Chapter Five: Do's and Don't's

So here you are standing before your orchestra; all eyes are on you; everyone is waiting for you to say and do something.
What?

You must create a good impression; they should like you, respect you; look up to you, even admire you, notice your designer shoes and your Swiss watch (which you should wear wrong-way-up to look casual), they must share your enthusiasm for the work, be eager to start making music. Now take another look around the orchestra.

Some are preparing themselves for the rehearsal by opening their newspapers. Others are furrowing their brows and sucking their pencils as they ponder the crossword puzzle. Many of the second violins are yawning because they only went to bed an hour ago, then had to get to the studio in order to carry on with their night's sleep during the rehearsal.* A few players have struck up conversations with those in another section - although inter-section communication is not particularly common whilst in the rehearsal studio. And many are looking at their watches, giving them a shake to see if they are still working, while trying to calculate if the timings of the repertoire will allow an early finish.

Certainly there is an air of expectation. They are speculating whether you might be the species of conductor who runs it through once, tidies up a couple of rough passages, then says:

'Well that was fine, it wouldn't do to over rehearse would it'?…The traditional response to which would be a chorus of 'hear-hear' accompanied by wise shakes of the head in sage agreement. Then the speed at which a rehearsal studio can empty is totally staggering. Between the words: '*thank*' and '*you*', the place will have completely

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* A frequently posed question: 'What is the difference between a *first* violin and a *second* violin'?
Answer: The instrument is the same in every detail, but the players keep very different hours. Musicologists have suggested that, as a result, *second* violinists are in the process of evolving into a new human sub-species. See 'Soundie', Chapter Six.

emptied, and the only noticeable movement will be the dust settling with the odd music copy fluttering to the floor and an eerie silence all around. One is left wondering if the rehearsal really happened at all, or whether you simply dreamed it.

As with many technical tasks, there is a right way to achieve your goal, and possibly a thousand wrong ways. Saying what you mean is definitely one of the wrong ways. For example, you are about to rehearse Brahms' first symphony in which the trombones only play in the fourth and final movement…

Right way: *Gentlemen of the trombones (and charming lady too) as Brahms saw fit to save the best till last by introducing you only in the finale. We shall not be requiring your expertise until 11.30am. So please do me the honour of accepting this fifty-pound-note to purchase for yourselves a nice cup of coffee to enjoy while you relax – Oh, and do please keep the change.*

The trombone section will be your friends for life.

Wrong way: *Okay, since there are no trombones in the first three movements, and since they are a bunch of lazy, overpaid social misfits, they can start making themselves useful for a change by turning pages for the violins instead of loafing about and pissing everyone off.*

You will be expelled so fast from the studio your feet won't even touch the ground.

Sweating: Try not to do it too much in rehearsals. If necessary change your shirt between sessions. You may, of course, perspire as much as you wish during performances – indeed it should be considered mandatory.

Showing off: You shouldn't need to affirm your superiority by punctuating your conversation with quotes from Shakespeare, or references to the Greek classics. Don't pitch your language too high over the players' heads.

There was a French conductor by the name of Louis de Grandtête (1905-) whose particular speciality was quoting Latin phrases he had

gleaned from a guidebook. He thought it made him look intellectual since he had had some success with the ladies when employing certain Latin chat-up lines. Unfortunately, there was a second flautist who happened to be something of a Latin scholar. He thought it would be courteous to reply in kind. Alas, Louis found himself to be quite out of his depth, and ended up the laughing stock of the assembled orchestra.

Louis de Grandtête.

Word got around on the orchestral 'grapevine' (which travels at roughly the same velocity as light) and before he knew it, every orchestra he visited started speaking to him in Latin. It was such a humiliation that he retired from music altogether, bought a small French village with two-hundred-and-eighty-thousand acres of prime vineyards, married a beautiful Prussian Countess and became a wine multi-millionaire. But I don't think he was ever truly happy. (See appendix.)

Quoting: It is not a bad idea, on the other hand, to insert, by way of diversion, a few relevant quotes by composers. It should provide the musicians with a clearer insight into the repertoire, while helping to keep their interest stimulated. Be sure, though, to keep in mind the list of 'Attention-spans' (page 32), and not allow yourself to get too carried away for fear of losing the players' concentration.

