

## Chapter Ten: Administration

The most important link the players within an orchestra have with their administrative workforce (obviously, apart from their maestro), is personified by the vital character occupying the position know as the **Orchestral Manager**. He is, in reality, a liaison officer and, amongst his many duties he has to keep a watchful eye on the ever-fluctuating morale of the players both as a collective whole, and on an individual and personal basis. The very tangible collective morale of the orchestra serves as an uncannily accurate barometer for the well-being of the organization as a whole, within both the business *and* the artistic communities. The orchestral manager will give this barometer a little tap each and every morning, checks the temperature, looks at the sky to see if there are any storms on the horizon, sniffs the air to test if it is fresh and wholesome, then goes, content, about his daily business.

But should the needle, as it were, stray too far into the *stormy* or the *arid*, then warning bells will sound. Things are not as they should be...

The following chronicle of events is taken from the pages of a private journal belonging to the head of the board of trustees for the Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra...

The Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra had fallen upon hard times. They had been forced to make redundancies across their entire administration team, and were now trying to keep the ship from sinking manned only by a skeleton crew. Resources were stretched to the limit. Their Arts Council grant had been cut by half, they could no longer afford to fund lavish advertising, audience figures were dismal, recording contracts had been ditched, touring was virtually non-existent, and the players' morale was at an all-time low. Stress-related illness was higher than ever before, and absenteeism was a permanent nightmare, relationships between players was strained, and those conductors whom they could afford, had commented on the lethargy and lack-lustre

playing.

Then finally, their kindly, though elderly, orchestral manager developed a heart condition, brought on largely through worry and pressure of work, and was forced to take early retirement. The orchestra was drifting towards the rocks with no one at the helm.

What could revive the fortunes of this unhappy orchestra?

If there was ever a band in need of a knight in shining armour to rescue it from the brink of destruction, then this was surely a most deserving case.

Just such a knight, in the person of Herbert (Cocky) Cocker arrived in the nick of time...

**The Guardian**

**The Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra**

Have a vacancy in their administrative team  
for the position of

**Orchestral Manager**

**29K P/A plus car**

Applications to:

The Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra,  
PO Box 23 Manchester  
(Not later than 15<sup>th</sup> January 2002)

11 Abattoir Terrace,  
Manchester  
M13 7DY

Telephone: 0161 70380732 (and ask for Cocky)

10<sup>th</sup> January 2002

Dear blokes at the Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra,  
I saw your job ad in my chip wrapper and thought this could be my big chance to get a decent job with some decent cash (and about bloody time too if you'll pardon my French).  
I have just finished doing a little stretch at "Her Majesty's" convenience (and I don't mean her privy - ha ha) and my parole officer (who is an okay bloke really) says I should get out into the community and get meself a job.

I used to have a job once, but I was working with the wrong sort of blokes - know what I mean. I found they were not to be trusted - especially when they shipped me to the Manchester Pigs. And I didn't do nothing wrong (well, not compared to them anyhow). I'm not one to hold a grudge, like, but I got some serious sorting out to take care of, know what I mean, see?

I think you are very lucky I saw your ad because I like music a lot, especially the 50's and 60's stuff (I've even got a Strat tattooed on my shoulder, being a big Shadows fan in those days, me and Sharon like, bless her). Also I'm very handy at working with people too. It's all about getting a bit of respect from them, like - if you know what I mean. I don't put up with no nonsense from people. I like to keep things nice and neat and tidy like. You can reach me at the above address but it is better to phone between 10pm and midnight.

Yours hopefully

Herbert Cocker

**The Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra**  
**Philharmonia House**  
**Manchester**  
**M17 8EP**

Telephone: 0161 7063 8078/9

Fax: 0161 7063 8017

16<sup>th</sup> January 2002

Mr. H. Cocker Esq.  
11 Abattoir Terrace,  
Manchester,  
M13 7OY

Re: Orchestral Manager vacancy

Dear Mr. Cocker,

Thank you for your letter of application for the position of Orchestral Manager. The board would like to invite you for an interview, which we will be holding at Philharmonia House on either the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> February.

