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**MASTER'S THESIS**

**THE CONDUCTOR'S WORK IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF  
ENSEMBLES**

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**DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE**

**PROFESE DIRIGENTA A JEHO PRÁCE V ROZLIČNÝCH  
TYPECH ORCHESTRŮ A ANSÁMBLŮ**

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## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem magisterskou práci s názvem:

« THE CONDUCTOR'S WORK IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF ENSEMBLES »

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Praha dne .....

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## **Upozornění**

Využití a společenské uplatnění výsledků diplomové práce, nebo jakékoliv nakládání s nimi je možné pouze na základě licenční smlouvy tj. souhlasu autora a AMU v Praze.



## **Abstract**

This Master's Thesis concerns the conductor's profession in different types of ensembles. The diversity, multitude of existing musical formations and the specificities that each sort of musical ensemble comprises make this a rich subject for exploration. The reader will first discover several chapters that focus upon various definitions of the role of the conductor and upon the conductor's functions, as well as upon the various types of musical ensembles. This will then permit the undertaking of the theme of how a conductor must deal differently with both amateur and professional musicians, as well as the subject of the conductor's craft and relationships with his musicians.

## **Abstrakt**

Diplomová práce se zabývá profesí dirigenta a způsobem jeho práce s různými typy souborů. Rozmanitost a množství existujících hudebních útvarů, stejně jako specifika, které každý druh hudebního souboru tvoří, z něj činí bohatý předmět pro zkoumání. V prvních kapitolách se zaměřuji na různé definice role dirigenta a na funkce dirigenta, stejně jako na rozličné druhy hudebních souborů. To umožňuje odhalit odlišný přístup dirigenta a jeho práci s amatérskými či profesionálními hudebníky. Práce nejenom osvětlí náplň dirigentského řemesla, ale též vztahy dirigenta s hudebníky.

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## Introduction

"Who is this man standing in front of the orchestra, and who, with a wave of the hand, seems able to unleash such extraordinary sounds and to modulate them according to his will?" This is a question of a 7-year-old attending his very first concert in the prestigious La Scala Theatre in Milan. The same evening, he writes in his diary that he too will become a conductor and that he will one day direct this music. This boy is a certain Claudio Abbado<sup>1</sup>, who has since become one of the greatest conductors of our time. (Abbado, 2007, summary of the book.)

This sublime admiration for the passionate profession of conducting is one I have also shared for many years. First of all, this flame for music, which animates me every day and has pushed me to address this rich and exciting subject of my Master's work. Then, there were the many exciting encounters I had the opportunity to have, whether with the musicians I directed, with the various soloists that I have accompanied, with my many professors and colleagues, or with the public that comes to meet me on many occasions. Finally, I want synthesize my situation so that I can go ahead and try to do better, whether in work with the orchestra or in interviews, in professional and human relationships. Being at the head of a group of musicians is always a challenge and an immense responsibility to assume, and requires great skill. This project has allowed me to draw a detailed account of my experiences and has caused me a deep reflection, very useful for my future commitments.

For my Master's Thesis, I want to guide the reader by the hand and offer a discovery, or a rediscovery, of the exciting, very demanding and sometimes difficult world of the conductor's profession. The central theme of this project is "The Conductor's Profession in Different Types of Ensembles", but I also propose to go through several important chapters, such as the definition of a music director, the various functions of the conductor in an ensemble, in general, the multiple existing types of musical ensembles, and addressing the question of how one becomes a conductor.

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<sup>1</sup> Italian conductor (1933-2014)



These chapters will allow us, then, to address the two central themes of this thesis first, about amateur and professional musicians and second, about the profession and the relationship of the conductor with his musicians. In this second part, particularly, I draw, essentially, upon my own personal experience with the various ensembles with which I have worked.

My main difficulty has been to avoid writing a thesis that only refers to me or relies only upon my own ideas. As I wanted to enrich my work with opinions and experiences that are different from mine, I organized interviews with three personalities from the musical world of French-speaking Switzerland. These interviews are used throughout this thesis, offering several different visions. One should know that these three leaders have not evolved in the same worlds. One is a choral conductor who has a great experience with young people, amateurs and professional singers, the second is a renowned teacher and director of wind ensembles who works mainly with excellent amateur musicians, the latter is a conductor who has led many training courses for professional musicians and music students. Therefore, three heterogeneous points of view complete this Master's Thesis.

## 1. Definition of a Conductor

According to the AZ encyclopedia of Atlas Editions, conducting is "The action of controlling the execution of a work by an ensemble toward the goal of coordinating the interpretation of the members who make it up." Looking equally in the Le Petit Larousse 1999 dictionary, the conductor is a musician who directs the execution of a work: In the word "chef d'orchestre" ["conductor", "chief of the orchestra"] there is the word "chief" which means, again according to Le Petit Larousse "A person who commands, who exercises an authority, a direction a determining influence." Still from the same source, the word means "to lead musicians, singers, to direct and orchestra."

In Czech, as in German, the term "to lead" equally signifies this authoritarian attitude, of a person who commands, who leads. I find the French term "chef d'orchestre" (chief of the orchestra), or "directeur" (director) to be less appropriate than the English term "conductor" which signifies that he is leading and not that he is directing or commanding.

Finally, I give you part of the definition of orchestral direction according to the Riemann Music Dictionary:

To conduct, that is to lead an orchestra, a choir, an opera, etc., a musical work can, according to the personality of the interpreter, be presented in very diverse ways, although all subordinate to the indications provided by the composer. An opera a symphony, etc., demands an entire group of performers whose individuality must give way to a single authority, that of the conductor or director, who is then the true interpreter. (Riemann, 1931)

During my three interviews<sup>2</sup>, I also asked the question: "What is your definition of a conductor ?" Here are the three answers:

The conductor Jan Dobrzewski defines the conductor as a musician above all, who has a great musical culture and a broad general culture that allows him to understand and assimilate the music he prepares in the best possible way. He is at the head of a musical ensemble and offers his musicians an interpretative vision of the different works.

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<sup>2</sup> The biographies of the three interviewees are in the appendix

For choirmaster Bernard Héritier, the conductor is first and foremost a coordinator who gathers energy during rehearsals and concerts. He is able to fade out during a performance, because the quality of the work and the spirit instilled during the preparation allows the entire ensemble to play freely and autonomously. He also compares the conductor to the pivot in basketball, who is the one by whom everything turns and who assumes much of the responsibility of the whole.

Conductor Jean-Claude Kolly describes the conductor as the person who has the task of helping musicians play better together. Moreover, if he manages to be discreet during the concert and the orchestra plays perfectly well, it is a success. He can also be more present and create the spark, which is also a success.