Another trick is to invent quotes, and attribute these to the composer. It is usually prudent policy to ensure the composer is dead, otherwise he may (should word inadvertently get back to him) deny having said it, which would be an embarrassment (or worse), although there is a strong chance that, even in such an event, and should your fictional quote be a witty one, he will most likely be more than happy to take credit for it having said it. You can, of course, say whatever you wish - and who is going to disagree with you? This is a trick we have stolen from the music critic (the lowest form of life on earth). There is a poetic irony in employing the tactics of our worst enemy and putting it to profitable and creative use.

Singing: Don't sing to the orchestra if you happen to possess a trained singing voice.* Strange thing to say I know - but why?

If you have a good voice then subconsciously, in the minds of the players, you will become a singer (heaven forbid), which will be, in effect, an instant demotion from your rank as 'Field Marshal' to that of roughly 'Sergeant'. Sing by all means - but be sure to sing as badly as you know how. This is, of course, a subject taught at conducting college where all students have to pass their 'elementary', 'intermediate' and 'advanced' *singing badly* exams before they may commence with their third-year conducting training. It is, nevertheless, a sound policy to

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* Conductors sing to better illustrate a musical point and to demonstrate its usage within the orchestration. Conductors therefore try to sing in a parody of the instrument, or instruments in question. So avoid using 'La la' as a note, but preferably a subtle combination of soft consonants and vowels. If you are fluent in 'Tonic sol-fa' (Do, Re, Me, etc.) then that is acceptable, but don't over do it (see showing off).

Example: Beethoven's Fifth Symphony – Ta te te Tarr.
Eine kleine Nachtmusik – Dum, de dum, de dum-de-dum-dum Dum.
Holst's 'The Planets' – Tiddly tum tum tiddle tum.

practice your bad singing regularly (I would recommend the traditional bath or shower as being a fitting location), and to take the odd refresher lesson from time to time.

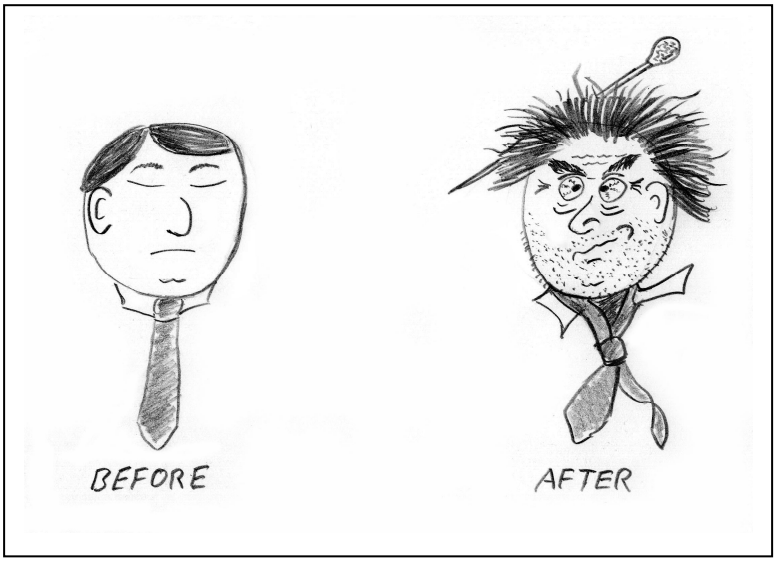
Foot tapping: It is not considered very clever, unless you are demonstrating complicated cross-rhythms. Try not to indulge. It can easily become a bad habit.

Tapping your baton: Too much of this can cause irritation amongst the players. Also it can cause your baton to 'earth' itself (see baton failure, chapter two).

Loose change: Keys and other odds and ends should not be piled up at the base of the podium. As soon as your back is turned they will vanish.

Hair Care: Don't over do it. Your average musician likes to behold an *artist* before them. You must be a little wild in appearance; wind-swept, noble, haunted by the music, at the mercy of your emotions, your heart on your sleeve. Much of this can be encompassed within your hairstyle. The best policy (and I'm referring to the younger conductors who may still have hair) is to begin a rehearsal or concert in a well groomed condition, but by the end you must look as if you have spent three months on a bleak island, surviving on raw shell fish and seaweed. It will go down a treat with the ladies of the orchestra who can never resist a man who is driven thus by his passion.

Tantrums: Rule one – never lose your temper! Trying as it may be at times working with a collection of troglodytes who are social throw-backs from a bygone era when the world was young and the only chat-up-line was a smart tap on the head with your trusty club (possibly the forerunner of the baton), you should never be tempted to stoop to the level of fighting fire with fire. That is not to say that you may never put on a display of extreme displeasure which, as you are doubtless aware, is taught as a subject at conducting college.



The importance of hair care.

