

## Chapter Six: In the Studio

The rehearsal studio is where the *real* work takes place. This is where the conductor is able to take the orchestra on a guided tour of the repertoire, much as any tour-guide would point out its features, demonstrating its many dimensions, its landscapes, its horizons, its scale and grandeur. It is a journey of discovery for them. He will answer questions from the players, place the music in its context, let them get a feel for it, become accustomed to its nuances, idiosyncrasies and style. You will, of course, have studied the work in some depth. Now you can bestow some of your knowledge and wisdom upon the orchestra. Give them some background, some history, but most importantly of all, **share with them your passion.**

All this will stimulate the players' own involvement and creativity. Their discipline and training will carry them through the technical complexities that confront them, and what you will then achieve will be upwards of a hundred musicians playing to your baton as one.

The orchestra will truly be *greater than the sum of its parts*.  
This is the theory at any rate.

Unfortunately, in practice, the reality of the rehearsal studio often falls somewhat short of this ideal. If you don't get off to a good start, if there are misunderstandings, if there is a failure in communication between you and the orchestra, it can take a long while to regain the advantage.

The first and most important rule is **always be well prepared**. There is no excuse for a conductor arriving for a first rehearsal unprepared and uninformed.

The following example is a transcript of the start of a rehearsal taken by Professor Sven Gottitjong (1949-):

Sven: Good morning gentleman – oh, and um, ladies. (to the leader):  
There are *women* in this orchestra!

Leader: Yes maestro. We have *ladies* in the orchestra now.

Sven: Are they any good?

Leader: They were selected from hundreds of applicants.

Sven: Female applicants?

Leader: No. Applicants of *all* sexes Maestro.

Sven: *Really!* Well, well - Oh. - well splendid... Right. – Um, (pause)  
Were they here last time I visited?

Leader: Yes Maestro. I think we really should tune up now if, of course,  
you are ready.

Sven: Yes, indeed. May I first of all thank you for the exceptionally  
fine concert last night. I have to say, all those critics who never  
rated this orchestra very highly were wrong. Last night's  
performance was a triumph.

Leader: Um, Maestro, we didn't actually play a concert last night, I  
believe you may be referring to the Vienna Philharmonic. You  
flew in from Austria last night.

Sven: Bless my soul, did I indeed? Well, why weren't you there? Try  
to be a little more reliable in future. Anyway, we should make a  
start. I'll give you a bar for nothing...

Leader: Excuse me Maestro, but we haven't actually tuned up yet.

Sven: Well get on with it, we haven't got all night.

Leader: Yes Maestro, and by the way, it is nine thirty in the morning.

Sven: Fine, we'll start with the overture I think.

Leader: There is no overture programmed for this concert.

Sven: The concerto then.

Leader: Um, there is no concerto either.

Sven: Damn it, what are we supposed to be playing on a Viennese night?

Leader: It is supposed to be a memorial concert.

Sven: Good, then we'll begin with the Blue Danube Waltz. That always goes down well.

Leader: Er, Maestro, we are supposed to be rehearsing the choral numbers from Mozart's Requiem, with the ladies and gentlemen of the chorus.

Sven: Ah, I was wondering what all those people were doing in the studio. So they are the chorus?

Leader: Yes Maestro.

Sven: They are not a very large chorus. Why can't we get a decent sized choir as befits the stature of this great waltz?

Leader: Um, maestro, it's a memorial concert in *honour* of those members of the chorus who were killed in the coach crash last month.

Sven: But this is awful, why wasn't I told about it?

Leader: Your chauffeur did tell you about it, Maestro. You were there in your car right behind the coach when it plunged down that ravine.

Sven: I must have been asleep at the time.

Leader: Yes Maestro.

Sven: Right, we'll start with the overture then. I'll give you a bar for nothing.

Leader: Arrrrrrrrrrgh!

