

WELCOME TO THIS SAMPLE from *Waving, Not Drowning*. I hope you enjoy it. If you don't, I hope you don't waste too much time reading it.

Waving, Not Drowning is a book in two parts. Part One is devoted to the influences that made my co-author and much-missed doyen of the podium Barrington Orwell the remarkable man he was. Part Two acts as a guide manual for the budding conductor, offering advice on everything from upbeats to cufflinks. So in this sample document you'll find the introduction to the whole book and the first chapter of each part.

Thanks for reading.

Lev Parikian

AUTHORS' NOTES

THE GREAT TEACHER, Professor Etwas Ruhiger, was fond of saying: 'Zere is nussink in life zat is not viz condectink to be doink.'

How true.

And so, to facilitate understanding of what follows, the first part of the book (or *amuse-bouche*, if you will, and even if you won't) will deal with some of my influences in music and in life. I thank them from the depth of my being for their part in my formation as a quasi-coherent conductor and passable excuse for a human being, but stress with the utmost vehemence that none of what follows is their fault.

The main course is a heartier affair, and consists of my thoughts on the craft of conducting. It is an entirely personal view, and should not be thought of as prescriptive.

Where I say 'Do not', feel free to; where I say 'Let yourself', feel free not to; where I say 'The alert conductor', feel free to dissociate yourself from that hypothetical breed.

And, crucially, where I say 'he', you can take it as read that I mean 'he or she' but am too lazy to write it.

Most of all, it is my devout wish that, after reading this book, you will be able to stand in front of an orchestra and not make them worse.

I am indebted to my amanuensis Lev Parikian, whose indefatigable efforts and eye for detail have ensured that this book will reach the printers as free from errors as possible.

Barrington Orwell

South Mimms Service Station, January 2013

BARRINGTON ORWELL was one of a kind: a musician of extreme individuality, and a conductor of sterling and largely misunderstood credentials. It is often said, when talking about conductors, that any fool can drive a Rolls-Royce, but just see how that fool fares when put behind the wheel of a Trabant. The latter was Barry's milieu, and he thrived in it. The sounds he wrought from a simplified arrangement of *The Pink Panther Theme* had to be heard to be believed.

In a different life, perhaps he would have achieved more widespread recognition. But the music profession is a cruel mistress, and even Barry must have become weighed down by the tell-tale signs of a relationship turned sour: the infidelities, the lies, the anniversary meal congealing on the bitter plate of despair.

I knew him for the last ten years of his life, our paths first crossing at a conducting seminar where I was giving a talk on 'The Cause and Effect of Involuntary Rubato'. His excoriating dissection of my lecture in the bar afterwards was brutal but kindly; his insistence that I dine as his guest that evening typical of a man for whom mere difference of opinion was no barrier to friendship.

Over the next few years we spent many hours in avid discussion, our passionate discourse often fuelled by a bottle or two of Schlockenbinter Grünger Feldkopfliner or one of the many other delights from the Pandora's box that was his extensive and brilliantly chosen cellar. These conversations went on into the night, covering every aspect of music and in particular the craft of conducting, a discipline that Barry (as he, with atypical ambivalence, both loved and hated to be called) found mysterious and bewildering.

What is the optimum podium size? What exactly did Mahler mean by the marking 'Sehr sehr, aber nicht zu sehr'? Pencils: 2B or...

Well, you get the idea.

It was during these late night chats that the plan for this book was hatched. 'Tell it like it really is' became our motto, and Barry applied his formidable brain to the task with his customary dedication, fearlessness and disregard for

punctuality. I acted, for the most part, as secretary, trying to catch the emanations of his quicksilver brain before they withered and were lost forever.

At 3am one morning earlier this year, Barry squinted across the kitchen table in my general direction and made a cryptic declaration, the gist of which, once I'd extracted it from some earthy comments about my ancestry, seemed to be that our project was closed.

At any rate, further wisdom was not forthcoming, and I set about the task of collating the wealth of material he had flung at me over the previous few months.

Then, five days later, came the hammer blow.

Barry was found in the instrument store at his local music service headquarters, apparently the victim of a freak contrabassoon accident. Legal reasons prevent me from going into further details at the time of going to press.

Needless to say, the void caused by Barry's loss was incalculable. But although he was gone, my task remained the same: assemble his thoughts into some sort of coherent order. His retelling of his early years, while at times rambling and incomprehensible, was nonetheless riddled with what appeared to be fascinating observations about the unfathomable mysteries of conducting. And when it came to insight into the craft, Barry was second to none. If at times his views contradicted each other, this ambiguity was offset by an uncanny ability to find the pith at the heart of the subject.