The lectures by the Professor of *Practicable Idiosyncratic Social Studies* (known as P.I.S.S. classes), delivered by the eminent Doctor Cross (1919-), have always been keenly attended by young conducting scholars eager to project themselves as the stern and forbidding maestro. So popular have these classes become, that the enthusiastic conducting student would seldom take a 'Piss off' except under the most unavoidable of circumstances. A fitting tribute to their success.

Doctor Cross has many fine and distinctive qualities that have made him an invaluable member of the conducting educational establishment.

His brilliant musical career was interrupted during the war when he was called up to serve his country on the battlefield. And it was while there that he single-handedly took an entire regiment of the enemy as prisoner without firing a single shot. Then, after hostilities had ceased, he was rightly honoured with a medal for his extreme bravery. Exactly how he was able to accomplish this heroic deed is only a mystery to those who are not aquatinted with him.

Doctor Cross, even from his earliest childhood, has possessed the extraordinarily well developed facial musculature, equivalent to that of an Olympic athlete which, together with the exceptional degree of control normally attributed to the hands of a brain surgeon has empowered him with the ability to change expression with effortless precision. Even during his childhood, his demeanor of stern command attracted the utmost respect from his rowdy classmates; a hush would descend on the room when he entered, his teachers would apologize to him if they were forced to give him anything less than the highest marks, begging him to show understanding for the position they were in.

Thus he excelled in everything he undertook. He could, indeed, have chosen any career path he desired. There is no doubt in my mind that, should he have wished it, he could have been a great statesman, Shakespearean actor or leading member of the plutocracy. The way he has wisely chosen to immortalize himself, however, is as a great maestro. And the secret of his success is undoubtedly in his countenance.

Having heard the many eyewitness accounts (as well as having watched him in action before an orchestra), I can well visualize the scene that took place on the battlefield. The noise, the smoke, death and fear all around, and into this ugly theatre of war enters Doctor Cross.

Immediately, the guns fell silent; one look at the expression of stern displeasure on his face and the soldiers of both armies stood still, holding their breath, and waiting in trepidation for his pronouncement. Then quite calmly, with not a flicker to betray his emotions, and without needing to raise his voice, he gave his instructions to the troops of both sides who instantly fell over themselves to be seen to obey. The enemy weapons were handed in, magazines emptied and neatly stowed away. Then the enemy soldiers were lined up and inspected by Doctor Cross.

Interestingly, now that our nations are living in harmony once more, I have had the pleasure of meeting three of those same enemy soldiers who were present at the time, but have since taken up the life of the orchestral musician and beaten their swords (as it were) into respectively, a flute, contra-bassoon, and cello. And they all say the same thing: They had faced many dangers hitherto, but for them Doctor Cross was the single most unnerving experience of the whole war.

Of course, not everyone can achieve the charisma of Doctor Cross, but it is something to keep in mind on those inevitable numerous occasions when your patience has been sorely tested. Try imagining how the esteemed doctor would handle the situation, then do your utmost to emulate him.

The Media:

The Times:

Royal Albert Hall

A packed hall greeted the Manhattan Symphony Orchestra under their ex-patriot principal conductor Cedric Chopper for last night's concert; the first in their European touring itinerary. The opening work, by the young American composer Zak Foreboding the Third, took the appreciative audience on a roller-coaster ride of frenetic wind and brass writing. The work, which the composer said was inspired by his first trip to a Ball Game with his Uncle at the age of nine, displayed much of the snappy quirkiness that has become a hallmark of contemporary American music since Copland and Bernstein. Also in the first half was Beethoven's Violin concerto played with competence rather than brilliance by rising American virtuoso Julie Ard. The well-polished performance of Brahms' mighty Third Symphony showed Chopper's European influence on the American ensemble with sensitive handling and refreshingly few clichés keeping the music clean and alive even in the slow passages.

The Sun:

'Ard luck Beethoven'

"I've always been good at fingering and position changing" drawled American beauty and fiddle playing pin-up Juile Ard. There's no doubt about that! - cold showers all round at the Albert Hall last night after she wowed the fans with her dangerously low-cut designer dress. "It's just something I picked up in Harrods before the rehearsal" said Julie with a little giggle. There were certainly a few blokes in the audience who wouldn't mind sharing the same fate. Julie is touring the 'Old World' with the US classical band the MSO. "What is it like being on the road with all those men"? I asked her. "Oh they're a swell bunch of guys". If Julie gives music lessons then *count me in.*

One performance – two somewhat different reviews.
What is it we want the public to know about our music and ourselves?