There wasn't much more printable dialogue that could be recorded during the short remainder of this particular rehearsal session. Suffice to say, the conductor escaped with only a few cuts and bruises, thanks to the quick intervention of the orchestral manager. The leader was not charged with assault, since all of the one-hundred-and-twenty-seven eyewitnesses agreed that the leader's violin bow had accidentally slipped from his grasp and, due to some freak circumstances, had bounced several times off the conductor's head before it finally broke. The bow was replaced under the insurance policy and the leader's 'aversion therapy sessions' progressed very well, he was eventually able to look at a photograph of a conductor without experiencing one of his panic attacks.

But this is not what one would normally regard as a happy ending to a rehearsal. No indeed. It would never have happened at all if the conductor had been more aware and better informed. Let Professor Sven Gottitjong's misadventure be a lesson to us all. (See appendix.)



As well as for rehearsal of the symphonic repertoire, the studio is used for recordings for radio, gramophone, and sound track.

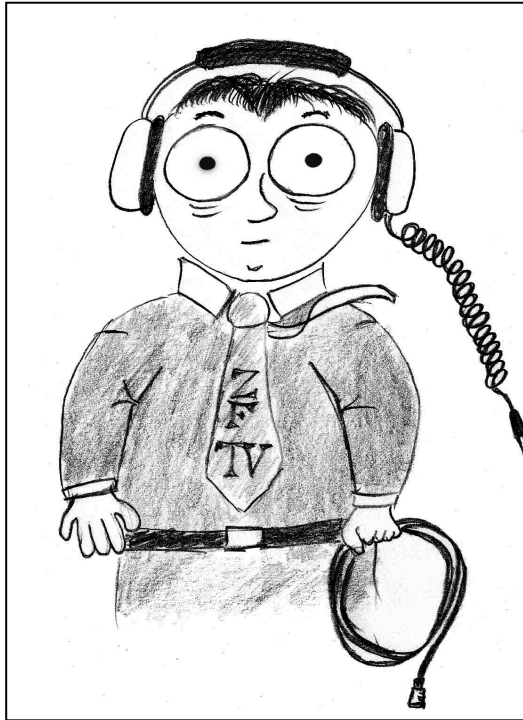
Enter the **sound engineers**.

They are a breed apart from all other members of the Primate genus.

When man came down from the trees, walked upon two legs, and became hunter-gatherers, there must have been a point where evolution stood at a fork in the road. Mankind as we know it (notwithstanding its colourful diversity) all chose one route, but the sound engineers clearly went down another path. They have evolved to live and work happily underground away from natural light and other terrestrial phenomena. Indeed, they actually prefer it that way. Hence they tend to be very pale-skinned with large staring eyes which others wrongly mistake for a sign of poor health. Not so. They in fact thrive on a diet of fizzy drinks and pasties.

Modern scientific thinking supports the view that the stages of evolution replay themselves in all of us as we develop through life, starting with the single cell and ultimately progressing to the adult human being. But there is a significant stage (usually during the teenage years) where the individual's dietary inclinations follow much the same pattern as the sound engineer's.

It has been noted by the vast majority of parents, at one time or another, that their offspring gravitate towards just these foods, and moreover, only with



The Soundie

extreme reluctance will venture from their beds earlier than the mid-afternoon, preferring, as they do, to enjoy the nocturnal life. Thus the sound engineer, or ‘Soundie’, was created. They have their own language which most often sounds like a sort of coded abbreviation of normal speech but has to be translated (usually by the producer) before the musicians can understand them. Here is a sample:

Mic	-	Short for microphone, and Michael - a very common ‘Soundie’ name.
Balance	-	Improves a recording by making the violas magically vanish.
Gain	-	Loudness
Loudness	-	Female word for Gain.
Fading	-	With the absence of sunlight, this is not usually a problem affecting sound engineers’ coloured garments.
NRPN	-	Non Registered Parameter Number. (A number of parameters that have clearly not officially been registered yet.)
RMS	-	The square root of the average of the squares of a variable quantity. (Most roots tend to be round – these ones, it seems, are square.)
Wave	-	Nautical term meaning wave.
Quantization	-	One of the tricks of the trade, and one of the many words they use if they want to confuse musicians because, even when translated, it makes absolutely no sense at all to anyone except another Soundie.