Many famous artists have written about the art of conducting below are some selected excerpts:

Charles Münch<sup>3</sup>: ("I am a Conductor"), 1954

In the term "chef d'orchestre" there is a notion of commanding; but it matters less to give orders than to know how to express them, and that, not by proclamations, but by gestures, attunes, by a true telepathy, by a sensitive and irresistible radiance. (Liébert, 1922, p. 630)

All definitions [of a conductor] that only take into account the science and the craft are revealed to be cruelly insufficient. What, then, is lacking? I think that every human being, granted as such with memory, intelligence, character, carries in him, in addition, a fraction of supernatural power. To liberate this superhuman potential, to allow it to radiate and envelope the musicians of the orchestra, such is, definitively, the supreme role of the conductor. (Liébert, 1988, p. 633)

Hermann Scherchen<sup>4</sup>: ("Conducting of orchestra"), 1953

In the same way that lightning and its light are one and the same and are inseparable from each other, the sonorous conception of the work and its materialization by the orchestra must be inseparable in their fulfillment. This total unity between conception and sonority, between the conductor and the

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<sup>3</sup> French violinist and conductor (1891-1968)

<sup>4</sup> German conductor (1891-1966)

orchestra, between the musician and instrument is the criterion according to which one can define orchestral conducting, as well as the ideal that could be attained by great conductors at the head of very receptive orchestras during privileged moments. (Scherchen, 1953, p. 32)

Hector Berlioz<sup>5</sup>: ("The Conductor. Theory of his Art"), 1855

The incapable or malicious conductor ruins everything. The composer must consider himself happy when the conductor into whose hands he has fallen is not both incapable and malicious; for nothing can resist the pernicious influence of the latter. The most marvelous orchestra is then paralyzed, the most excellent singers are disturbed and numbed, the man of genius (the composer) become an extravagant person or a cretin, and what is worse, the public, and even those listeners gifted with the highest musical intelligence are in an impossible situation, if it concerns a new work that they are hearing for the first time, to recognize the ravages exerted by the conductor, to discover the foolishness, the errors, the crimes that he commits. (Liéber, 1988, pp. 19-20.)

Thanks to these excerpts, I demonstrate that the roles of the conductor are considered to be complicated and demanding. The director has great responsibilities towards the orchestra; he has the duty to restore to the best condition the works to be interpreted, to translate the ideas and the intentions of the composer with the greatest rightness.

The conductor must equally internalize a very well-delimited sonorous conception, in order to know what he wants to hear with his ensemble and by which gestures he is going to ask this of them or to show them. Finally, I raise the supernatural aspect of the relationship between the orchestra and the conductor; this alchemy that one cannot necessarily show, that is sometimes produced and that transforms the concert in a moment with an inexplicable magic from which no one in the audience is spared. There is, then, a symbiosis between the musicians the conductor the public and the interpreted music.

I, furthermore, offer you a last excerpt on this point. It is a testimony by the Swiss conductor, Charles Dutoit in his book "Music of the World". Dutoit was in Lucerne as a listener with his friend the great cellist Pierre Fournier to hear the Verdi Requiem under the direction of Herbert van Karajan.

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<sup>5</sup> French conductor and composer (1803-1869)

"I think it was the most extraordinary concert I have ever attended. The musical tension was such that at the end...there was no applause! Nothing. Karajan left with the soloists, then the orchestra stood up in silence. My throat was tightened. Pierre Fournier was weeping. Karajan unleashed an unbelievable electricity".

I conclude this chapter with a peroration of the definition of a conductor by the Larousse Dictionary of Music 2010: "Conducting is therefore not one thing, but multiple ones, and the different personalities that are involved bring responses to it as varied as their temperaments".

## **2. The Functions of the Conductor in an Ensemble in General**

The Larousse 2010 Music Dictionary summarizes all of the conductor's functions in a very condensed manner. "The conductor's goal is to unify the playing of the instrumentalists while keeping his own musical vision in mind, to do service toward the composer's work before the public. For this, vast musical knowledge is necessary, and the conductor has multiple roles." Among the diverse aspects touched upon in this definition, I can raise several important subjects:

- The conductor must unite the interpretation of each musician, of the different registers of instruments in order to recreate the work in the most relevant manner.
- He must have a clear conception, a personal idea about the piece.
- He respects with conviction the composer's music without misrepresenting it.
- He presents the work before the public.
- He must acquire very broad knowledge to become a conductor.
- The functions of the craft of conducting are very numerous.

Some of these points will be addressed later in this thesis, in the chapter about the diverse competencies that a conductor must acquire.

In this chapter, I will particularly address the multiple functions of a musical director at the heart of a society. It is necessary to know that what we see, we, the public, at the evening of the concert, or in front of television, is only a tiny part of the conductor's work. Indeed, his responsibilities, his roles are much richer and more diversified; the concert is only the tip of the iceberg. We should understand that the conductor's tasks are not all musical ones. One can classify his functions into two groups; musical and extra-musical tasks. Those specifically musical tasks are:

- the analysis of scores and the elaboration of gestures in rapport with the work being played

- work in rehearsal, putting the pieces together with the orchestra
- directing the ensemble during concerts
- certain touching up of the orchestration in order to adapt the piece according to the abilities of the ensemble (principally in amateur ensembles)

As every orchestra acquires a repertoire of works to perform and it is indispensable that the members know the scheduled performance dates, the conductor, aided by an artistic commission therefore carries out several extra-musical tasks, permitting the smooth operation of the ensemble during the entire season:

- the choice of works for the concert programs
- to organize the acquisition of orchestral scores and parts
- the organization of the concert programs of the musical season
- the implementation of various rehearsal plans with the orchestra
- recruitment campaigns of musicians in order to assure an effective number of musicians in the orchestra
- the auditions of the instrumentalists

One must also speak of the varied social relationship that a conductor must maintain with the different political and religious elements in the surrounding community. In the society of a village or of a city, large sums of money are sometimes spent and this financing is often essential to the survival of the ensemble. It depends upon society's leaders to demonstrate that their financial windfall is very precious for the stability of a musical society. It is necessary to regularly convince them and show them the admirable impact that such a beautiful art produces upon the community as a whole.

To finish the subject on the functions of the musical director, I want to talk about his mediating side, as well as the relationship he has with his ensemble. Indeed, a conductor is largely responsible for the cohesion of his group, and for the good general positive spirit and for the prevailing atmosphere.