And what is likely to happen if we unwittingly surrender control to the media? Careers have been made or ruined through the press, television, recordings, and to some degree radio.

It is important, first and foremost, to realize the motivation within *every* media organization. There is a simple order of priorities:

1. *Money*
1. Competition
3. *Money*
4. Sensationalism
5. *Money*
6. Information
7. *Money*
8. Accuracy (optional)
9. *Money*
10. Impartiality (optional)

This is as true at every level – be it the little news hound (*Yorkshire Terrier*) of the local free advertiser, or the huge multinational (*Tyrannosaurus Rex*) media empires. If the aforementioned ten items were a chain, then its continuing survival would largely be dependent upon the integrity of its weakest link. Never forget they will do absolutely anything to sell papers.

Lurking in the shadows of the auditorium will be that demon from hell, the music critic. As previously mentioned in the first chapter, it is worth taking the pains to treat him well if you get the chance. Go to the trouble of inviting the critic personally (via a pretty lady in the orchestra's administration team) to the concert, rather than take potluck with whomever the paper has to spare that particular evening. In time you (via she) will develop a relationship with two or three in particular, and can then request them in person. Your average critic is not above flattery, and can be cajoled, flattered, or wined and dined into a state of agreeable cordiality.

There is one very effective trick-of-the-trade that you may wish to employ. Music critics are in one sense like parrots; they have the knack

of picking up a phrase or sentence and regurgitating it (so to speak) later on. So how does this help you and your concert?

You and your administration team will most likely know the critics by sight. Plant a couple of your trusted staff in the auditorium close to the critic, then, when the opportunity presents itself, let them have an appreciative conversation about the music. Make sure he can overhear them and, most importantly of all, have them use *lots* of long and obscure technical musical terminology, generously laced with superlatives.

For example:

Plant 1: What exquisitely sensitive handling of the dynamics in the sonataesque contrasting second subject.

Plant 2: Yes, and how cleverly he created a synthesis of the thematic motifs in the recapitulation bringing the final codetta to such an emotionally fulfilling cadence.

Plant 1: Absolutely, rather than simply a thematic and enharmonic inversion of the exposition.

Plant 2: It is quite extraordinary to hear such breadth of expression and such profound insight in repertoire from the Second Viennese School these days. Dodecaphonic writing can succeed when it is this well interpreted.

Plant 1: I particularly liked the sensitive linear handling of the contrapuntally juxtaposed motifs during the retrograde fugato section. Harkening back to Bach and the neo-Baroque - don't you agree?

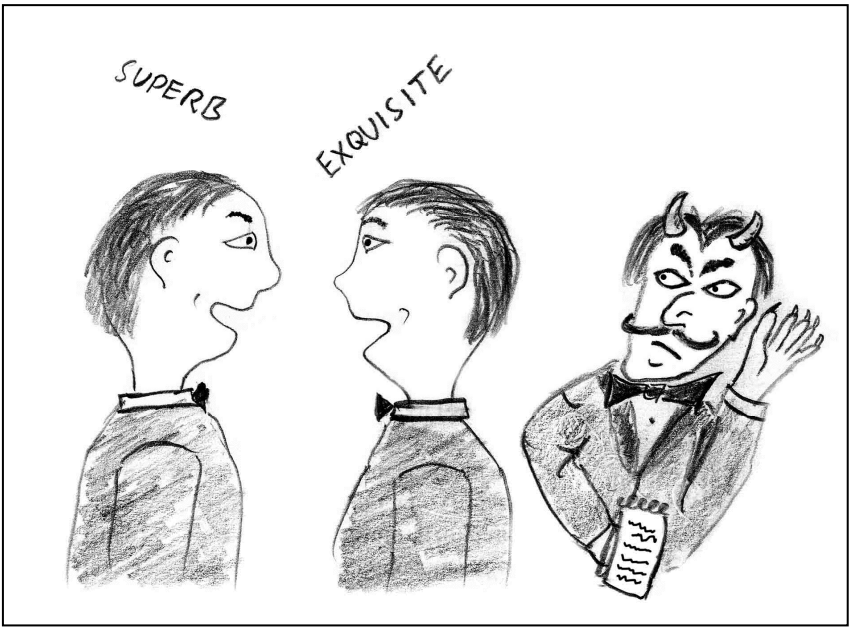
Plant 2: Indubitably, old boy. You took the words right out of my mouth.

Plant 1: It is so profoundly delectable to see a conductor who is also this faithful to the composer's dynamics and tempi.