Please could you confirm your availability on either of those days so that the panel can formalize arrangements?

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

*Clarence Clotheas*

Clarence Clotheas  
(Assistant Artistic Director)

Clarence Clothearts: Good morning Mr. Cocker. Please take a seat.  
 Let us briefly summarize your interests. You say in your application that you've always been interested in the music of the 50's and 60's. That was quite an innovative era in the exploration of the development of serialization in twelve-tone techniques, wouldn't you say?

Herbert Cocker: Yeah, well, um. Let's just say I've always been quite particular about *my* sort of music, if you know what I mean. I'm a bit of an old Rocker, like, and I don't go for all that electronic stuff wot the kids play all the time. No brains and cloth ears if you ask me. Oh, no offense Mr. Clothearts.

Clarence Clothearts: None taken Mr. Cocker. So how, then, do you regard contemporary composers such as John Cage?

Herbert Cocker: Wot group was he in?

Clarence Clothearts: He was an exponent of the avant garde school.

Herbert Cocker: Oh, that lot. School ain't wot it used to be, that's for sure. Avantanybloodybollocks more like. I don't go for all that foreign crap.

Clarence Clothearts: I see you're not afraid to speak your mind.

Herbert Cocker: Me? Yeah, I know I've got a bit of a *north and south*, but at least I'm up front with the blokes like. You know where you stand with me, all right? I don't believe in any messing. Straight to the point, and no farting about.

Clarence Clothearts: Well, Mr. Cocker, you must be aware that the

position of orchestral manager would require you to be ‘hands on’ with the musicians much of the time.

Herbert Cocker: I once did a spot of minding for a band once. That could get pretty ‘hands on’, like. It doesn’t do to let the punters’ spirits get too high, know wot I mean? We don’t want any ‘aggro’ during a gig, do we? And you got to keep the band under control too, innit?

Clarence Clothearts: By upholding players’ morale?

Herbert Cocker: Um, yeah. That sort of thing, I s’pose.

Clarence Clothearts: I take it you would not be afraid to intervene where there are disputes between players?

Herbert Cocker: Sort of like the referee?

Clarence Clothearts: Interesting notion.

Herbert Cocker: Yeah... well, disputes have always been a bit of a speciality of mine, if you take my meaning.

Clarence Clothearts: In the capacity of arbitration and mediation?

Herbert Cocker: Well, more of a wossname - like you said before. Sort of *hands on*, like.

Clarence Clothearts: Taking the bull by the horns?

Herbert Cocker: Definitely... well, I might have to slap one or two faces, but it’s all about getting a bit of respect from the blokes, like. No hard feelings, and nuffing below the belt.

Clarence Clothearts: You don't approve of any underhandedness?

Herbert Cocker: Me? No way mate. Straight to the point, that's me.

Clarence Clothearts: Now, Mr. Cocker, I must ask if you've ever had any experience working with classical musicians before?

Herbert Cocker: Well, not as such, no. But I have had to deal with some pretty interesting blokes in various lines of work.

Clarence Clothearts: Working in the community?

Herbert Cocker: In a manner of speaking, yes.

Clarence Clothearts: Public relations?

Herbert Cocker: Not exactly, no. More sort of personal dealing on a h'individual basis, if you follow me. A little bit of this and a little bit of that, and 'Yours is the uncle Robert', know wot I mean?

Clarence Clothearts: So your experience is much wider than just symphonic music?

Herbert Cocker: Oh, definitely. I've met some pretty tough nutters in my time, but I've lived to tell the tale.

Clarence Clothearts: Now, Mr. Cocker...

Herbert Cocker: Please call me Cocky.