If he wants to make quality music, he needs to have the trust and consideration of his musicians. Yes, he is the conductor, the leader, but there is a way to obtain what one desires. Whether in rehearsal, at the concert, or even in a different setting, musicians need to identify with their conductor. In return, the conductor must live up to their expectations and also respect them not only as artists but above all as human beings. Unfortunately, this feeling between conductor and orchestra cannot be learned and cannot be fabricated. Either you have it and the cooperation with your ensemble is a happiness, either you do not have it !

My teacher at the Fribourg Conservatory in Switzerland, Maestro Jean-Claude Kolly, told me: "The relationship between a musical society and its director is like a wedding." I can add that if things are not going well, one must consider a possible separation, for the good of all, for the good of the music.

In his DVD, "You Cannot Start Without Me" the conductor Valery Gergiev<sup>6</sup> discusses the essential importance of a good contact with the musicians and especially the fragility of these relations. It takes little to break a mood, destroy affinities. It is then very difficult to restore these relationships when the connections have been strained.

I asked myself what the different relationships are that musicians of all levels have with their boss, outside of work. In this regard, I wanted to interview these three conductors during my interviews. I propose that you read their answers.

For conductor Jan Dobrzewski, there may be, of course, special professional relationships, especially with musicians who have a more important role in the orchestra, such as heads of groups or musicians who are soloists. If not with the musicians in general, he says that the conductor must be available but he does not often have the chance to create closer contacts with his musicians. Especially when he is a guest conductor, he finds himself alone most of the time. If he is permanent director of the ensemble, there is more opportunity to get closer to the musicians, but it is as for everything, it depends on the circumstances and also the connected atoms of common affinities. With an amateur orchestra, it is often different because the conductor plays the role of facilitator, but also of an inspirer.

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<sup>6</sup> Russian conductor (1953\*)



Choral conductor Bernard Héritier says that he has for many years had very deep relationships with some of his singers. Obviously not with everyone, though, because friendships remain selective. There are times when everything goes well with the everything and the relationships are very pleasant and sometimes, when the ensemble goes through a more difficult and delicate period, it is more complex to manage these relations of friendship. He says he has always had the chance to meet people who have supported him in his work, while singing in his ensembles.

The conductor Jean-Claude Kolly, who collaborates more often with amateur musicians than with professionals, considers that good relations outside rehearsals and concerts are essential. He demands from them the best and they surpass themselves during the performances. He therefore finds it legitimate to be interested in their personal situations and sometimes the worries of his musicians and to maintain a friendly relationship with them. An instrumentalist going through a difficult time will need a bit of understanding from the conductor. He finds it very important and rewarding for a conductor to know his musicians.

### **3. The Various Types of Musical Ensembles**

The multiplicity of types of ensembles and their respective musical levels mean that each society has different artistic and social requirements and therefore needs a conductor adapted to its needs. As I wrote earlier, "you have to imagine the relationship between an orchestra and its musical director as a marriage." (Maestro Jean-Claude Kolly) In such a union, each of the two parties must collaborate with their partner, under the best conditions, with similar desires and objectives.

I address different types of existing ensembles in this section, but first of all I propose a definition of the orchestra. In his *Illustrated Guide to Music, Volume 1*, Ulrich Michels writes: "The term orchestra means a more or less important set of instruments grouped by chorus, unlike the solo ensembles used in chamber music. Choral grouping implies a certain discipline and the adoption of the same techniques (bowing, for example), in favor of a general spirit essentially characterized by the conductor." (1988, p. 65)

There is a considerable number of types of ensembles or orchestras, (to which I also add vocal training), here are the main ones:

- The symphonic or philharmonic orchestra: Ensemble composed of four major families of instruments: woodwinds, brass, strings and percussion. The size of the orchestra has increased considerably throughout its history. The number of performers in a concert differs according to the work played. In general, it is made up of about fifty to more than one hundred musicians.
- The chamber orchestra: It can also be made up of four large families of instruments, but of a more modest size. The family of strings is the base, to which are added the woodwinds and some brass. Depending upon the repertoire, other brass and percussion come to enrich the ensemble. The number of musicians varies from twenty to forty instrumentalists.
- The string orchestra: Group consisting solely of instruments of the string family: the violin, the viola, the cello, the double bass. They are generally small or medium-sized ensembles, between fifteen and forty musicians.

- The Harmony Orchestra: Orchestra of wind instruments from the woodwind and brass family, consisting of thirty to eighty musicians. This ensemble also includes a section of percussionists and sometimes uses cellos and double basses, especially in large harmony ensembles.
- The brass band: Ensemble composed of brass and percussionists. The structure of this group is precisely defined and the number of musicians playing in this type of orchestra is about thirty. Of course, in village societies, this number varies according to the possible size of the ensemble. In Valais, in the region of Switzerland where I grew up, there is a multitude of brass bands. The musical level is sometimes excellent. In many villages, there are still two groups participating in cultural life.
- The fanfare ensemble: In Switzerland, in the 1990s, this type of training has often turned into a brass band or sometimes even into harmony ensemble. Therefore, few fanfare ensembles still remain. Composed of brass, percussion and also saxophones and clarinets, the structure and the number of musicians of this set are not, as in the brass band, defined exactly. The bugle (a trumpet-like instrument of the brass family) plays an important role in the marching band, but sometimes it is replaced by cornets or trumpets.
- The choir: A musical ensemble made up of singers, also called choristers. There are many types of vocal groups: choirs of women, men, children, youth, or mixed (male and female voices). The size of the groups is very variable. For a work with orchestra, there can be over 200 singers.
- An orchestra made up of families of specific instruments: It is a group made up of instruments belonging to the same family, such as the accordion orchestra, the recorder orchestra, the guitar orchestra, mandolins ...
- The Big Band Orchestra: This is a medium-sized orchestral band performing jazz and blues songs. It is composed of four distinct instrumental sections: saxophones, trombones, trumpets and rhythm section (drums, piano, guitar, percussion and bass or double bass). One or more singers can also be present.

During the interview, I asked the following question to each of the three conductors: "Is there a different approach depending on the type of ensemble and the repertoire ?" The reactions of these three conductors lead to a clear observation. The approach to rehearsals of amateur and professional ensembles is very different. A conductor does not work the same way in developing a concert program. There are different demands at the pedagogical level, and the learning speed differs greatly. The quality is not necessarily better among the elite musicians. In terms of results, the Swiss choir director Bernard Hérítier says that it takes longer for the amateurs to complete their preparation of works, but that this additional period allows us to go for the small important details and increase the fusion and the flexibility of the voices, qualities that are not always excellent in professional choirs. When I also asked the Colonel François Boulanger, conductor of the Republican Guard in Paris, he says that a good orchestra of amateurs often has nothing to envy in front of professionals!

I will take the time, in a next chapter, to develop the subject on amateur and professional orchestras in more detail.