Nuances such as these are undoubtedly the hallmark of true greatness.

Plant 2: Couldn't have put it better myself old boy.

He is unlikely to be able to resist. All you have to do is pick up the newspaper tomorrow, read his column, and see it repeated virtually word for word in print.



Enticing a music critic.

Apologies: As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, there is not really such a thing as a mistake with the baton - just *degrees of rightness* as we more appropriately regard it. So, if and when the baton does not always behave as it is supposed to, and seems to take on a sinister life of its own, you may chose to implement one of the many escape routes on offer. This is, of course, standard baton procedure. But what you must *never* do is apologize to the orchestra.

First, the chances are that no one noticed an error, or maybe only a few. So what happens if you apologize? – They *all* know you went wrong because you just went and told them you did. That was a very silly thing to do, wasn't it?

Secondly, keep in mind that an apology is an act of contrition; it is an admission of error prompted by guilt, and will, understandably, be construed by the orchestra as a sign of fallibility on your part. You will have lost the initiative, you will have sacrificed your statutory professional integrity through a gratuitous act of humility. You might as well take the orchestra's freely offered (though typically draconian) advice and 'go hang yourself' as being a quicker and arguably less stressful method of committing professional suicide.

The apology is the ultimate loss of face, and you will find it a real uphill struggle to regain your esteem in the eyes of the orchestra.

Dirty Shoes: Your feet will be at eye-level to the audience, need I say more.

Indecision: It is without doubt one of the deadliest of all the deadly sins a conductor can commit.

If a player asks you a question which you cannot answer, or, indeed, if you have even to *think* before answering, then your credibility will drain away with every second you take pondering the pro's and con's, or weighing up the for's and against's, or the why's and the wherefore's. You must keep in mind at all times the position you hold.

Here are the maestro's '**Ten Commandments**' which all conducting scholars should memorize:

I. You are the Maestro.
II. You know the music better than anyone (and that frequently includes the composer).
III. You understand the workings of the composer's mind (very often even when he doesn't).
IV. You understand the passions within his breast.
V. You have a clear insight into the spirit behind the music.

VI. You can read between the lines.*
VII. You are in touch with the source of inspiration that drives the creative artist relentlessly onwards.
VIII. You are in control and understand what needs to be addressed.
IX. And *only you* possess the wisdom, the knowledge and the experience to achieve the desired end.
X. It is *you* who hold the baton.

So what do you do when a player asks you a tricky question? – You answer *instantly.*

What, you may very well ask, do you do if you don't know the right answer? - Simple. You must *still* answer instantly.

Consider this. Much of the time the musicians like to play (or so they fondly imagine it to be) a game of cat-and-mouse with the conductor; trying to catch him out with awkward questions, trip him up with obscure technical terminology, snare him by pointing out inconsistencies within the score. Yet, to them it is only a game. However, on the other hand, they are all equally aware that the conductor's word is law. Whatever you say must be obeyed. Therefore, rather than the players harbouring resentment because of this, they would, in reality, rather play a phrase seemingly incorrectly than contradict the wishes of the conductor simply because the maestro's word always comes from above – it is his divine right. If a conductor says it must be played in such a way, then that is how it must be. For them, it would be equally a sin to disobey. Furthermore, it affords them some considerable comfort in the knowledge that, in executing your wishes, they are thence absolved from the overwhelming responsibility that is inextricably associated with that of interpreter of the often obscure notes they are expected to play. Musicians don't like to *think*, it tends to get in the way of the music. It goes without saying that you can always change your mind. Rather than making yourself appear indecisive it will, in reality, reinforce your position. They will be impressed that you have given the problem the sort of deep thought, the

* See example at end of chapter.

like of which, only you as conductor are capable. It will affirm to them that you are in constant communion with the spirit of the music, and can pass on its secrets to the players. They will look up to you.

Do not enter the studio too early:

Doubtless, eager as you are to get to work, you must, nevertheless, time your arrival in the studio to the second (see example in 'Showmanship and expression' – Chapter Two). The maestro's entrance should be an event, without which, it will be much harder to get the focus and attention you will require. Should you be early, then you will be forced to either socialize with the players, start talking about the repertoire before you want to, or (worst of all) get lobbied by the trombone section to completely re-arrange your rehearsal schedule, thus allowing them to go home before the rest of the orchestra. Beware - they can be very persuasive. The principal trombone will possess a list of conductor's who are regarded as a 'soft touch'. Do not allow your name to appear on it.