Clarence Clothearts: Right, ...um Cocky. Let me test you with a conflict of interests scenario. Let's say, for example, that the conductor required the players to go into

overtime. And the players, who were tired, said it was unnecessary. And you have been called upon to intervene. How would you handle it?

Herbert Cocker: This conductor bloke, he's the 'Grand Fromage' - the 'Mr. Big', right?

Clarence Clothearts: Well, yes.

Herbert Cocker: So he earns the big bucks, right?

Clarence Clothearts: Certainly his fee reflects the weight of artistic responsibility.

Herbert Cocker: But he gets more than the band, right?

Clarence Clothearts: Well, naturally.

Herbert Cocker: Okay. Easy-peezy. I ask the players how much dosh it would take to make them agree to it, and then I'd get the conductor to pay it to 'em. If the conductor agreed (and it would be up to him, h'okay?), problem solved. If not, then I'd tell him politely to bugger orff – equally, problem solved.

Clarence Clothearts: Hmm. Let me see...That would certainly be a speedy solution...

Herbert Cocker: Yup!

Clarence Clothearts: ...and the players would certainly be happy with the outcome either way it turned out...

Herbert Cocker: You're a fast learner.

Clarence Clothearts: ...and the conductor will have saved himself either



a lot of extra expense, or will be forced to take onboard the value of the players' time and use of rehearsal scheduling.

Herbert Cocker: Spot on mate.

Clarence Clothears: Yes, I can see it would work. Yes, YES. Thank you Cocky. Thank you. I think you might be just the man we are looking for.



The weeks and months following the appointment of Cocky Cocker as orchestral manager to the Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra, saw a dramatic transformation in the fortunes of the organization.

The contrast in the players' mood from then (on his first day) to now, is quite remarkable...

Into the studio stepped Clarence Clothears followed by this hairy apparition, sporting a long greasy ponytail, multiple piercing of ears, nose, lip, and eyebrow, wearing a black sleeveless leather jacket over a string vest, with huge muscular arms adorned on the left side, from shoulder downwards, with a skeleton tattoo (complete with grinning skull and glowing red eye-sockets) strumming on a Fender Stratocaster with its bony fingers.

He is not a tall man (about five foot, four inches), but he nonetheless filled the room with his hirsute, muscular demeanour.

Only during the quietest of recordings is there ever a silence as complete as the one which greeted Cocky on that very first day of his new appointment.

The clock seemed to stop ticking and the players appeared to have forgotten how to blink. The silence was eventually broken by Clarence Clothears who, after a couple of false starts, and a nervous

little cough, said (perhaps rather unnecessarily) to the staring, open-mouthed orchestra:

‘Can I have your attention, please’?

No reaction – although a slight chill seemed to have come over the studio.

‘Um, as you are no doubt aware, for some considerable time we have been soldiering on without an orchestral manager, and you don’t need me to tell you that relations between the administration team and the players has, on occasions, been strained. We’ve all had to do the best we can, very often under extremely testing conditions. Let’s face it, it has been a struggle for all of us’.

You could hear the sound of a pin drop ten miles away.

‘But I want you to take this moment to collect your thoughts and make a conscious decision to put all our differences behind us from this moment onwards’.

If the silence could have become more intense at this point, it surely would have done so. Instead, although nothing moved or changed, the room temperature seemed to suddenly drop by another ten degrees.

‘Well then, um, I have a very important announcement to make. I would like you to join me in welcoming Mr. Herbert Cocker to the team as your new orchestral manager’.

The temperature was now hovering just above ‘absolute zero’.

‘Err, perhaps Mr. Cocker would like to say a few words to introduce himself...’

At this point Mr. Herbert (Cocky) Cocker, after first examining and then satisfying himself that his right nostril was free of obstructions, stepped just one pace forward and, like a hand in a well-worn glove, into his role, effortlessly, as orchestral manager to the Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra. The players heard the first of what was in future to become a hallmark of managerial-to-player dialogue openers: a loud nasal sniff, accompanied by screwing up of the left side of his face, and the words...