According to the three conductors interviewed about the differences in repertoire, it is also imperative that the conductor be thoroughly familiar with the composers, eras, styles and context in which the works were created. According to Bernard Hérítier, it is obvious that one does not approach a 16th-century work as a Modern or Romantic piece.

To conclude this part, I can say that any musical ensemble is formed of personalities, human beings who all have different sensibilities and talents, needs and also defects. In short, the life of an ensemble is a bit of a sample of our planet, everyone must try to make it work at its best. Respect for others, for rules, for the different personalities who lead the group and also for the set goals is precious and contributes to the longevity of the group. The conductor is one of the essential cogs in the smooth running and sometimes fragile balance of this small cosmos dedicated to music.

#### **4. How Does One Become a Conductor?**

Exercising the art of conducting is far more complex than practicing an instrument. The violinist who wants to train takes the violin out of his case and plays it. For the singer, it is even easier, he can practice almost anywhere and anytime. For the conductor, it is quite different. If he wants to use his "instrument", he must have an orchestra in front of him, or at least a group of instrumentalists. His art therefore depends upon others. Without other musicians, he is nothing. It is nevertheless possible to learn to conduct without always having to depend upon an ensemble.

The essential knowledge and skills of a conductor are so diverse that there is a way to prepare a musician to become a conductor in many ways. But one thing is certain, nothing replaces the practice in front of the orchestra, not even the best conducting teacher.

There are many ways to train as a music director, however there is no compulsory diploma to direct an education in conducting. Certain great conductors, such as the British maestro Thomas Beecham or the German composer and conductor Günter Wand were even self-taught in conducting. It should be noted, however, that the current tendency is to follow a formal training in conducting, largely to acquire an excellent technique of the gesture. Without that, achieving the sound of the music you imagine in your head can sometimes be very difficult. When your gestures perfectly sketch the music you want to create and your musicians easily understand your intentions, it greatly simplifies the work with the ensemble. You save time, you understand immediately and you do not need to compromise because you are unable to show your intentions. A conductor who has tried in vain to implement a complex technical transition or a delicate transition, will lose credibility in front of his musicians. I am convinced that a conductor must have an irreproachable technique of gestures. Just as any professional instrumentalist possesses the technique to play his instrument.

To become a conductor, there is a sine qua non condition: you have to be a Musician, first and foremost. The term "musician" implies that he knows extremely well the theory of music: solfeggio, harmony, counterpoint, analysis and history. He must also have knowledge of the families of instruments he

directs: notions about the strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. It would also be necessary for the conductor to know how to sing for two reasons: first, to express vocally to these musicians what he wants to hear; secondly, to understand the way in which the music he analyzes is analyzed, where the breaths, the tensions and relaxation are placed, the way of articulating. Thus, he will more easily find the appropriate type of gesture. What is more natural than singing, which has no intermediary between the thought of its author and what results from it? Moreover, we cannot forget to breathe when we sing. The great German conductor Hermann Scherchen wrote in his book on conducting: "[...], the song that breathes life into the world of sounds. Singing is the vital function of music. Without it, the music breaks apart, [...]" (1986, p. 50). Conductor Thomas Beecham also said, "If I can not sing a work, I do not conduct it."(Liébert, 1990, p. 66).

There is another important aspect to become a conductor, one must have a personal conception of each directed work. First of all, you must know the score perfectly. Then you must be able to hear it in your mind, imagine it, know how each passage sounds. Similarly, the conductor must inquire about the composer whose music he is playing.

This allows the conductor to orient his interpretation in relation to the styles of the time of its creation. In the interview, the conductor Kolly discusses the difference in approach of the various repertoires played:

Each type of repertoire requires a different character and sound. It is therefore obvious that the approach for the conductor is not the same. During the preparation of the score, he must research at the historical and geographical background to know the characteristics of the work he will direct. He also says that each ensemble has a different charisma and a way of working of its own. If one has to deal with an ensemble that works very quickly, or on the contrary, that needs time to assimilate the works, the attitude of the conductor in the construction of rehearsal is different.

For the execution of the work, He will know more precisely what he can and cannot undertake in the interpretation. In the concept of personal design, there is sometimes a factor that can disrupt the leader's ideals; in addition to respecting the composer's indications as much as possible, these are the

possibilities of the ensemble. For example, you have a precise idea of a tempo of a part of the work that you direct, but for your orchestra, the speed of execution is too fast. You then have only two choices: play this part slower, but against your personal convictions, or refuse to approach this music in these conditions. This decision is sometimes difficult to make, but the will to respect the work should always prevail.

Another essential asset for a music director is to have a high quality of listening. After his personal preparation of the piece, he knows in his head, how it sounds, how it sings. Once in front of the ensemble, he will inevitably hear, at one time or another, divergences between his ideas and the reality of what the orchestra plays. For this he must have an ear, which detects the slightest deviation, what is changed and by what instruments, so that he can intervene and quickly correct these differences. It can be a simple false note, a wrong articulation, the incomprehension of a musician or another way of interpretation.

There is one last aspect that I want to approach and it is not one that is learned. A conductor, like the boss of an enterprise, is in charge of an institution that includes a large number of people. In addition, the importance of his decisions and choices has a great influence on how it works. One must feel that the musical director of a group, is one who leads, one who rallies others forward. He must know how to motivate his troops when everything is going perfectly just as much as during difficult times that the orchestra can traverse. He will be constantly constructive, visionary and ambitious to lead his orchestra ever higher, ever further. So that the entire ensemble tries to push beyond its own limits.

This is how the traditional training of a conductor in Switzerland takes place. There are classes in the Conservatories and the Hautes Écoles de Musique. Generally, it is possible to train in three different courses: choir conducting, wind ensemble conducting and orchestral conducting. In the first two, it is often possible to enroll in non-vocational training. Indeed, in the areas of choral conducting and wind ensembles, a significant portion of conductors are amateurs, often talented and passionate.

If a musician wants to obtain a professional degree, he must first acquire a Bachelor's Degree in orchestral conducting. Subsequently, as for the Bachelor's Degree, he takes an entrance exam in a conducting class, in order to obtain a

Master's Degree. It is obviously advisable to have a good concept of conducting in order to seek a place in the Hautes Écoles. The training is spread over 3 years for the Bachelor's Degree and 2 or 3 years for the Master's Degree.

I interviewed the three conductors about their musical journey and in conducting; here are their answers:

For conductor Jan Dobrzelewski, his career as a conductor began by realizing during the preparation of a work that it is not possible to mount and present this work without the help of a conductor. Since he already officiates at the position of solo violin, he is then proposed to conduct. His career begins with this anecdote. Then he takes part in many conducting courses with different teachers. He also has the opportunity to play as a solo violin with several orchestras, to see many great conductors in action. He later created and directed several chamber orchestras in Costa Rica and Mexico.