It was my job to take the pith and pass it on to you.

I have done my best to represent his views as accurately as possible—if I have failed to do so, the fault is mine. By the same token, if I can take the credit for anything, it is merely the contribution of a competent mechanic assembling an engine from the blueprint of a master designer. The creative spark was all Barry's. May he rest in peace.

Lev Parikian

West Norwood, March 2013

YOU STAND ON THE podium, finest Armani caressing your skin. The scent of Hugo Boss aftershave tickles your nostrils. You've chosen it specially—Hugo Boss is a Mahler kind of perfume. Calvin Klein was for the first half, its manly brusqueness, almost bullying but just backing off at the right moment, perfectly matched to the lean muscularity of Beethoven. But Hugo is subtler, more complex. He puts you in the mood, does Hugo.

The applause has died down and now there is expectancy in the air. You bring your focus to the matter in hand.

Mahler.

Ah, Gustav. Gustle. Gussie. Every conductor's soulmate. The one composer whose music could be said to be written for the man at the front. It's almost as if he's woven the choreography into the music, every shake, lunge, heave and grunt as integral to it as the notes themselves.

But not every conductor understands it the way you do. Your bond with this music is infrangible. Themes, sub-themes, counterpoint, harmony, rhythm, texture, the very fabric of the music itself—they are weaved inextricably into the core of your being. Your interpretation is imbued with such musical honesty, such (dare you say it) humanity, that to call it an 'interpretation' is to do it an injustice. It's as if Gus, Gussington, Sir Gustavo von der Mahlerstein himself has tattooed it into your cerebral cortex with his own spindly hand, perhaps in a seedy backstreet tattoo parlour in the Vienna that was his home, and where you spent such enjoyable years (the Sachertorte! The Kaffee! The Kuchen!) researching, living, breathing, absorbing the master's spirit.

And now, at last, your time has come. From this moment forward the world will know that the spirit of Gustav shines like a beacon once more, in the form of your dedicated, talented, hard-working-but-painfully-modest self.

There's only one problem.

You don't know how to begin.

The music is perfectly formed in your head; if only you could say the same about the upbeat you need to give so the musicians can begin to realise your vision.

You hesitate. The orchestra, like a thoroughbred used to a multiple Derby-winning jockey but suddenly in the not-so-tender care of a spotty stable boy, senses your fear. All is lost.

Mahler, not for the first time, dies a long and painful death.

It's a common enough problem. Many is the aspiring conductor whose promising career has been—how to put this tactfully?—shafted like an in-heat antelope on the veldt for want of a decent *Auftakt*.

And even if you negotiate the beginning without catastrophe, what then? Tempo, phrasing, dynamics, balance, ebb and flow, tension and release, accelerandi, ritardandi, recitatives, accompaniment, programming, player management...all the way through to pudding wine choices and beyond; the responsibilities facing the modern Maestro take the breath away.

It makes you wonder why anyone would want to do it.

But don't worry. Be not afeared. Help is at hand.

This book is...well, what is this book? Who is it for?

This book is for everyone.

Maybe you're the avid classical music fan who wants to delve yet deeper into the warp and weft of the art form that you've adored since your Uncle Albert dandled you on his knee, humming along to a scratched 78 of Sir Adrian Boult's recording of the *Overture to La Gazza Ladra*, his bristly moustache tickling your ear and the words 'This is the kind of thing, eh? None of that modern rot' on his port-infused breath.

Or perhaps you're a complete novice, whose only involvement with Western Art Music thus far has been a drunken karaoke rendition of *Nessun Dorma* at the office party and the Katherine Jenkins album given to you one Christmas by a well-meaning aunt. You're determined to better yourself, and not just to impress Sandra, although her reaction when you put that Miles Davis album on makes you think she might be susceptible to the kind of bloke who knows a bit about music. You've toyed with the idea of learning an instrument, but you have neighbours, and didn't Charlie take up the piano and tell you how terribly hard it was? Far easier, surely, to learn about conducting—and terribly impressive, too.

At the other end of the spectrum, maybe you're a disillusioned orchestral musician, fed up with the man (or woman—let's not pretend that it is only men who are egotistical maniacs) whose self-glorifying antics and impenetrable gestures do so much to blight your daily working life. You're determined to prove them all wrong—conductors can be down-to-earth, honest musicians with functional upbeats and an unaffected style; they can be generous, humble and genuinely engaged in the craft for the service of the music. Perhaps you can be the first of them. You can certainly do better than the one they had in last week—what a charlatan! (NB: 'the one they had in last week' was always awful, no matter how good you secretly thought he was.)

