

Chapter Eleven: In Pursuit of Excellence

Learning how to be a conductor will always be an on-going process. There will never come a time when you will be able to sit back and say ‘Now I can conduct’, since you will only ever be as good as your last performance, which, in its turn, will only be as competent as the musicians upon whom you forever bestow your trust to convey the soul of the music to the listener.

Art is art – ultimately it is the language of the human spirit. And is communicated through different means, and interpreted in many different ways.

You portray your art visually through movement and expression, as does a ballet dancer. Yet your movement and expression is not, alas, in itself the art.

The language of music is conveyed through the air, from the almost limitless combination of sounds, textures, nuances, colours and dynamics to be found within the orchestra. Yet, alas, you are the only performer present who has no part to play.

Yet, if the music were a painting, it is not you, alas, who are the canvas and colours; those are surely the musicians. However, it must be you who strives to be the light in which the painting is displayed; not too glaring, nor too dim, but illuminating, even in texture, uncomplicated, and unbiased.

If the music were a metaphorical sculpture in marble, the manuscript would be the raw materials, taken from nature, from which it is formed; the musicians are its curves and geometry. Yet it is you, the conductor, that convey the human spirit within, and transport it into a living, breathing work of art; to be a concept captured in time, which may endure for all time.

Such is conducting.

You must change the lives of the audience, and only live music can do this.

Learning how to be a conductor will always be an on-going

process.

To keep our repertoire fresh, it is a useful discipline to strive to hear it with ‘new ears’ from time to time. And, likewise, to keep our language fresh (by that I refer to all technical aspects of our art) it is also wise to take a step back and become, once again, the student.

Indeed, back to basics.

The conscientious maestro never stops being the scholar in pursuit of excellence.

With that end in mind, try transporting yourself back to your student days. The skill here is not so much in getting all the answers right, necessarily, as how easy it is to slip, once again, into the role of scholar after all these years as *the maestro*. You may be forgiven for saying: ‘But that was a long time ago’. Alas, that is no excuse. The time you stop learning is the moment you will, indeed, cease to be *the maestro*.

Dip into the following ‘sample exam paper’. Be reassured, though, that if you experience the odd occasional nauseating sinking feeling, accompanied by sweaty palms, loss of appetite, high blood pressure, slight feeling of panic, throbbing headaches, and a fervent desire to be a million miles away - then you have, indeed, succeeded in transporting yourself back in time to your student examination days...



The Royal College of Conducting

Year Four - Final Examination Paper
(Sample questions)

To all candidates

Please read this sample paper thoroughly as it will help you through the final and most rigorously demanding stage of your intense training to become a **world class conductor**. The questions contained within this paper will be typical of the type and variety of questions you will encounter in your final examination while covering every aspect of the work and pressures which you, as conductors, will be expected to deal with on a day to day basis. Explanatory text is provided to help you through the complexity and diversity of decision making which you will be required to address both in the examination and in your future careers.

Having reached thus far in your studies, and having survived the elimination process that is part of the rigorous training at this college, it merely remains for me to wish you luck in your final year, and to hope sincerely that you will go forth into the world of symphonic music upholding the honour and traditions of this great seat of learning.

Imrich von Wörstenbeat
College Principal

Part One: The use of the Baton

(Tick all applicable boxes)

1. When conducting in 4/4 time do you beat:

- A. Up, down, Left, Right
- B. Down, Right, Left, Up
- C. Right, Left, Up, Down
- D. Round and Round,
- E. Down, Left, Right, Up

- It is vital to get this question right. The correct answer is, of course 'E'. However, in a sense, there are *two* correct answers. Many of the great Maestri, both past and present, with the best will in the world, can either get lost or forget which beat of the bar they should be on (especially in a bar containing more than two beats). Should this happen to you, the standard emergency procedure as quoted in '**LETS BEAT IT**' by **Hans Vericlever** (see 'year one reading list') states that it is quite acceptable to go 'round and round' as long as you stop when the music stops. You will not lose marks for choosing this answer.

2. If you make a mistake with the beat during rehearsals do you:

- A. Stop and apologise to the orchestra.
- B. Pretend you were going to stop there anyway in order to make a point about something.
- C. Pick out some kind of 'rhythmic problem' (which was probably just about to happen anyway).