The choirmaster Bernard Héritier took over as the first group the group of singers where he began his career as a singer. Then during his vocal studies, he attended many master classes of choral conducting and conducting in France and Germany. He also founded several choirs.

Maestro Kolly talks about his triple training, which he describes as an ideal course for him: a training as a musician and then a conductor but also as a teacher in schools. For him, these three courses are important and complementary for the job of director. Being a teacher allows the conductor to have an educational attitude. When one is a musician one knows the instruments and therefore the problems of his musicians. Finally, conducting studies allow one to control the preparation of the work, its analysis and the conduct of the rehearsal.

#### **4.1 My Career in the World of Music**

Since this work is personal and must be imbued with my experiences, I want to inform you, in this second part of the chapter, about my career in music and how I became a conductor. I actually think that discussing my musical background can help the reader to understand the somewhat atypical evolution of my craft



with the different ensembles with which I have worked. It also allows the reader to understand that everyone develops their career path in a unique way.

My parents are not musicians at all. However, my grandfather played saxophone in the very good fanfare ensemble of my village. When I was four, I asked my mother to buy me a conductor's baton. Imagine her astonishment at my strange request! I wanted to become a conductor. No one has ever told me why I wanted to become a maestro, but I know that I have had this passion since my early childhood and it remains intact. I got started piano the same year, I played for six years. I was then often asked to join the ranks of the fanfare ensemble in which my grandfather played. But I always answered in the same way: "I want to be a conductor, not an instrumentalist. I want to conduct the music, not play it!" And that is why I never started playing in the band.

It was much later, when I had passed 17 years of age that my demons of music caught up to me. After all these years just dreaming without ever knowing how to achieve it, I wanted more and more to conduct an ensemble and to be in front of musicians; it became an obsession. This is where one of my close friends, a musician in this famous ensemble made me change my mind. Three months later, I started playing euphonium in the new musical season. But, obviously, my goal was different, and I wanted to go to the side of the baton as soon as possible. However, the work with the director during the rehearsals was exciting and it was an excellent type of conducting course for me. Soon, I showed my interest to become assistant conductor of all the young musicians of the band. This good quality ensemble was regularly featured in small concerts in the area. I started to build my conducting arsenal with this ensemble and I learned a lot.

The following year, I enrolled into a Conservatory of music, in the conducting class of wind ensembles and in the accelerated theory class. That same year, a friend came to see me with a proposal to direct the youth choir of my village that nobody wants to take back. Two weeks later, another friend suggested that I come for a trial rehearsal to resume a harmony ensemble orchestra in the area. This is where everything goes very fast for me. I found myself at the age of 18, head of a harmony ensemble, of a youth choir, and of the youth band of my initial training.

What wonderful experiences I had. I remember the response of my first professor at conservatory when I told him about this proposal to lead this harmony ensemble. He said: "If you say yes, you will have lots of new experiences, even if the training is not very good, you will learn to work with musicians and to make your first weapons. If you say no, you'll always regret not having started there." He was right. I had my first solid experiences through regular practice in front of musicians. Because nothing can replace the job, being there with the orchestra, baton in hand, and making sure to produce the best music possible. I have been fortunate all these years to lead a large number of amateur ensembles of very different levels. With a youth choir, I have also opened a brand new and essential door for any conductor, that of singing. I then started a training as a singer at the Conservatory, it has contributed so much to my learning of conducting and, especially, of being a musician.

It was at the age of 23, after several years of intense reflection on the issue, that I made the decision to continue my music studies, in order to become a professional conductor. Music as a hobby took up a lot of my time, and sometimes, with my professional activity and family relationships, it became complicated. I wanted more and it was not possible. But above all, I wanted to continue to train, to go further in my studies and acquire the appropriate background to lead ensembles of the best musical level. It was therefore necessary to take the plunge. And what a radical change! I had to completely interrupt my professional activity, to start a full-time federal vocational matriculation (compulsory to enter a Swiss university) and at the same time, I followed one day a week, a pre-professional conducting course at the Conservatory of Fribourg. The week was busy, but so exciting.

After graduation, I started a Bachelor of Music Teacher in schools, with singing as the main instrument. I completed at the same time my pre-professional training of conducting and Bachelor's Degree. In the meantime, I had passed my entrance exams in the executive class, the Master's degree at the Haute École de Musique in Lausanne and a Higher Diploma in Conducting at the Bern University of the Arts. As I could not make a choice between them, I started both, and these two types of groups with very different visions took me to beautiful human and musical experiences.

I regularly had the opportunity in my studies, to conduct string instruments and work in the repertoire of classical music, and this was finally what fascinated me. I was therefore more and more frustrated to have to conduct, outside of my training, only wind ensembles, moreover, addressing a repertoire that did not interest me in the same way. I needed a string orchestra to allow me to do classical music. I talked to a Venezuelan friend who helped me with this complicated task. We wanted to bring together students of string instruments from the Sion High School of Music. We did not have a franc in hand to create this first concert project, but finally, we found ourselves with fifteen young musicians, motivated to make beautiful music. The Sedunum String Orchestra, (SSO), was founded in the summer of 2012 and became a professional orchestra with projects. We have since created eight new projects of excellent quality, have accompanied renowned soloists, have been engaged three times by an international festival of classical music and have in the last project in December 2017 been engaged to perform Offenbach's operetta *Orpheus aux Enfers*, four times, in front of more than two thousand people. The orchestra has been hailed by critics in this beautiful production.

I can say that my Sedunum String Orchestra gave me the opportunity to have more experiences and to learn more about my profession than any training. And if there was only one answer to the question: "How does one become a conductor?" I would say without hesitation: making his own experiences in front of musicians and being confronted with the music. But there is no single answer, and there are plenty of paths, or should I say pilgrimages that lead to the personal success of a musician and a conductor.

In the summer of 2015, I received a phone call from the director Florian Schmocker<sup>7</sup>. They were going to stage Rossini's opera *Guillaume Tell*, in the Roman arena of Martigny in Valais. The premiere was in less than a month and the conductor had just had a stroke. He proposed to me to replace him. The next rehearsal with all the soloists took place the next afternoon and I could get the scores the same evening. There was three hours of music, which I had never heard in my life, except for the opening, to prepare as quickly as possible. Of course I said yes and this very ambitious project was beautifully well done. This was one of my most incredible memories: finishing this opera five times in the

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<sup>7</sup> Swiss director and musician (1956-2017)

open air and in the night, in a Roman amphitheater, with an audience of one thousand people, an orchestra of 60 musicians on the stage and more than 80 singers, a deep emotion.