I humbly submit that there is something in here for all of you. If you learn just one thing from this book, whether it be the best speed for *Nimrod* when played in a muddy field outside Saffron Walden or the correct amount to tip a stage-door Johnny in Caracas, I will have, in part at least, fulfilled my duty.

My Father

I AM OFTEN asked ‘When did you know you were going to be a conductor?’

I may be mistaken, but I have a distinct memory that the midwife’s efforts to coax the first stertorous breaths from my infant lungs were woefully lacking in rhythm. Then, in the Intensive Care Unit, my efforts to make the other children wail in tune, or at least in synchronisation, were sadly misinterpreted by the doctors as being in some way related to a desire for my mother’s milk.

If there was a clue to be found in my ancestry as to my future career, then it certainly wasn’t to be found easily. Music played no more a part in the lives of my parents than subtlety and humility do in Donald Trump’s.

In our modern and ‘enlightened’ world, music is hard to avoid. Entire populations are encouraged to display their ‘talent’ on prime-time television as if merely opening your mouth and allowing the spirit to guide you is enough to send the audience into whooping paroxysms of orgasmic delight (which, to be fair, it often is); musical ‘education’ consists of little more than thrusting a set of jingles into an unsuspecting child’s hand, posting the results on YouTube with the title ‘Santa’s Little Helper—Amazing Talent!’ and daring the world to contradict you; and no office’s annual calendar is complete without the ritual humiliation of the ‘Karaoke Night’—an appalling monstrosity in which ordinary members of the public compete to find which of them can execute the bloodiest atrocity on the popular music of the day.

Music assaults us everywhere and everywhen, from the G \flat major chord that greets us on booting up our computer, through the incessant butchery of the telephone hold Muzak, all the way to ghastly novelty items such as the Christmas-carol-playing toilet roll holder or the musical condom and beyond.

In the Northamptonshire of the early 1960s it was much easier to be music-free, and it was to this ideal that my parents seemed to aspire. More amusical than unmusical, they had no television ('Satan's evil chest'), and the wireless was used only for news bulletins and *Mrs Dale's Diary*. My father's idea of an evening's entertainment was to read to us from the volume of Lamb's *Tales of Shakespeare* that lurked heavily on the front room bookshelf. It would no more have occurred to them to go to a concert, had there existed such a luxury in the cultural outpost we called home, than it would occur to Katie Price to translate the works of Marcel Proust into Danish.

The only time this musical vacuum was breached was on Sundays. Community singing was different. Every Sunday the three of us would tramp up the hill and take the same pew in the village church. And every Sunday my parents would 'sing' along with the rest of the congregation.

Mr. Archbold, the organist, was a gentle, bespectacled man. The top of his bald head was just visible from where I sat, and I used to thrill to the sight of it bobbing up and down very nearly in time with the music. He had been organist-in-residence at St. Ethelburga's church for some fifty years, and yet for all the wealth of experience that he brought to the rôle, he never quite came to grips with such musical subtleties as rhythm, meter or key signatures. As a result he gave the congregation few clues as to where the singing should begin and end. On many occasions, indeed, it was not readily apparent which hymn we should be singing. The resultant noise was one that would have excited the great musical experimenter Charles Ives, but few others.

This uncertainty had little effect on my parents. While my mother mewed apologetically to my left, it was my father, on the other side, who caught the eye and, more irresistibly, the ear. His approach to a hymn was to seize it by the scruff of the neck and shake it until it fell to the floor, spluttering and coughing up blood, its will broken beyond any human help. The sight and sound of him, hair Brylcreemed to the point of drowning, collar cutting into his wobbling neck, and ruddy cheeks glowing with exertion, bellowing *Come, and Let Us Sweetly Join* in a manner that brooked no argument, will remain

with me to my dying day. The empty pews around us, in a relatively well-attended church, told their own story.

Away from the church, it was as if music didn't exist. So if the home environment was musically barren, how was the seed of my love for it sown?

Take a bow, Uncle Ted.

Conductor Types

BEFORE DEALING with the intricacies of technique, we should take a moment to consider the kind of conductor you want to be. This is not a decision to be taken lightly, after all. Your persona will dictate everything about your conducting, from the size of your upbeat to the softness of your polo shirt.