- MEP - Midi Event Processor. (Obviously a Midi is quite an event when it happens. Best to get it processed quickly.)
- Auto-Pan - Some sort of slow cooker.
- ADPCM - Adaptive Pulse Code Modulation. (Instructions concerning cooking beans in the Auto Pan.)
- FM Synthesis - You will discover that no conversation with a Soundie would be complete without the word 'synthesis' in it.

### **Recording:**

Making a recording represents much of the 'behind the scenes' life of the modern symphony orchestra. Technology has allowed people to enjoy symphonic music at home, in their cars, on their bicycles, at the beach, during childbirth, in fact anywhere.\*

This is both a good and a bad thing.

Good – because it brings in revenue for the orchestra and allows the repertoire to reach a wider public.

Bad – because it has caused the symphony orchestra to become more remote from its audience. It is now too easy to access music. Symphonic music should be an event *every* time, and to achieve that it needs to be *alive*. It is worth remembering that the classical composers had no notion that the audience could ever be anywhere other than under the same roof as the musicians.

Orchestras may well *play* in the studio to the microphones and machinery, but they only *perform* to audiences.

The audience is (surprising and irritating as this may seem to some musicians) the essential ingredient in a performance. In the words of the maestro Hans Knezund Bümssidezi (1927-): '*You can take the*

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It has been suggested that playing recordings of Mozart's music to an infant will make it grow up to be more intelligent. I think it would be more worthwhile to know what Mozart's mother played to the infant Wolfgang.

*music out of the people, but you can never take the people out of the music.*’ How very right he is.

The sound engineers, needless to say, have no comprehension of live music at all, since they rarely venture forth from their subterranean world. For them, music is made up of ‘takes’ which they cunningly and painstakingly join together with the aid of computers and other complex machines. It has a similar fascination for them as a jigsaw puzzle might to those who have nothing better to do with their time. It can become quite compelling. I’ve seen them at work and believe me they are very good at it. It’s like watching a spider constructing a web. One stands back amazed at how they can make all that jumble of sound into something that fits together so well, but you wonder also if they really know themselves how they manage it. They appear to be working purely by instinct.

So, the orchestra are assembled in the studio, bleary-eyed and tuned up.

In marches the conductor and his liaison officer in close formation. No, not the leader (who is still officially second-in-command and sitting in his proper seat) – but the **producer**, and they each hold a score (even the leader generally doesn’t get one of these). It is like the badge of office for the producer; a symbol of his status – and he wants everyone to know it, especially the leader.

He heads the motley team of pallid soundies whom he sends scuttling about the studio, running errands, shifting microphones, uncoiling cables, etc. Yet his role has much in common with the orchestra’s leader insofar as he has to act as go-between, translator, organizer, timekeeper, advisor, even interpreter of the score if he senses the conductor getting into difficulty.

If the studio were an operating theatre, then the conductor’s position would be that of surgeon and the producer would be the anesthetist. They are a two-man team, dependent upon each other, somewhat to the annoyance of the jilted leader, who usually takes out his frustrations upon his section and the other string principals if he catches them smirking. The producer is, therefore, a very important



person, not least, since he is the only one present who can speak both the language of the 'soundie' and that of the musician. For this alone, if for no other reason, a recording would not be possible without him.

That is the last the musicians will generally see of the producer until the end of the session. He will be ensconced in the recording booth, hearing and watching over the session through the two-way mirror like the orchestra's 'Big Brother'. His disembodied voice will boom over the connecting loudspeakers like a demigod addressing his worshippers.



The Producer.

The studio is the producer's domain, and so whilst there his word is law.

Events from here on follow a well-scripted sequence. The

orchestra will play a movement to warm up while the producer has his breakfast of Diet Cola and pasty. Then the conductor speaks into a telephone attached to his stand, asking if we are ready to make the first 'take'. The producer gives a long speech with a lot of 'soundie' words in it which the conductor, of course, won't understand (but won't admit to), however, the gist will be that the orchestra must take it from the top again while all the engineers swarm into the studio and weave about swapping the microphones around.