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2. Subito Piano: | A. Slash | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Crouch | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. Wobble | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Accelerando: | A. Choo Choo | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Hop Hop | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. Shake Shake | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The Final chord: | A. Double handed side slash | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Single handed upthrust | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. The Windmill | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Slow, quiet opening: | A. Eyes shut with shrug | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Double pearly quiver | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. Suck lemon with wobble | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Tragic Passages: | A. Shoulder hunch with claws | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Head back posture with eyes shut | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. Knee bend with wing flaps | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Scherzando: | A. Double hop with stab | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Tickle with skip | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. The Flying toupee | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. The Up beat: | A. Skip and twitch | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Two handed jab | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. The Tennis serve | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Rallentando: | A. Row the boat | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. The Snake charmer | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. The Knee bend | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Waltz time: | A. Knit-pic-flick | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Hup-two-three | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. Hop-scotch | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Crescendo: | A. Fast skiing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | B. Standing up in a hammock | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | C. Canoeing the rapids | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Part Two: The History of Conducting

1. A) Which late 19th century conductor could no longer rehearse while seated following the well documented ‘I’ll show you an up-bow’ incident, involving a viola player, during a discussion about the use of ‘flying spiccato’?

B) ‘Flying spiccato’ bowing is rarely used these days. Describe the significance of this in relation to part ‘A’ of this question.

 - It may be useful to draw some simple anatomical diagrams to illustrate your answer.

2. Over the last four centuries the baton has been getting progressively smaller. Outline the evolution, up to and including the ‘carbon fibre hyper performance sports batonette’, as used by Rushdie Larsbah with the Delhi Sinfonia.

3. Can you name three conductors who have ‘done time’?
 - This is a very difficult question that is still being hotly debated amongst the most eminent musicologists. Of course it is possible to extract more than one meaning from the phrase ‘done time’. It is fair to say that all conductors *can*, most conductors *should*, other conductors *will*, while some conductors *have already*, no conductors are *exempt*, but a few conductors should be *excused*.

4. Which conductor who, in the early years of the 20th century, was quoted as saying ‘Find me an orchestra who can count, and I’ll show you a conductor who can beat them?’
 - This is probably an apocryphal quote. There are (as you may well imagine) numerous maestri who would *like* to have gone down in history as having said it.

5. Describe the many reasons, highlighting in particular the health and safety aspects, of why conductors *face* the orchestra but have their *backs* to the audience.

- This is an emotive topic upon which much historical and forensic research is still being carried out following the alarming number of tragic accidents that have occurred during the last century alone, and indeed further back still. It is worth illustrating your answer with examples highlighting the risks conductors' face when *turning their backs* on the orchestra, particularly since the introduction of the steel cello spike. It is also worth making the point that double-reed instrumentalists rarely go anywhere without a formidable collection of razor-sharp knives, which can easily be concealed in tailcoat pockets. Do not be afraid to stick your neck out and make assumptions here – no conductor worth their salt ever got anywhere without making assumptions, sweeping generalisations, and uninformed conclusions.

6. Historically, conductors have always had to be paid considerably more than the musicians whom they conduct. Justify this in terms of the prohibitive cost of batons as compared to (for instance) a violin or a contra bassoon.

- This question is very straightforward and should not pose too many problems.

7. How many conductors can you name who have, on the strength of their personality alone, made inspired 'on the spur of the moment' improvements to the symphonic repertoire during *actual performances*?

- This is, of course, an admirable quality and one that is greatly to be encouraged in all young conductors. The answer is, of course, **all of them**. The only sad drawback tends to be the lamentable inability of many orchestras to follow these maestri when they are possessed of these great creative flashes of inspiration. Needless to say, one must always emphasise the outstanding courage it takes to improve the repertoire in

this way. This is one of the quintessential qualities that set conductors apart from musicians.