While it may be true that you can only be yourself, it can do no harm to spend some time in advance pondering exactly which version of ‘yourself’ you would like to be. Everyone’s different, of course, but if you are to present yourself to an unsuspecting public, you need to have an identifiable personality. For this to happen you need a personality—lacking this, you might be better off becoming a politician.

There are many different types of conductor, and the few that follow below are merely archetypes—most people choose one dominant type, with sprinklings from other categories. Think of it as a really delicious curry. When you have the mix right, no single flavour predominates and each ingredient is held in perfect balance with the others, allowing the whole dish to sing; get it wrong, and you’ll be the chicken korma of conductors—beige, sludgy, and the choice of those who don’t know what they want.

The Scholar

Slender, delicate-looking, studiously distraught, with wispy hair flying to and fro in the slightest breeze, this conductor exudes knowledge and thought, if not charisma. Wire-rimmed half-moon spectacles are a must, the implication being that long hours have been spent researching in libraries. He will make much of the minutiae.

‘Ah, now then. This staccato marking in the second flute part—the cause of much debate. Some sources have it legato, of course, but their authenticity is dubious...’

That kind of thing.

The Scholar can get so bogged down in these details that rehearsals rarely progress beyond the first movement exposition, and orchestras are left to fend for themselves in the later movements, which are usually much more difficult.

The Jolly Good Chap

The ‘hail fellow well met’ type: English, exuberant, jovial, openly pally with everyone, he can often be found in the cafe holding forth on one subject or another, punctuating his story-telling with sharp barks of laughter at his own jokes.

But beware. Behind that smile lurk shark’s teeth. He has played this part for years, and will probably get rid of half the orchestra the moment he’s appointed Music Director.

The Wild Man of Borneo

‘Keep your hands and feet away from the cage’ might be an appropriate sign to hang near this conductor. Exuding animal power, he (and it’s always a he) seems to prowl the podium like a caged panther. While conducting he emits bestial grunts, and front desk players may need masks to protect against flying drool. His conducting style comes under the heading ‘rampage’. Adrenal prestissimi are as likely as excessively drawn out adagios. Once in a while this will result in a performance so electrifying that it will all, momentarily at least, seem to be worth it. Critics will hail The Wild Man a genius, driving him to yet further extremes and orchestral musicians to drink.

The Out-And-Out Bastard

At least you know where you stand. He’s a shit, and doesn’t mind who knows it. It doesn’t matter where you’re standing—he will manage to stab you in the

back anyway. You might as well take your punishment, chalk it up to experience, and moan about him along with everyone else.

The Lazy Bugger

He has a tendency to, shall we say, not push rehearsal times to their limits. Possibly the greatest example (and, incidentally, a quite majestic conductor on his all-too-rare day) was Horace Ontahl. Engaged by a big London orchestra to conduct a programme including Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, he played no more than three minutes of the opening, laid down his baton and asked:

‘Ladies and gentlemen, you appear to know the piece very well. When did you last play it?’

‘About six months ago, Maestro.’

‘And who was conducting?’

Upon being told the name of a meticulous colleague and rival, he slapped shut the score and said: ‘Oh he’s *very* good. You’ll be fine. See you later.’

In later years he would only accept engagements in towns where there was a restaurant with at least two Michelin stars, and insisted on a clause in his contract stipulating a maximum of two hours of rehearsal a day.

Renowned English conductor Linby Hucknall, on the other hand, refused to work on days when there was a cricket international being played anywhere in the world, and once scheduled a tour to Australia to coincide with the Ashes series being played at the same time. The resultant lean schedule, with its concomitant *per diem* payments to every single player, effectively bankrupted the orchestra.

The Cosmopolitan

Smooth, suave, sophisticated, The Cosmopolitan is the most socially acceptable conductor there is. Often to be seen gracing the pages of the glossy magazines, he’s on first-name terms with members of royal families in at least six countries, and acted as best man at the weddings of two of them. He has homes in exclusive areas of London, Madrid, New York and Buenos Aires, along with, of course, the requisite mistresses.

An extravagantly talented all-round musician, he plays several instruments to a very high standard. As a conductor, he possesses a flawless technique, consummate aural skills and a photographic memory. He commands exorbitant fees, for sure, but is also a shrewd businessman and delivers packed houses, glowing reviews and stratospheric record sales on a regular and ongoing basis.

Despite all this, he has no friends in the whole world. Not one. This is because he's a complete prick.

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If you have enjoyed reading the sample, please visit wavingnotdrowningbook.com, where you will, from August 1st 2013, be able to buy it in any of its various forms. Thanks.