Then it is back to the phone again. Another long speech. The musicians' eyes are all on the conductor. They are hoping it is going to be a quick session: twice through, a couple of re-takes to cover up the sounds of tummy rumbles, then off to the pub. He nods his head (the players wag their tails), he shakes his head (the players whimper). Finally, he puts the phone down and relays the message that we must try certain passages again for balance. The players groan - yet this is an important part of the session. The producer must entrench the players into exactly the right fatalistic frame of mind. i.e. they must know that this is going to take quite some time to get right, so they can forget right now about an early finish.

Then it is down to the 'nitty gritty'...

Takes followed by re-takes, followed by more re-takes. Skipping on, going back, a long speech by the producer - he is not happy... 'We will have to come back to this passage again at the end of the session if there is time.' The conductor (who understandably feels out of his depth and somewhat at the mercy of the producer) tries to jolly things along with the odd joke. More groans from the players. Even the trombones (who may be discussing whether a lady musician, such as their own section member, is actually capable of receiving a 'bollocking' in the literal sense of the word) are talking with less than their usual *joie de vivre*. The rest of the orchestra are losing their will to live.

Then, quite suddenly, seven hours later, it is all over. The producer steps out in person to dutifully thank the players - but they have all vanished. The studio looks, once again, like a ghost town. The only clue that a recording has taken place will be numerous incomplete crossword puzzles and spilled polystyrene coffee cups creating fascinating random patterns on the studio floor.

The Producer thinks to himself: ‘Hmm. Perhaps I’ll enter it for the Turner Prize? I’ll think of a good title. How about something like...  
 ‘...Iamaprematurelybaldingoverweightmissunderstoodpissedoffgenius.’

### **Metaphors:**

When speaking or writing about music, it is difficult to convey, verbally, an image of that which one is endeavouring to describe in melodic sounds. Hence, a wonderfully colourful variety of picturesque metaphors have evolved – some universally adopted, but many the product of the wildly groping imagination of the individual conductor, thus being created hastily in the passion of the musical moment.

It should be understood that when his mind is focused first and foremost on the repertoire, the conductor (who often may need to spend as much rehearsal time talking about the piece with its inherent artistic and technical complexities, as he does actually conducting and letting his baton do the speaking for him) may often use whatever words that spring most readily to mind to describe the effect the music demands. One is occasionally made aware of the cognitive verbal threshold whereby one’s brain, whilst meticulously endeavouring to choose and then articulate the correct words, unfortunately gets overtaken by the mouth which, it would appear, is rolling down the verbal hill with no brakes. This has come to be known as ‘Wydikem’s Syndrome’, or *Why-Didn’t-I-Keep-My-Mouth-Shut*.

He may be endeavouring to describe a subtle textural quality in the context of one, or indeed any combination of the following:

**Rhythm** - playing not only the correct note values, but also emphasizing the correct beats to make sense of the phrase.

**Harmony** - not simply a case of playing in tune, but also being aware of the tonality and the tensions and resolutions within the harmonic structure.

**Melody** - making sure that the landscape (there’s a metaphor) of the melody flows smoothly from its start to its conclusion, making note of its special features on the way.

**Phrasing** - making it relate to the spoken word, with correct punctuation and grammar.

**Dynamics** - being aware of the large combination of instruments that may be playing together and creating, as a whole, a meaningful range to work within.

**Tempo** - not too fast or too slow; and be aware of the capabilities of both the instruments and their players.

**Pulse** - not the same as tempo; pulse is about how the music affects you. If it is exciting then it may be the natural thing to want to go faster – then let it, if that feels like the right thing to do.

**Rubato** - this is about defining the *grey* areas in the rather ‘black and white’ system of musical notation. A composer, who is aware that his work must be interpreted, knows also that he may safely leave aspects of the expression to the performers.