Do not fiddle with your clothing (especially your trouser fly) while in rehearsal. Keep in mind that all musicians are trained, from the earliest level, to watch what you do with your hands at all times. It will make them very nervous, resulting in poor concentration, should you conduct yourself in this fashion. There is a simple check list (learnt in the first year of conducting college) that will be your mantra prior to setting foot in the studio or on the concert platform:

Fly Buttons / Shiny Shoes / Watch and Tie /Score and Baton

The sight of an open zip during rehearsal will hold a hypnotic fascination for the musicians, similar in nature to that of a rabbit, frozen with fear, caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. Don't let yourself get caught. I did once. There is nothing to compare with the cold shiver of realization one experiences on discovering, some hours after the orchestra has disbanded, that your zip is gaping.

The Conducting Competition:

There are mixed opinions regarding the wisdom behind pitting one young conductor's artistry against that of another in the gladiatorial arena of the modern concert hall. Where, I ponder, is the artistic value in witnessing a single-handed contest between a lone young conductor and a ferocious symphony orchestra in a fight to the death? There must surely be a victor and a vanquished.

Take art for instance.

Would any serious art critic ever attempt to say who was the better artist when comparing, for instance, Leonardo Da Vinci with Vincent Van Gogh. Realistically, how can it be done? Would he go on to say that Leonardo held his brush with more style, or that Vincent's colours are more faithful to nature. Would the judges award them marks-out-of-ten for their work? The exercise would, quite obviously, be a futile one simply because their artistry lies in the spirit within the picture, and the means by which it was executed is in a style that is so individual that comparisons become irrelevant. Yet the conducting competition has, in the past, helped many a young conductor along the road to success, so maybe we should address some of the general do's and don**'t'**s – or rather, take heed to this spine chilling tale…

Stepping into a cage with any untamed wild animal is either a very brave or a very foolish thing to do. Stepping onto a concert platform occupied by ninety socially challenged troglodytes, attired in tailcoats, is not so very different.

All conductors have, at some time or another, experienced the sensation of brooding menace that can emanate, like a miasma, from the assembled orchestra and, in the arena of the conducting competition, this sense of foreboding becomes almost overpowering. Having heard the testimony of many (surviving) conducting competitors in the past, I can tell you that this tangible sensation of menace becomes heightened tenfold in this artificially competitive scenario. It may be due, in some part, to the added pressure and weight of responsibility on the shoulders of the competing conductor. Or, maybe (and this is the theory unto which I personally subscribe), the orchestra who, can quickly sense your

fear, will transform into a pack of frenzied hunting animals at the prospect of the smell and taste of the maestro's blood.

Here is a reasonably typical scenario.

You have just met the competition representative and the orchestral manager; your journey to the rehearsal venue was all well arranged, everything is laid on for you, and you are now standing outside the rehearsal studio armed only (as with sword and shield) with your trusty baton grasped in the one hand and your faithful, weighty, well thumbed, orchestral score tucked snugly under your arm. A quick prayer, once through the check-list (*Fly Buttons / Shiny Shoes / Watch and Tie /Score and Baton)*, and you are ushered into the lion's den. All eyes will be on you – fine so far, you were expecting this. But suddenly, where is that strange, unaccountable fear emanating from?

You are introduced to the players, they politely tap their stands in greeting – yet you are now beginning to experience a strange sensation of having stepped into a vacuum, the unreality of the situation is beginning to tug at your consciousness, you are beginning to feel strangely detached from reality as if you are looking down at yourself.

Something is not right. Gradually the hair on the back of you neck begins to stand on end – you hope no one can see it. Still - where is the threat you feel so strongly?

You have the feeling of being watched – well, of course you are being watched, indeed, all eyes are upon you – but this is not what you were expecting, not like anything you have ever felt before.

You look back over your shoulder. Nothing there – you say to yourself: 'This is silly, snap out of it, it is only a bloody orchestra for God's sake.'

You cast your eyes around the assembled players, across the strings, over to the woodwind, then the brass, and finally the percussion and harps. Something is wrong but you can't quite put your finger on it. Everything seems quite normal, everything is where it is supposed to be, however something is amiss. You are beginning to feel desperate now. The sense of menace is touching your pain threshold, it won't be ignored, your head is pounding and you are looking wildly about the room to catch sight of that elusive, yet tangible, threat which you perceive so strongly. You fight back the panic – get a grip, don't be

silly, you're holding a baton, what could possibly go wrong? – Unless, of course, you drop it. Your hand tightens. That's better, don't let your hand shake. Now let's make a start.