Part Three: Musicianship

1. During a performance when the orchestra are not playing together, what do you do?

- A. Follow whoever is playing the loudest.
- B. Follow whoever is playing the fastest.
- C. Adopt the 'emergency procedure beat' (which resembles chopping up a log).
- D. Leave the orchestra to get on with it, while you continue to look serene in the knowledge that they will get the blame and not you.
- There are numerous 'emergency procedure beats' (refer to **'THE CONDUCTOR'S POCKET BATON GUIDE'** volume three, published by Connem Press Plc) and a skilled conductor knows many of them. Suffice it to say, they are all variations on a similar theme, namely they create a visual diversion. This is a very useful weapon in the conductor's armoury for many reasons, but mostly it focuses the audience's attention back onto the 'Maestro', where it should be, and thus away from the orchestra who should, as we all know, remain in the background.

2. When asked about how to interpret a certain passage do you...

- A. Ask the leader or other musicians what they think.
- B. Toss a coin to decide.

C. State that you have spent many weeks in Vienna studying the original manuscript in the vaults of the Musikkraphaus and have decided to follow the composer's instruction to the letter.

- A fairly obvious choice – or so it would seem. However, leaders have a tendency to browbeat conductors if they get half a chance. Be warned. Do not be intimidated into giving in to lesser egos. Remember that the composer's word is always final (even if the composer was unaware of his words).

There will be times when you are going to have to speak for the composer yourself (not least when he's been dead for a hundred and fifty years). This is part of your destiny.

- There is much wisdom in the sentiments of the great British conductor Sir Antiphony (the Slasher) Hammerbeat **'The only good bloody composer is a bloody well dead composer. Same again Archie and make it a double this time you tight fisted scoundrel'**.

3. When asked by a viola player what note they should have in bar so and so, do you...

A. Try to work out the impossible notation of the 'alto clef' (a clef designed to strike terror into the hearts of all conductors).

B. Turn the question around by asking the viola principal what he thinks it should be.

C. Stall for time by saying: 'Well, I should have thought it were obvious'.

D. Suggest playing it both ways slowly and see which one they like the best, then show them who's boss by choosing the other one.

E. Or maybe some completely new approach. Please elaborate.

- Here is a very pertinent point. It was thought, when we lived in more superstitious times, that the 'alto clef' was the work of the devil. These

days we realise that even viola players cannot read it, so there is really nothing to be feared from questions such as this one. The important point to remember here, and the reason why they ask these types of questions with such predictable regularity, is that there is a complex game of tactics which viola players never tire of. The object of which is to ‘score one’ over the conductor, and if they can’t score off the conductor then they try to score points off each other. It has become a lifetime obsession for many viola players.

4. In the world of the recording studio name the ‘Six Things’ that can go wrong with ‘A Take’.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

- On the face of it there would seem to be an infinite number of things that can go wrong during a recording session. This is a fallacy that is (luckily) taking a lot of killing and is being perpetuated not, on this occasion by the orchestra, but by those strange zombie-like beings, the sound technicians, who spend most of their lives underground and shun daylight.

The reality of it is this.

You must do a retake if...

1. There was a wrong note.
2. It was not together.
3. The balance was wrong.
4. It was too fast/slow/loud/soft.
5. There was some extraneous noise.
6. Some complex technical problem beyond the comprehension of humble musicians.

- A wise producer will choose which excuse is most plausible, but will also keep them fairly evenly rotated for the duration of the session. Repeating the same one over and over tends to make the orchestra suspicious; they may end up thinking their time is being wasted. Needless to say, the technicians *know* their time is being wasted. The orchestra cannot win (this is the beauty of the recording studio). It is terrific money for the conductor (plus a few more ‘knighthood points’), and also for the producer and record company, while all the time it is the orchestra who do all the work. Life can hardly get much better than that.

Part Four: Life within the Orchestra

1. What do you do when you secure a principal conductorship?

This is a dream come true for any conductor. However, now you’ve got the job how do you stop the dream becoming a nightmare? Quote the list ‘The first five things to do when you secure the appointment’ from the book by Count Grandarsio Del Potsofdosh from the chapter titled ‘Orchestras – Can’t live with them, can’t live without them’

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- Although you shouldn’t take too literally what the Count writes in this chapter, the list runs thus:
 1. Make a friendly opening speech; tell the orchestra you’re on their side, together we’ll go on to better and better things, I didn’t take the job for the money (the very idea!).
 2. Chop off a few heads to show the musicians who is in charge.