**Counterpoint** - being able to blend two or more melodic lines in a manner that complement each other creatively.

So how do you set about the task of describing a feeling, an emotion, a sensation or a mood in terms that relate to the execution of musical sounds? Conductors should try to avoid using stark terms like *quieter* or *louder* to describe how a passage should be played.

- *Playing* the instrument is the task of the musician. That is what they have been trained to do, and there is very little a conductor can helpfully contribute in such an extremely specialized field. Your interference would rightly be construed as a trespass.
- *Interpreting* the passage is the task of the conductor. That is your specialized subject, and the musicians know this. They

would no more presume to instruct the maestro on matters of interpretation than he would presume to tell a player how to play his instrument.

A mutual respect of each other’s territory is essential. The printed lines of the music form, in a sense, the prison bars. If you can see between them, you will allow the spirit of the music its freedom. Only then will you be in communion with the composer’s heart, mind and inspiration.

The following chart will serve as a helpful ‘thesaurus’ for the conductor during rehearsals. He should endeavour to use the following terms during rehearsals in a spontaneous manner while the musicians are actually engaged in playing. Thus, it will conjure in their minds the spirit of the music as it should be portrayed through the voice of their instruments. So, should he ever find himself groping for the right words...

In the music	Avoid saying	You may say
Crescendo	Get louder	A fuller sound. More projection. More exciting dynamic. More energy. Increase the tension. More power. More dynamic momentum.
Diminuendo	Get quieter	Becoming more sensitive. Fade into the distance. Far away. Lose yourself in the texture. Disappear. Vanish gradually. Retreat. Get smaller. Daintier.
Accelerando/ Poco piu mosso	Get faster	Increase the tempo. More exciting. Move along. Move forwards. Drive forwards. Surge forwards. Bowl along. Roll along. Roll downhill. Take off. Gather momentum. Increase the tension. Like a rocket. Like a bullet. Pick up the tempo. Let go. More exciting.

<b>In the music</b>	<b>Avoid saying</b>	<b>You may say</b>
Rallentando/ Ritardando/ Ritenuto	Get slower	Hold back. Put on the brakes. Whoa there. Unwind. Release the tempo. Be more lethargic. Get heavier. Go into slow motion. Subdivide. Think in quavers. I'll be subdividing the beat.
Modulation	Key change	A new texture. A new colour. A lighter colour / Darker colour. Paler. Change of mood. Richer. Elevate. Happier. Sadder. Sunshine. Stormier mood. More expectant mood. More pregnant mood (yes really). More suspense. Sensual. Fresher. Whimsical. Gay. Stern. Serious. Graceful. Hopeful. Brooding. Romantic. Passionate. Frisky. Sarcastic. Grave. Heavy. Volatile. Veiled texture. Transparent. White sound. Watery.
Legato Passage	Play smoothly	Flowing. Lyrical. Singing. Expressive. Melodic. Long phrases. Genteel. Sweetly. Dolce. Dolcissimo. Flautando. Sul tasto. Dreamy. Steamy. Sensual. Angelic. Sotto voce. Innocent. Clean. Release the sound. Shy. Introspective. Cajoling. Tender.
Staccato passage	Play short	Jagged. Spiky. Lifted. Airy. Molto secco. Dry. Hard. Mechanical. Sudden. Angry. Grotesque. Violent. Demonic. Daggers. Stabbing. Dancing. Energico. Marcato. Spiccato (strings). Dynamic. Bold. Heroic. Lifted. Space between the notes. Air between the notes.
Piano passage	Play quietly	Velvety. Feminine. Hushed. Soto voce. Whispering. Veiled. Luminous. Distant. In the background. Ghostly. Mysterioso. From far away. Through a closed door. Sensual. Tentative. Cajoling. Sul tasto (strings). Flautando (strings). Coy.
Forte passage	Play loudly	Strong. Masculine. Heroic. Noble. Present. Courageous. Gigantic. Firm. Hard. Vital. (Molto) Energico. (Molto) Intensivo. (Molto) Ritmico. In yer face. Smash it out. Blast it out. Hack it out (strings). Uncoil it (horns). Dynamic.