You place the score on the stand, open it to the first page – the notes look familiar and reassuring – old friends. Think of the many times you have conducted this piece in the past. You could easily do it in your sleep. Take a deep breath, calm down, raise your baton…

But then, suddenly, it hits you like a bolt of lightning. What did you say to yourself just now? What was it you were just thinking? Oh no, that's it…

'…Do it in your sleep'!

How could you have not noticed, how could you have been so stupid not to have realised? You stare at the orchestra in blind horror. And there, before you, is the menace, revealed at last, looking back at you with hungry eyes and slavering jaws, ready to spring, rend you apart and tear the flesh from your bones. All the players are *sitting up*. None of them are asleep, or reading newspapers, or talking amongst themselves, or fiddling with their music copies, or even removing bits of their instruments…

They're not asleep. They are all *CONCENTRATING!*

This has never happened before. Surely it is against the laws of nature. Orchestras do not normally behave like this. It is unnatural. What do you do?

As with all such scenarios, competitions will endeavour to create a safe, but competitive, arena by having judges and creating rules – but this, you realise in the horror of this exquisite moment, is all completely irrelevant. What you have woken up to is that it is not the panel of competition judges that will decide your fate, but the collective players of the orchestra will be your ultimate judge. Not only that, but they will (no doubt about it) try you, find you guilty, and then sentence you to die a terrible death.

This is what, with that dreadful, detached calm that comes at these extreme moments in one's life, you are realising. Suddenly everything is happening in slow motion. A thousand thoughts flash through your mind:

How could I have not realised? What could I have done to prevent this happening? How could I have foreseen it? How could I have been so stupid? I wish I'd become a plumber. I'm too young to end this way. Your life flashes before your eyes. Mummy!

WHATEVER DO I DO NOW?

You have no choice but to proceed. There is no turning back. Your fate is sealed and it is no longer in your hands. It lies in the hands of the untamed beast that crouches, ready to spring, before you.

Such is the conducting competition. You will never again be able to look upon an orchestra without seeing before you the threatening, hungry monster.

Toupees: These are the work of the devil.

Those gentlemen who suffer pangs of nostalgia for their long departed hair, will recklessly spend colossal sums on one of these, erroneously believing themselves to look decades younger the instant they slap them on their heads. Wrong. You will, at best, look like a very old looking younger person. And at worst like an old bald guy in a wig.

Conductors do not need such accessories. There are many fine conductors who have no hair at all but still regularly visit their local barbershop for a wax and polish. They do this for a number of reasons ranging from: a chance to escape from the wife, to a brief departure from reality and a few precious therapeutic moments in the barber's chair for a chat, but most importantly it is all we need, very often, to make us feel good about ourselves. It is all about self-esteem.

Perhaps, atypically, a conductors' ideal age (or that which, stereotypically, is perceived objectively as being synonymous with the height of the profession) would fall between sixty and eighty years. That being so, it is more often advisable to make yourself appear older, rather than the opposite.

We conductors tend to improve with age…

- The younger members of the profession must strive for the wild romantic appearance.

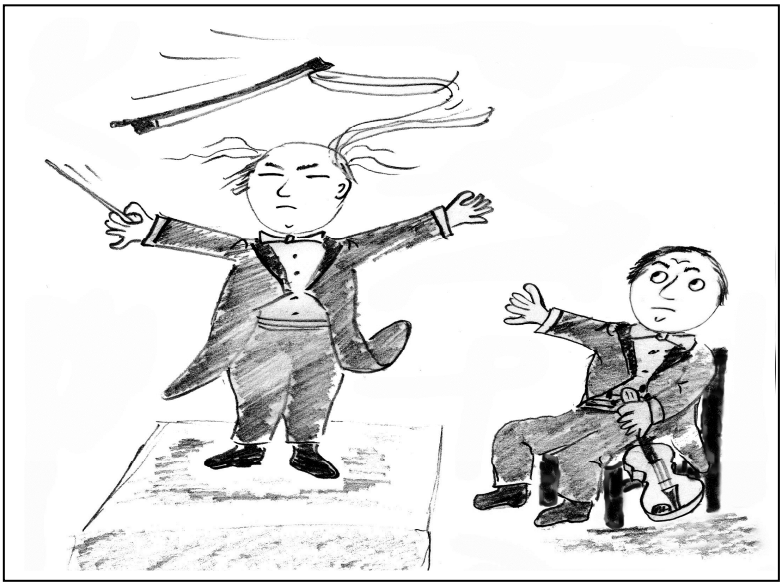
- The middle-aged members must aim for stern brooding

gravity.

