. Some repertoire requires a colossal force of players, far more than would be on the regular payroll. This obviously comes at a price. Do not flinch from draining the orchestra's coffers in the advancement of your art. Insist, also, that the music be played in a venue that befits its stature. No little town hall for you. Musical history was not made in sports halls or village meeting houses. No indeed! Insist at all times on the best that money can buy. The world stage is your venue.

Furthermore, it is surely a false economy to penny-pinch on publicity. Invite the top music critics of the press to your concerts. Make sure they are comfortable in their seats having wine and dined them lavishly (which, experience has shown, brings out their best and most attentive critical nature). Give them the finest seats in the house - which may not necessarily afford the best view of the orchestra or, indeed, the clearest sound. It is sometimes prudent policy to locate your critic close to a noisy ventilation outlet in order to filter some of the roughness which inevitably occurs in the acoustic of many concert halls. Above all, make them feel welcome, which can be quite expensive if it is to

encourage the sort of impartial acclaim we are eagerly anticipating. (See chapter five on enticing a music critic.)

Commitment:

It is primarily through your example that the orchestra must be inspired to give of their best. Use what ever methods you can (which will be discussed later in this book) to achieve the sort of inspirational dedication from your orchestra that you require at all times, be it day or night. There will of course be occasions when the decisions you are required to make in pursuit of your art will receive less than the enthusiasm one would have hoped for within the orchestra, like sacking players for instance, or canceling their vacations. Nevertheless, they must be assured that it is ultimately for the sake of the music, and in time they will surely grow to love you for it.

Temperament:

The temperament of ‘The Maestro’ is fundamental to the collective spirit of the orchestra, as you skilfully, courageously, painstakingly, and laboriously guide your players through the veritable minefield of musical traps left to simultaneously (in alphabetical order) baffle, beguile, bewilder, bog-down, confound, confuse, convolute, dismay, disrupt, distress, ensnare, entangle, entrap, tax, tempt, terrify and trip-up the unwary musician, occasioned and precipitated by an alarmingly significant number of notorious composers whose tendency to know less than the permissible minimum, and yet at the same time, more than indeed that which they should, about which we of the conducting fraternity believe to be the very least qualifying requirement necessary to attain the exceptional level of excellence, expertise and execution expected of a symphonic composer in this more enlightened, and technically demanding day and age. The list of composers who should, by rights, have been lined up and shot the instant they presumed to set pen to paper would make sombre reading, and will be dealt with in some detail in a later chapter. I quote: *‘Some [composers] should*

have died for their art much sooner than they in fact did'. - Count Richard Heinrich Richmann (1812-1897).*

Suffice to say, the burden of all this falls upon you, and you alone, and one must be equal to the task at all times. Or to quote the profound words of the great romantic Russian conductor, Ivan Dontaskmi 1833-1879): *'Be prepared even when you're least prepared.'* Dontaskmi died in particularly tragic circumstances with the words: *'I'll never fall for that old...'* when a viola player was trying to warn him about a cellist who was recklessly indulging in target practice with a bow and needle-tipped cello spike. A truly unfortunate accident.



The tragic death of Ivan Dontaskmi.

Other Points to consider:

*

Outspoken nineteenth century musicologist, and joint record holder for the most abundant repetition of the word 'Rich' in one name. The other holder being the Czechoslovakian Physicist and amateur violist: Bêdrich Richmûch Mûchrichski.

Women conductors. Here is a very strange phenomenon. It is not so very long ago that even the notion of women within the ranks of a symphony orchestra was not entertained, let alone to find one of them standing up in front and wielding the baton. Of course, it was the harpists who started the rot. Let's face it, men do not play harps (unless there is something wrong with them). The concert harp, lovely instrument though it be, has and always will be, a ladies' instrument. It is the way of things; it is a law of nature, it is meant to be that way - simply ask any member of a trombone section, and I guarantee he'll agree. So, if that is the case, why even include harps in the modern orchestra, I hear you ask?

There is a deeply held conviction from within a particularly well entrenched school of conducting, that the presence of harps has a biblical parallel, namely that in the same manner that the devil is forever amongst us waiting to claim our souls by tempting us from the path of righteousness, so too are female harpists, being, as they are, the sole bastion of femininity within a traditionally male stronghold, the presence of which serves as a constant reminder to the gentlemen of the orchestra of their masculine fallibility. We need harps, indeed, to know that we can, when it comes to it, resist them. Hence Dante's reference to the 'Harpie' in his Divine Comedy (though I'm damned if I can see anything comic in it - perhaps it loses something in the translation). Of course, in a perfect world, the feminine revolution (as it later became), would have been arrested there and then. However, as the decades of the twentieth century progressed, all round the world women of all shapes and sizes popped up, not just on harps but on virtually every instrument represented on the concert platform. It was unstoppable, like a gradual explosion. The world of symphonic music was never to be the same again. Of course, the younger generation of conductors (the under sixties) probably won't recall the time when things were different. However, the outcome has inevitably meant that the former 'Old School' has had to learn some new lessons. It was inevitable, therefore, that the female of the species would at some time challenge the final and greatest position at the top of the symphonic pyramid: the conductorship. And sure enough, it may be happening even now. However, there is one glimmer of hope on the horizon for all you 'gents

only' die-hards. And that, of all things, comes from the actual women themselves within the orchestra. Surprised? So was the highly respected Vienna-based music research institute: 'Arts Research in the Symphonic Environment' (known as A.R.S.E., in which I have an honorary seat), who have devoted much time and resources studying this fascinating phenomenon. They were at the forefront in the promotion of an influential and high-profile campaign to encourage women into the performing arts, and in order to initiate and motivate orchestras in this modern thinking, created an annual Europe-wide event whereby one lady from any orchestra, could be selected for her exceptional service to the arts by being presented with a handsome pair of matching gilded pitchers (which, of course, later became more widely known as the 'Golden Jugs Award'). Indeed, what no one could ever have foreseen was that today's lady musician does not appreciate being conducted by another of her kind. It is one of nature's great mysteries. The quiet, demure, genteel ladies of the orchestra will, when faced with a female conductor, transform into fierce hunting pack animals and, with the comparable collective team spirit one may observe in the wild, hunt their quarry down, going for the throat of any woman who presumes to ascend the podium. It has raised one or two male eyebrows during rehearsals to say the least, and in some strange way gives the female musician a new and heightened status within the modern symphonic dynamic. I have overheard phrases like: 'I didn't know the old girl had it in her' or: 'By Jove, I like to see a feisty filly with a bit of fight in her' or (admittedly from a percussionist): 'She's got balls'.

Finally, to quote just a few of the profound words of the enigmatic maestro, Pierre d'Odoure (1886-1979):

'We live in an unchanging age of unchanging changeless change'.

'Everyone's differences are all something those of us who are different always have in common with everyone, always'.

'Has anyone seen my baton, it was in my hand a moment ago'.

‘There are only two kinds of composer: Those who are dead, and those who ought to be dead’.

‘No, I have never had an electric shock, why do you ask’?

‘It was always never not a pleasure not to have the pleasure of not conducting this performance’.

‘Out of courtesy, I merely seek only to contradict myself, never others’.

‘I rarely equivocate except when discussing the exact science of my conducting’.

‘Honest, it wasn't me’.

‘I never fail to beat my orchestra to the end of the performance’.

‘There seem to be two orchestras on the concert platform tonight’.

‘I give in, which end am I supposed to hold’?

Which, I believe, gives us a profound insight into the mind of the modern conductor - and also reflects much of our own thoughts.