That same year, having completed my two degrees in the Swiss Higher Schools of Bern and Lausanne, and after a semester of enriching Erasmus exchange at the High School of Music of Prague, I decided to pursue a place in the same institution. to undertake a second Master's Degree. This training offered an effective teaching focused as much on the conducting of the symphonic repertoire as on opera conducting. I found myself again in the Czech Republic and this time for a three-year Master's Degree program. Thanks to these new studies, I have had the chance to collaborate several times with prestigious institutions of the country like the Brno Philharmonic, the Prague Philharmonia or the Opera Orchestra of Plzeň. In Prague, I also founded the Opera Studio Praha, an association that creates opera projects and combines music with various disciplines such as dance and pantomime. In 2017, we put on a show that was hailed by critics. Then we were invited by an important opera festival in Prague. We are now working on a brand new project for the winter of 2018.

I want to conclude this chapter with these few lines: becoming a conductor is one thing, working regularly and living well is another. Currently, it is not easy at all to find a musical director position in a professional ensemble. And if it is easier to work in amateur ensembles, the salary is obviously not enough, so you must accumulate invitations. To date, there are more and more good conductors. There are always more countries that offer excellent training in the field of conducting. When I last registered for an international competition in Denmark, we were 566 young aspiring conductors, coming from 78 different countries. This competition has almost seen its number of registrations double compared to the last one, three years ago! As the competition is fierce today, we must find all means to stand out and stand out from the others. There are two good ways to do this: to conduct conducting competitions or find an assistant position in a good institution. One must not hesitate to promote oneself, by creating a website, sending spontaneous offers in different theaters and orchestras. But it is true that the luck factor plays a certain role in the success of a maestro's career. You have to meet the right people at the right time. I know many talented conductors who unfortunately have no job. There are also some musicians who regularly conduct and have no special gift.

## 5. Amateur and Professional Musicians

When you conduct a group, whether consisting of amateur musicians or talented professionals, in both cases, you make music and endeavor to do it very well. The ultimate goal is therefore the same: to be at the service of the work that one interprets, despite different approaches towards rehearsing and sometimes very different amounts of preparation time.

When I started my career as a conductor, I led amateur musicians of a fairly low musical level. I had to explain nearly everything to them and ask them things hundreds of times. To achieve a certain pianissimo or diminuendo, to make a beautiful phrasing or to create a good overall sound, it was the cross and the banner at each rehearsal. And often, I had to settle for a result far below expectations. We had two rehearsals a week, from September to April, which is about seven months of work, to prepare an hour and a half of music, and all that hard work for a single annual concert. Whereas today, when I do a concert with a professional orchestra, I have three or four rehearsals to prepare the ensemble. Between these two examples there is a considerably different approach in the preparation. Here are the main points that diverge, in the two examples above, during the work preceding the presentation of the works to the public, but also during the concert:

- the learning speed of the musicians
- the musical level of the ensemble
- the individual work of musicians between different rehearsals
- the preparation time for the concert
- the requirements of the conductor to adapt to the level of the orchestra
- conducting gestures

Regarding the first point about the speed of learning, it is very important not to neglect it when preparing a concert program. One must know the abilities of the ensemble to prepare for a new deadline and schedule a time for rehearsals that is appropriate. In amateur orchestras especially, there are sometimes very large

differences in the learning speed of the instrumentalists. With some, we say things once and it works, with others, we must repeat the same information tirelessly. Some are very good at music and at their instrument, and others, who sometimes also have a great passion for their hobby, are much less so. You have to know how to adapt to these differences and make sure that everyone benefits. We must advance the less able without discouraging the most talented.

The second criterion is also fundamental. It determines all your choices and your challenges. Especially with amateurs, one finds a huge disparity between the elite of the music ensembles and the less good ensembles. Every musical organization has its "creed", that is, that it has a course of action for its group. For some, it is to allow members to have a good time with friends, while making music. For others, their main goal is to win a maximum of competitions, to constantly progress the level of all, to place it at the zenith. This is partly the case with vocational training. The musical level between the Berlin Philharmonic and a small regional professional orchestra can also be considerably different, and these two ensembles certainly have ambitions and projects of widely different scope, even if the desire to make beautiful music remains one of their essential common points.

The conscientious musicians work their instruments at home. They arrive at the first rehearsal and already know the music, they master their technical features and know how to take advantage of the rehearsal with the colleagues to adjust parameters that can only be practiced when with the others, as for example the accuracy in the register and the precision and balance of the whole ensemble. Other instrumentalists do not even bother to take their instrument out of the case. If, in addition, these musicians are the least capable members of the group, the disparity between the best and the weakest is only increased and it complicates the task of the conductor in rehearsal. Unfortunately, it is often the less talented who are the laziest. This remark applies to both amateur and professional musicians.

Regarding the next point concerning the preparation time for the concert, the conductor will take care to adapt it intelligently, because it is very important to be properly prepared for a deadline. In an interview, the Swiss conductor Armin Jordan described the concert as follows:

"The happiness of the concert depends on the quality of the preparation. Well prepared, nothing is difficult. Otherwise, it's terrible. I always say to young musicians: be prepared! So, the pleasure of conducting is unheard of, that can not be explained. To lead Wagner's "Parsifal" is to enter a whole new dimension. "The Afternoon Prelude of a Fauna" by Debussy is bathing in a fabulous sensuality." (Jordan, 1997) This quote demonstrates the importance of good musical preparation. Indeed, the concert is a unique moment and those who prepare it must be at the height of the event. On the other hand, a too long preparation time will also have a negative effect on the quality of the work and the success of the concert. Indeed, the fact of too much repeating a partition, triggers in everyone boredom and even further, annoyance. It will be necessary at all costs to avoid crossing this limit, by finding an adequate time of preparation. For my part, I always try to have something new to give at the time of the concert. In order to allow the musicians to find a new and original inspiration and to make them want to take some risks and surpass themselves. For me, the concert is the last step of an ascent towards the completion of the preparation of a work, and it is not necessary to reach the summit before this last march. It is imperative to reach this summit during the concert!

The conductor must be at the height of what is asked of him in his notebook of tasks. And as said earlier, regarding the musical level of the ensemble, his tasks can vary greatly depending on the politics or the creed of the orchestra. Nevertheless, the conductor must respect the music he plays, as well as the members of the ensemble and also the audience who will listen to them. He must constantly ensure that the musical quality is the best and push his ensemble to want to make each project even better. He will take care not to fall into a boring routine and keep a healthy and quality work environment. It is very important for a conductor to have a medium and long term artistic vision of his orchestra. He must consider the future, know how to evolve his training with taste and intelligence.