3. Start spending the orchestra's money on new and better facilities for the players (and, of course, for yourself). Don't be put off by those members who say they would rather have the money themselves instead of the facilities because their families are starving. They are only joking.
 4. Create an elite secret police from certain players whom you can trust to keep the others under control.
 5. Above all, enjoy yourself.
- There is a heart-warming story in the famous volume of anecdotes by the great American conductor Art Z Beetbashe the Third. In this he describes how very important it is to 'step down' from time to time and meet the players socially (indeed almost as an equal). He recalls a second violinist lamenting that he'll never get the kitchen decorated before the birth of his sixth child as they were being worked to death (notwithstanding the satisfaction the orchestra was enjoying from the sales of their complete box set of symphonic works by the inmates of Alcatraz). Art was able to say that he totally sympathised as he himself had four kitchens (at the last count, in New York, Paris, London, Vienna, Tokyo and Las Vegas). The message which we must never lose sight of here, is always be ready to *bond* with your players in this way. It can achieve a far more profound effect on orchestra morale than any number of pay rises.

2. Difficult choices.

You have to fit in a series of recordings with your orchestra. However, the only available slot would involve cancelling their annual leave. Discuss the merits of the three tried and tested methods listed below.

- A. Give them the 'I could never have done all this without your help and support' speech. (Refer to the book, '**YOU OWE IT ALL TO ME**' by Ima Plönke.)

- B. Get them on your side by pointing out how much richer the orchestra and its conductor will be if this all goes ahead.
- C. Point out it is a ‘never to be missed’ opportunity to bring to the world the greatly underrated symphonic music of ‘Mozart, aged between eighteen months and three and a half years’ (surely one of the world’s great child prodigies), in this version arranged for massive symphony orchestra plus rock band by Ike N Zing who has just branched out from heavy metal into classical music, a partnership that will be mutually beneficial to all.

3. Can you please everyone in an orchestra?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Who cares?
- D. Why?

- This is an unusual question. Why was it included in the exam? Do not be too surprised if you get a trick question like this in your finals. It may have been put there to test your *reaction and attitude* rather than to test your knowledge. The mind of the conductor must be highly trained *never* to do the obvious, but *always* to think at a tangent. The great French maestro Gaston Perriér, when greeted by the orchestral manager one morning, replied with an elegant flourish: ‘Oui, the sunshine reminds me of my virginity’. It is always a good policy to keep a stock of esoteric phrases akin to this to remind others that you are not like ordinary men.

Part Five: Mathematics

If a crotchet is worth ‘ten pence’ what would be the value of:

- | | | |
|----|-------------------|-------|
| A. | A Minim | _____ |
| B. | A Semibreve | _____ |
| C. | A Dotted Crotchet | _____ |
| D. | A Dotted Minim | _____ |

What are the missing numbers in these sequences?

1 - 2 - ? - 4

? - 2 - 3 - 4

1 - 2 - 3 - ?

Part Six: Expression

Conducting is an entirely visual art form, and in this day and age, where the television camera can bring your face into the audience's living rooms, there has never been a more important time to perfect the art of facial expression.

By practising for three hours each day in front of the mirror you will, by now have acquired the extraordinary degree of control over your facial muscles that is essential to conducting.

Taking your answers from 'THE ART OF CONDUCTING WITH YOUR HANDS TIED BEHIND YOUR BACK' by Stéphan Payneful. (Tick the correct box for each expression).