Should a conductor stray too far into the realms of the verbally esoteric, then his players will simply not be able to understand the point he is trying to convey. So, as well as avoiding stark *black and white* musical terms (as they might be printed in the music), also avoid getting carried away with your verbal paintbrush.

If it were possible to read into the players' mind during rehearsal, we might gain some insight into the response to our musical directions. Take a horn player, a timpani player, and a violist, for example...

Conductor	Horn player	Timpani player	Viola player
A more dynamic attack please.	That means play louder, I guess.	That means drown out the strings – no problem.	Is it hard, I wonder, playing that cello with such big tits?
Don't allow the phrasing to get too drowsy here.	Steady tempo.	So try beating a bit faster – pillock.	'Frozen water' - three letters - begins with 'i' - ends with 'e' ... Hmm, tricky?
Play to the bottom of the beat please.	Be early?	Be late?	I'll join in when that lot get it right.
A more veiled texture with the dynamic.	I'll puff a bit less.	Boring, boring, booooooring.	I'm going to watch those two bits of sweat on the conductor's shirt till they join up.
Imagine the waves washing over you.	Poco forte, with small hairpins?	Now that I <i>can</i> do – tasty timp roll coming up!	Hmm... Topless beaches.
Let the dynamic have a more pregnant colour here please.	Slightly harder entry?	I'm a timp player, not a bloody gynaecologist!	Sort of reddy-pink???
As if you're a dying singer.	Poco forte, with big hairpins?	Tragic roll coming up.	I'm going to be first out of the studio when he says 'break'.
Feel the pain in the music.	Harder tone quality?	I hope that means louder, 'cos that is what he's going to get.	Things wobble when she plays tremolando.

<b>Conductor</b>	<b>Horn player</b>	<b>Timpani player</b>	<b>Viola player</b>
Follow the landscape of the phrasing.	Legato.	Soft, loud, then soft again.	I'd give anything to be that cello.
Give the passage a more feminine ending.	Does he mean get quieter?	Okay, I'll let the strings through a bit here.	Feminine ending? Cor, yes please.
Tempo molto flessibile with a hushed, veiled tone.	Huh! Vague beat.	You beat what you like, mate. I'm just going to play the notes, so you'll just have to follow me.	Don't let her catch you watching while she does that bouncy stuff. - Oh soddit!
Let the phrase end in the air, like a question.	Diminuendo in the last bar?	Why can't he just say 'get quieter'?	I've got a question - when are we getting a break?
Accompany the contours of the melodic line.	Don't play too loud.	Don't play too loud.	Don't play.
We must build a massive architectural phrase.	As loud as poss.	Whoopee! Now you're talking.	EEK! I've just been hit by a trumpet player.
Play as if it's a warm sunny day.	I think he wants a more open sound.	I think he wants it louder.	I think the studio clock has stopped.
A swirling mass of sound.	Loud.	Loud.	I'm keeping my head down.
Feel every accent like a stab through the heart.	Harder accents?	Louder accents?	Terminator II is on TV tonight... <i>'I'll be back, maestro'</i> .
Lyrical, but staccato please.	Long then short?	Short then long?	Tum-ti tum-ti tum.
Even though it's very slow, I'm not going to sub-divide the beat.	<i>You</i> don't have to try to follow it chum.	Lazy sod.	Well, I'm not going to <i>watch</i> the beat. So there!
Go for long, extended phrasing here.	Run out of breath, rather.	I've heard of phrases. Never could understand what they were, though.	Does that means <i>long extended rehearsal</i> ? Please, no.



Conductor	Horn player	Timpani player	Viola player
Bruckner's climaxes must be massive.	I wonder if Bruckner ever had complaints from the neighbours?	There has to be something wrong with a composer who makes a four-three suspension last for twenty minutes.	I guess all this tremolando stuff is probably quite good practice for it.
The sound here needs to be <i>cold and hard</i> .	Stronger <i>forte</i> 's, and quieter <i>piano</i> 's.	Harder sticks maybe?	Got it! – <u>ICE</u>



Communication.