The last point addressed concerns the conductor's gestures. This is very personal, each one has his way of conducting, his own small techniques, his own small defects and his few weaknesses. What is ultimately most important is that musicians immediately understand your intentions, that they are comfortable with your gestures and that your orchestra plays together. It can be said, however, that with amateur training, the conducting will have to be content with

a clear, rather simple and precise technique. I do not mean that with professionals there is no need to be precise and clear! But you more often have the opportunity to trust your musicians, let them play, and finally, use your arms to show other details and finesse of the work. I do not think I conduct amateurs and professionals in a very different manner. I believe that it is particularly in the beginning of the preparation of a program that there is a real difference in the gestures. One must also add that this depends on the musical level of the amateur ensemble and the habit that the musicians have with a conductor. It's all about knowing what musicians need! The gestures are the conductor's language in the service of his musicians.

To conclude this part, I propose to read the answer given by the Swiss conductor Jean-Claude Kolly, concerning the important differences that we find before a set of amateurs or professionals:

"The main difference between the two types of training is that the conductor must have a more pedagogical attitude toward non-professional musicians. He must explain more, know how to give technical advice, be more attentive and the preparation of a work takes longer. However, when directing high-level amateur musicians, this difference tends to disappear and your technique of working and results are very similar to those of a professional orchestra."

## **5.1 The Core Competencies the Conductor Must Have**

To conclude this chapter, I will now list in two groups the important and specific capacities that a conductor who works with amateurs or with professionals must develop.

The main and essential skills with amateur musicians are:

Patience. It is absolutely indispensable. You must be able to repeat the same thing a hundred times and continue to believe that this time is the right one! You respect the weaknesses of your instrumentalists and accept that they sometimes need time to assimilate the requirements of the score and their instruments.



Motivation. The conductor must have to resell and especially give a lot! Nothing is worse than an amateur ensemble leader who can no longer motivate his instrumentalists. He must constantly arouse interest in his musicians. They are there for the happiness of making music, despite the demands of rehearsal. You must think that everyone has a profession that takes a lot of their time and energy. For this the conductor gives them the desire to go to the beautiful and so allow them to forget the hassle of everyday life. Their salary is none other than the pleasure of living and sharing their passion for music.

To know how to renew oneself. We must learn to multiply our methods of work. This will prevent you from falling into routine and to not lose motivation and and cause it to be lost. Indeed, as you must sometimes say things often and repeat passages regularly, it is a good omen to find several ways to say it and also to design different ways of working with musicians. For example, you can create warm-up exercises focused on the various difficulties of your musical program, which you will place at the beginning of the rehearsal. Change is often good.

A fun and educational work method. Developing an entertaining rehearsal while educating your ensemble is the key to success. You hold your musicians in suspense until the last minute.

A social and unifying spirit. As I have already mentioned in the chapter on the duties of the conductor, amateur musicians have a great need to identify with their leader. He is for them the symbol of musical quality, but he must also be a unifying emblem, an open mind and sociable who likes contact with his musicians. Knowing how to create friendly relationships, sometimes sharing a good drink or eating a meal with the members of one's ensemble is also a very important part of the duties of the director of an amateur ensemble.

The main and essential skills with professional musicians are:

High level of musical knowledge. It is essential for a conductor to have a great musical culture. He works with talented musicians and demands the best from them. For this, he must have an important musical background and know perfectly the works he directs.

Speed and efficiency of work. In a world that is going faster and faster and where everyone is asked for the best, a conductor who works with a professional

orchestra has the duty to prepare himself as quickly as possible. It is not very charming to say, but imagine how much it costs a three-hour orchestra rehearsal in a philharmonic ensemble of one hundred musicians! It is therefore necessary to arrive at the best result, in the shortest possible time. In addition, the instrumentalists appreciate a steady pace of work. They see directly where the Maestro is coming from and quickly understand his expectations and requirements. Efficiency and speed, essential factors for a conductor.

Inspire musicians and push the orchestra beyond these limits. This is a very important point for me: to be able to get the best of each musician and even to get the orchestra to surpass itself, to push its own limits, its own abilities. This is genius and few leaders are there. This requires an excellent relationship between the ensemble and the conductor, but also other gifts and skills of the Maestro. I have had the chance to attend concerts with exceptional orchestras and conductors. When this alchemy operates during the concert, it's just wonderful. We feel that the orchestra and the conductor, and even the public, form a whole. One and immense energy. At this point the time stops, nothing else matters. It is this kind of experience that inspires you immeasurably and makes you want to find again and again this extraordinary symbiosis.

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated the importance of the conductor to adapt to the requirements of the ensemble. There are many kinds of amateur or professional training, with very different needs and desires. And it is not fair to believe that all chefs dream of leading the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. I know many directors of very modest amateur ensembles who are satisfied musicians and who do a high quality work with their musicians. The solution is to find a shoe on one's foot: the ensemble must engage a musical director who shares their artistic vision, with the same values and who has similar ambitions.

## **6. The Work and Relationships of the Conductor in the Different Types of Ensembles With Which I Have Worked.**

I started my career as a conductor at the age of 18 and I had the chance to lead various musical groups: a youth choir, several brass bands, several wind orchestras, youth ensembles musicians, string orchestras, symphony orchestras and opera orchestras. I also founded my string orchestra, the Sedunum String Orchestra SSO, a project-based professional ensemble, and founded the opera association Prague Opera Studio Praha. I have worked with amateur musicians as well as professionals.

In this chapter, I will use essentially my experience and my career to explain in the best way the profession of the conductor, as well as the various relationships in the different types of ensembles. We will start with my first director position in a harmony orchestra of a village in my area.

I was 18 years old when I got my first commitment as a conductor, in this amateur ensemble of low musical level, and what is more, had just thanked his former director, because it had caused very many damages in the ensemble. Many unmotivated members had left the company in previous years and there were not thirty instrumentalists left when I started. There was everything to do or redo to present a quality concert. In addition, I did not have any experience in this field, I began my career as a conductor. I could not find a better school to learn the craft. I wanted to quickly improve the musical level and create a climate of pleasure and desire to make music at my musicians. In this kind of ensemble, the social side is invaluable. Developing friendly ties with musicians is also important for maintaining group cohesion. When you have good relationships, you can ask much more of your set and it will sometimes give you more.