‘All right, wot are you buggers gawping at’?

Cocky had a refreshingly forthright manner with the musicians and administration alike, right from the conductor downwards. He

treated everyone as equals which, at first, tended to put the occasional nose out of joint (or to be more precise – to put the occasional nose in the fracture clinic along with the odd black eye). But he never took anything personally, or held a grudge. His method of dealing with disputes was always short, sharp and to the point. And it seemed to work. There were never any hard feelings. He looked after the players' well-being much as a mother grizzly bear looks after her cubs.

Should a visiting conductor ever take liberties with the feelings of the players, then he would be taken aside and told kindly but firmly:

'Listen, maestro mate. You don't really want to treat my band in that way do you? Let's just say, from now on, we are all going to be one big happy family - okey-dokey'. Followed by a friendly (but bruising) slap on the back.

In the weeks that followed, the atmosphere in the studio began to change. Players stopped being antagonistic towards each other, old grievances healed, and players became supportive of each other, there was an acceptance of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and a real team spirit developed with just a hint of friendly competition thrown in. Absenteeism virtually vanished, and the players began to apply themselves to the work as they'd never done in the past. Some of the younger members proudly showed off their new tattoos in the dressing rooms.

Cocky declined the offer of the company car, saying he'd always been a biker at heart. A top-of-the-range Harley-Davidson motorcycle and sidecar combination was purchased with a few of Cocky's custom accessories thrown in, which included an extremely powerful sound system.

There is no denying that Cocky was a superb orchestral manager with a unique style of his own which made him a huge success. The players loved him, and his colleagues in the administration team soon found they could rely on him to sort out the most difficult agents of visiting conductors and soloists, while the board of trustees and sponsors were like putty in his hands.

The money came pouring in as advertisers fought each other to have their products endorsed. Recording companies were continually out-bidding each other for the services of the orchestra.

Cocky, indeed, became quite a celebrity in his own right, as he was frequently to be seen driving about the city on his special black and chrome MPO Harley, wearing his new leather jacket complete with stud-work depicting a skeleton (complete with grinning skull and glowing eye sockets) playing on a violin, accompanied by the sound of the orchestra playing at two-hundred decibels – often with a beaming celebrity conductor (wearing soundproof ear-muffs) sitting in the side-car and waving back at the crowds as they thundered sedately by. On the conducting circuit it became quite *the thing* to take a ride from hotel to concert venue with Cocky.

Following a very successful eleven-week tour of all the major cities in the United States, Cocky found himself (to his bemusement) to be head-hunted by no less than three major American orchestras, promising colossal salaries and a host of extras thrown in.

He declined them all, including the interesting offer from Harley-Davidson Motorcycles to be their classical music advisor.

The Orchestra's fan-base became massive, subscription was running at saturation point, concerts were sold-out months in advance, and the players noted, with approval, the increasing number of black leather-jacketed music lovers in the audience enthusiastically showing their appreciation at the end of (and sometimes during) their performances.

And it was all down to one man.

There are undeniably those who would say that he was uneducated and uncouth – and maybe, in the formal sense, that is true.

There are also those who may be forgiven for dismissing a man of Cocky's appearance as not suitable to be working with highly skilled and sensitive artists. It is a credit to Clarence Clothears that he had the objectivity not to judge this particular book by its cover. Indeed, they became inseparable friends, and Cocky was instantly adopted by Clarence's young children as a new and doting uncle.

If the players and management of the Manchester Philharmonia Orchestra were to put their feelings into words, without any doubt or hesitation, they would surely say...

‘ ... Here is a man of compassion and empathy, a trustworthy,

dependable and caring man, a fair man and a modest man who always put the welfare of others before his own; a man of vision. Orchestral Manager extr'ordinaire...'

...Mr. Herbert (Cocky) Cocker O.B.E.



Cocky.