

| TEXT 1

I'm standing on a podium, with an enameled wand cocked between my fingers and sweat dampening the small of my back. Ranks of young musicians eye me skeptically. They know I don't belong here, but they're waiting for me to pretend I do. I raise my arm in the oppressive silence and let it drop. Miraculously, Mozart's overture to Don Giovanni explodes in front of me, ragged but recognizable, violently thrilling. This feels like an anxiety dream, but it's actually an attempt to answer a question that the great conductor Riccardo Muti asked on receiving an award last year: "What is it, really, I do?"

I have been wondering what, exactly, a conductor does since around 1980, when I led a JVC boom box in a phenomenal performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony in my bedroom. I was bewitched by the music – the poignant plod of the second movement, the crazed gallop of the fourth – and fascinated by the sorcery. In college, I took a conducting course, presided over a few performances of my own compositions, and led the pit orchestra for a modern-dance program. Those crumbs of experience left me in awe of the constellation of skills and talents required of a conductor – and also made me somewhat skeptical that waving a stick creates a coherent interpretation.

Ever since big ensembles became the basis of orchestral music, about 200 years ago, doubt has dogged the guy on the podium. Audiences wonder whether he (or, increasingly, she) has any effect; players are sure they could do better; and even conductors occasionally feel superfluous. "I'm in a bastard profession, a dishonest profession," agonized Dimitri Mitropoulos, who led the New York Philharmonic in the fifties. "The others make all the music, and I get the salary and the credit." Call it the Maestro Paradox: The person responsible for the totality of sound produces none.

My guides through this mystery are Alan Gilbert, the music director of the New York Philharmonic, and James Ross, who with Gilbert runs the Juilliard School's conducting program. I'll be leading a student orchestra in a half-hour rehearsal of Mozart's six-minute overture to Don Giovanni. Throughout the fall, I drop in on Gilbert and Ross's course, in which four students take private lessons and meet for seminars, attend Philharmonic rehearsals, and conduct the school's lab orchestra in weekly two-and-a-half-hour sessions.

Pianists can work through their failures in solitude; conductors live each one in public. As the students take turns on the podium, Gilbert prowls the room, giving cues from the sidelines – "You're not showing that pizzicato!" – or sneaking up and grabbing a proto-maestro's wrist. Ross stays behind the violins and lobs little flares of wisdom: "A lot of great conductors are shy, even though you wouldn't know that from how they handle large groups of people. That shyness can actually help in intimate music. You have to let people see what's inside you, even if you don't do that in the rest of your life."

I'm not a naturally demonstrative person, so I find this idea both consoling and counterintuitive. Not only am I letting the musicians in on my own inner life, I'm also asking them to express it for me.

The idea of conducting as a kind of emotional ventriloquism helps deal with one especially thorny bit of the Maestro Paradox: Leadership requires confidence that is difficult to acquire and impossible to fake. Orchestras are psychic X-ray machines. They judge a new chief within minutes, and once contempt sets in, forget it. I'm going to have to project the sense that I am entitled to be there, and first, I must convince myself.

"Knowing the score"— the expression implies mastery, but it doesn't suggest the sustained and solitary study that's required to achieve it. There are a few miles of roadway that I have driven often enough to navigate them faultlessly in my mind: I know every pothole, every deer crossing. A conductor needs similarly detailed recall of an enormous musical terrain. In the weeks I spend fussing over just my six minutes of Mozart, Gilbert conducts Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*; symphonies by Mahler, Brahms, Dvorák, and Beethoven; and assorted pieces by Webern, Bruch, Berg, Bach, Haydn, and Mozart — dozens of hours, millions of notes, pieces he has performed for years and pieces he's never seen before. During one session, Gilbert demonstrates for a percussionist how to get the right sound on the triangle, corrects a bowing in the violin part, sings the bassoon line, and points out a subtle harmonic shift — all without glancing at the score. "I haven't looked at this piece in five years," he says, "but it's still in there somewhere." If the entire symphonic tradition were incinerated, a team of conductors could write it all out again.

Questions

1. Write a title for the text and justify your choice in no more than 60 words.

2. Choose the correct answer.

2.1. In the first paragraph it is implied that the writer...

- a) didn't feel up to the task
- b) doubted the musicians' ability
- c) had never conducted Don Giovanni before

2.2. What does he say about the Don Giovanni overture?

- a) It earned Riccardo Muti an award
- b) He only conducted it in his dreams
- c) It wasn't a very skillful performance

2.3. In the second paragraph we learn that...

- a) his Seventh Symphony was a huge success
- b) he has sometimes conducted his own music
- c) he has had extensive experience as a conductor

2.4. The writer thinks that good conducting...

- a) is out of reach for him
- b) is crucial for the orchestra's success
- c) takes far more talent than he would have thought

2.5. Which of the following is stated in paragraph 3?

- a) Conductors get paid too much
- b) Audiences often despise conductors
- c) Conductors tend to question their own profession

2.6. The writer..... at Juilliard School

- a) is seeking answers
- b) is teaching a seminar
- c) has accepted a position

2.7. What is true according to the text?

- a) Being shy is not an obstacle for a conductor
- b) Conducting often means pretending to be self-assured
- c) Conducting can be an effective therapy against shyness

2.8. Musicians...

- a) need to feel the conductor trusts them
- b) often struggle to express their own feelings
- c) are unlikely to change their minds about a conductor

2.9. What does the comparison between conducting and driving mean?

- a) The smallest mistake can be disastrous
- b) It's important to avoid mechanical performances
- c) Perfection is only achieved after extensive practice

2.10. What strikes the writer about Gilbert?

- a) His great memory
- b) How fussy he can be
- c) His endless patience

3. Define the following words according to the text.

- ✓ Enameled:
- ✓ Ragged:
- ✓ Crumbs:
- ✓ Dogged:
- ✓ Prowl:

4. Look for synonyms in the text for the following words.

- ✓ Sundry:
- ✓ Flawlessly:
- ✓ Unreasonable:
- ✓ Glimpses:
- ✓ Seclusion:

5. Write a summary of the text (100-120 words)**6. Do you see any similarities and differences between conductors and teachers? How? Develop your ideas (200 – 220 words)**