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | Fortissimo: | A. Snarl | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. Wobbly jowls | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. Dancing eyebrows | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | Appassionato: | A. Frown | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. Tongue in cheek | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. Smouldering eyes | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Piu Mosso: A. My head is falling off
 B. Nod Nod
 C. Suck in cheeks
4. Nobilmente: A. Glassy eyes
 B. What's that on the ceiling?
 C. I'm falling asleep
5. Con Brio: A. Yes, Yes, Yes
 B. No, No, No
 C. Whoop!
6. The Climax: A. My finger's in the power point
 B. Grrrrrrr
 C. Arrrrrgh
7. Subito Piano: A. I've swallowed a football!
 B. That tasted sour
 C. I just bit my tongue!
8. Largamente: A. Look at my tonsils
 B. Dreamy
 C. Steamy
9. Molto diminuendo: A. My teeth just fell out
 B. Whoa there boy
 C. Emergency stop
10. Accelerando: A. I'm going to be sick
 B. I'm having a seizure
 C. Help, I'm drowning
11. Cueing the chorus: A. The Guppy
 B. The Vampire
 C. Eyebrows up

Part Seven: Modern Music

1. **Contemporary composers like to write music with odd bar lengths like 13/16 or 25/32 and so on. Choose the correct beating pattern from each of the following:**

- | | | | | |
|----|------|----|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | 6/8 | A. | Down and around | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. | Once around and back | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. | Up and up again | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | 5/8 | A. | Three-legged march time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. | One-and-a-twoooooo | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. | Over-arm, under-arm | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | 5/4 | A. | Tiddly-tum-tum, tiddle-tum | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. | One, two, three, foooooour | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. | Down, swish, swish, hup two | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | 11/4 | A. | Kung fu | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. | Karate | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. | Tae kwon do | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | 3/16 | A. | The fast deal | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. | Shadow boxing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. | The facial tick | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. | 7/8 | A. | The Long John Silver | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | B. | Knees bent and over we go | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | C. | Ants in the pants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- So why, you may well be asking, do they do it - why can't everything be in 2/4 time like it is supposed to be? This is one of the few topics upon which both the players and conductor actually agree.

- The sad fact about composers these days is that they all believe that writing weird time signatures all over the score makes the music critics of the press think they are intellectual. Not only is this a very naive notion, but it fails to recognise that many music critics are in fact failed composers themselves, and would like nothing better than to add another name to the list. Always remember during your darkest hours, as you slash your way through another first and last performance, that what the critics and public really want to see is some flashy baton technique.
- Also (while we are on the subject) beware of composers who think they can conduct (unless, of course, if they happen to be knighted). Strange as it may seem, there is *no death penalty* for this crime. Although the up side is that after the orchestra has had a fortnight of trying to explain to a composer/conductor which end of the baton to hold and which end the notes come out of, they may actually be genuinely glad to see you.

2. You have to rehearse a score for the first time. Each page is the size of a double-decker bus, the notes are micro-dot size, and every bar has a different time signature. What are the first three things you do before the orchestra even plays a note?

- This is a pretty scary scenario for any conductor to find himself in. However, the art of ‘shifting the blame’, as discussed in chapter 96 of ‘**THE CONDUCTOR’S REVENGE**’ by Hugo De Surlygit, lists a pre-rehearsal procedure, thus:
 1. Inform the orchestra that the score only arrived from the publisher’s six minutes ago, and the ink is literally still wet.
 2. Explain that you were on the phone to the composer last night for eight hours and, not only have had no sleep, but could not understand a syllable of what he said since you are not very familiar with his particular dialect of South-Western M’bulaländ.

3. Let the orchestra know that if we work well you can see no reason why we shouldn't finish this piece in twenty minutes, rather than the scheduled fifteen hours, and also have the next day off as well.
- Here are three very important tactics that all conductors should know.
 - The first point shifts the blame onto the composer for being lazy and not finishing his score in time, then onto the publisher for not getting it printed sooner, and finally onto the postal service for delivering it late. But, most importantly, it also absolves you from any blame for the utter mess which this new work is certain to be.
 - The second point states that, although music is supposed to be a universal language, the truth is that only composers who speak English (and are preferably knighted) are worthy of being universally understood. You might even get the sympathy vote from some players who were listening when you recounted your long night on the phone - but don't bet on it.
 - The third, and in many ways, the most important point, will get the orchestra on your side. The bribe of an early finish is a great motivating force in their lives. There is nothing quite like it to sharpen their awareness, their skill, their concentration and musicianship. All this means that the music (which probably sounds like a disco in an abattoir even when it is played correctly) will in no way suffer. Indeed, the concentration from the orchestra will be such that you won't really need to conduct at all - just the occasional gesture of encouragement to whoever is playing the loudest will do. Let's face it, the audience is going to hate the piece anyway, so if it falls apart in the concert, just pretend that it has actually finished. (It's all in the book.)
3. **You are about to premier a new violin concerto with a renowned soloist in a prestigious venue. Sadly, the soloist will know the work intimately, and you only saw the score yesterday. How are you going to: a) keep things together, and: b) upstage the soloist?**

- Now, here's a strange law of nature. The orchestra's sympathies are more likely to lie with *you* than with the soloist. Why? Surely they hate you, don't they?