- The senior members may indulge in eccentricity, charisma, even geniality at times.

But your hair must be allowed to go the way of all flesh, and die a natural death as nature intended.

The only thing that is worse than a toupee is the fashion for dragging your last strands of hair from above one ear, over your head and plastering them above the opposite ear. In a profession which involves a lot of vigorous head nodding, it is unlikely to stay in place for more than a few bars at best, and there is the further risk of getting entangled with the violin bows – I've witnessed just such an event…



The hazards of long hair.

The leader, who was playing with great gusto, had broken several of his long white bow hairs which danced about as he performed as if with a life of their own, which then became entangled with the maestro's equally long (and equally animated) strands of white hair. An

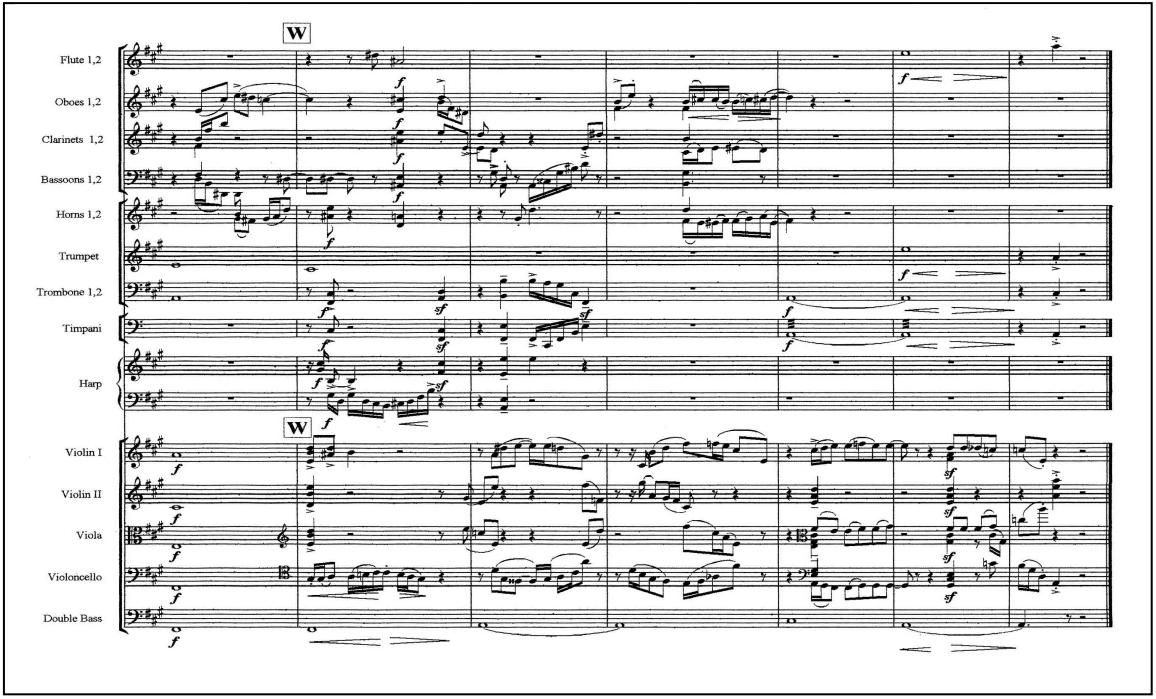
instant later, as the conductor lurched heroically to the right, the leader's bow was snatched from his grasp, and due to some freak rhythmic harmonization of its own, began to twirl about the maestro's head as he conducted, eventually wrapping itself around his head.

The performance came to a premature and abrupt end with the conductor getting smacked in the face with the wooden bow stave and falling backwards off the podium. Fortunately, he suffered no injury as his fall was broken by a music critic sitting on the front row who was rushed to hospital having suffered a broken rib and a heart attack - so it was not all bad news.

A member of the woodwind happened to have a sharp knife to hand (they rather alarmingly never go anywhere without them), and the conductor and the leader's bow parted company and normality was soon restored.

The moral of this particular tale (apart from the obvious point regarding hair) is that when an event such as this occurs during a performance, it will be remembered long after the music has been forgotten.

This is not the way a conductor should choose to go down in history.



Here is the final page of a typical score, the interpretation of which should begin by employing your skill in perceiving the message contained within the notes on the page. This may often seem obscure to the untrained eye yet, with perseverance, you will find, in time, that you may begin to make sense of it. Eventually a profound insight may shine forth from the page to enlighten you.