Well, yes *and* no. The one thing you can always rely upon in an orchestra is their devotion to time-honoured tradition. They hate you because it is traditional, not just because it's personal, and it is tradition that takes precedent. However, there is one thing they hate even more than their conductor, and that is an outsider. So, rest assured, if the soloist takes any liberties, trespasses on your domain as figurehead of the orchestra, says something critical about any player, or even tries to make a joke, then the orchestra can give the soloist a very hard time indeed. If that is not job satisfaction, then I don't know what is.

- Needless to say, any attempt the soloist makes to correct you when you make a mistake will stir up the emotions of the players like a grenade in a hornet's nest. And the rest you can do by employing your acting skills:
 1. Look disdainfully at the soloist while he tunes up. Let the audience know that that was a less accurate job than we are accustomed to working with. Wait until he's finished tuning, then ask the first oboe player to give him another 'A' and invite him to have another try.
 2. Wait until he is ready to start, raise your baton, hold for twenty seconds, and then stop because your concentration was spoiled by a cough in the auditorium.
 3. Get very emotional while he is playing. He obviously knows the work better than you (or indeed anyone, since he's been practising it for six hours a day for the last ten months) but you are 'the maestro', and he must know that your inspiration and feeling for the music transcends all earthly considerations. You are above him - on a spiritual sphere. Also, if you wave, flap, and sway about with enough abandon, it will really distract him, as well as keeping all eyes on you where they are supposed to be. The public and press are bound to hate the music (as if what the world really needs is yet another violin

concerto), but they will be swept away by your choreography and passion.

4. **How to handle a composer.**

It's a typical rehearsal scenario, but with the added discomfort of having a composer breathing down your neck and getting in the way. Suggest some of the methods of keeping composers under control as described in 'THE MODERN COMPOSER, FRIEND OR FOE' by Euwa Posthumous

- It is never very pleasant having someone around who thinks he knows more about it than you. Once again, help will come when least expected from the orchestra. Especially from the percussion section. Of course, percussionists are not really musicians, since they spend all day hitting things (and that is *not* music. Unlike the obvious artistry of swishing a baton around in the air). However, they seem to enjoy a certain status within the group dynamic (no joke intended). And, due largely to the mind-boggling array of percussion instruments within the modern orchestra which they, and only they, understand how to produce any sound from (if you don't believe me, try asking yourself what to do with a wet sponge, a packet of polos and a pair of fluffy dice in Mahler's Eighth symphony), it is quite clearly beyond the comprehension of all, but another percussionist, as to what to do in all that chaos of bells, bars, drums, rattles, sticks, shakers, pans, blocks, jingles, slings, pings, tings, dings, and other horrid devices.
- Composers, once again in their struggle to appear both knowledgeable and creative, have been including, against all common sense, more and more percussion in their symphonic output, until quite frequently as much as half the platform space is taken up with what looks like a stock-take in a breaker's yard. The concept of 'Less is more' somehow never really made it into symphonic music. So you will find, during rehearsals, without any prompting from you, that percussionists will punctuate proceedings with really awkward questions, fired rapidly at the composer, about what on earth he intends them to do with so-and-so instrument. And, like a dog

wanting his stick to be thrown, it is a game in which they need little encouragement and from which they never grow weary.

- The effect this has on the composer is truly demoralising to the point that one can almost feel sorry for them, until you remember what this latest commission is costing the orchestra. So it is a very brave or foolhardy composer who attends more than one rehearsal session. They prefer to slink off and carry on with being '*misunderstood*' and '*ahead of their time*' on their own.

Examination time: Three hours
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