## **6.1 My First Experience as a Conductor in a Harmony Orchestra [Wind Ensemble]**

I was 18 years old when I received my first position as a conductor, in this amateur ensemble of low musical level, and what is more, had just thanked his former director, because it had caused many damages in the ensemble. Many unmotivated members had left the company in previous years and there were only thirty instrumentalists left when I started. Everything needed to be done or redone to present a quality concert. In addition, I did not have any experience in this field, I began my career as a conductor. I could not find a better school to learn the craft. I wanted to quickly improve the musical level and create a climate of pleasure and desire to make music for my musicians. In this kind of ensemble, the social side is invaluable. Developing friendly ties with musicians is also important for maintaining group cohesion. When you have good relationships, you can ask much more of your ensemble and it will sometimes give you more.

I did two rehearsals of two hours a week. They began with a warm-up of about ten to fifteen minutes, fun and related to the works of our program. I wanted to create a quality ensemble sound, "to make them ring", as we say in the jargon. For that, it was necessary to target work upon precision and quality of play, breathing and the listening of each musician. As I mentioned earlier, you have to be patient when working with low-level amateur musicians. You must be able to ask often the same things. We had an hour and a half of music to prepare and about seven months of preparation. Suffice to say an eternity, and especially enough time to no longer be able to stand these pieces of repertoire. However, despite rather laborious preparation, due to the low general level, the little individual work at home between the rehearsals, and the number of absences for some musicians who were less conscientious and passionate than the others, we had a rather good annual concert.

The moment of the concert is good for everyone when they are well focused and doing their best to ensure a perfect version of the work. Often, something special happens upon this occasion. A phenomenon that brings people together, that unites the musicians into a whole. This multiplies the energy and allows the orchestra to surpass itself during a performance. What fun on stage! Then after a

break of fifteen days, we start rehearsals for another challenge, and we restart six feet underground! A new colossal work awaits us.

Regarding the way of working with the orchestra, I performed several types of rehearsals: the rehearsals by registers, the rehearsals by families of instruments and the rehearsals "tutti". In this way, I more effectively targeted the problems to be solved, the needs of the musicians and I avoided wasting time musicians when I rehearse only with others. Here is more in detail about the different kinds of rehearsals that can be found in an annual work plan of an amateur ensemble of all levels:

- the group rehearsal
- rehearsal by instrument families
- the "tutti" rehearsal where the whole ensemble is present
- the dress rehearsal

The group rehearsal is used to target and verify the individual work of each musician. It helps to fix all the technical details and possible difficulties encountered in the score of the instrumentalist. It also helps to create cohesion and overall sound in the registry. In a harmony ensemble [wind ensemble], the main groups of instruments are: clarinets, flutes, saxophones, horns, trumpets, trombones, euphoniums, tubas and percussion. Once the work of each group is completed, it is time to group the musicians for rehearsals by instrument families or rehearsals of the whole ensemble.

For the rehearsals for each instrument family, they are composed respectively of brass, woodwinds and percussion for the harmony orchestras, and large and small instruments of the brass family, as well as percussion, in the field of brass band. This work favors the setting up different groups between them, without having to regroup the entire ensemble. It serves partially as an intermediate and transitory stage. It can be very beneficial, because often the works of the repertoire of wind ensembles and brass bands are quite complex and the fact of separating the different families of instruments such as woodwinds, brass or percussion, makes it possible to assemble and to adjust many musical elements, and thus ideally prepare the orchestra for the tutti rehearsals.

The rehearsal "tutti" where all the ensemble is present, intervenes in the last phase of preparation of a program of music. But it often happens, for social reasons and not to lose the "sound" of the whole, that such rehearsals are placed throughout the preparation phase. You can start your work plan by reading the works with the entire ensemble. Then begins a series of group rehearsals. During this period and that of brass-woodwind rehearsals, it is important to insert several tutti rehearsals. Finally, in the last stage of work, it serves to lay the last stones of the building: the famous overall sound, the balance and the balance between the different groups, the general intonation, the common interpretation of the work, or listening to musicians between them. When these three stages of work are well organized and carried out efficiently, you have the solution for good concert preparation.

To conclude each preparatory phase of a concert, in all types of musical ensembles, the last rehearsal is called the dress rehearsal. It allows the ensemble and the conductor to interpret the complete program, if possible, in order and without stopping, in order to finalize and confirm that the works are ready. In an amateur ensemble, this is really the moment to give his musicians confidence for the concert and to show them that all their work during the season has borne fruit and that the music is ready for public performance.

## **6.2 Comparisons in Working with Different Wind Ensembles**

After two years working with this ensemble, I no longer had the necessary energy and patience, which are key words in this business, to continue my task. Despite a tempting new financial proposal, I declined the offer to stay and I quickly found a conducting position in a better brass band, whose members were much more passionate. Finally one thing is true, we start a new season with another orchestra, but we do the same type of work. We have other challenges, other satisfactions, other results, but the process of preparing a concert is almost identical, the human contact with your musicians remains essential and you always have the ambition to make beautiful music.

To avoid repeating myself, I will avoid telling each of my experiences as a conductor in the amateur wind ensembles that I have worked with. I prefer to

address the disparities that they contain. Based on more than ten years of experience in the world of conducting, I led three brass bands and four wind ensemble orchestras of very dissimilar levels. In Switzerland, amateur wind ensembles are classified by categories, ranging from the fourth, the lowest, to the best class called "excellence". In the field of wind ensembles "harmonies", I was at the head of an ensemble of fourth, then second and then first category. I was also assistant director of a two-year "excellent" ensemble. I can therefore note the differences in the preparatory work of a concert and at the level of the conductor's tasks in general:

- learning speed
- different way of working
- the amount of interpreted repertoire
- the various assistant conductors
- the individual requirements of the conductor

First, the speed of learning obviously plays a key role. You do not take the same time to prepare a concert program for a fourth category ensemble and an orchestra of excellence. If we take into account that each ensemble works on works adapted to its level, it is necessary in my opinion between two to three times more time for the same quality of result.

Secondly, the way of working with the instrumentalists is a little different. In a good ensemble, the results are faster, so we settle basic things like rhythm and individual technique faster. Since we go faster we surf on a wave of positive energy. We say things less often and we have more results, so musicians are better rewarded for their work. This creates a "snowball effect", the more you play well and understand quickly, the faster you are and the musical result is fruitful. The working method does not change much but we develop other devices and sometimes solve several problems at the same time.

On this subject, I would very much like to present to you an excellent method for the rehearsal work that I have used during all these years in my amateur orchestras and finally in professional orchestras as well. This working technique is called the hourglass. It was developed by the conductor Jean-Claude Kolly, my

professor of conducting of wind ensembles at the Conservatory of Fribourg. This method of work consists in significantly and very efficiently improving a problematic passage of a partition. I will try to explain it simply: You take a musical passage that does not work (false notes, incorrect rhythm, nuances, balance ...). First, you read this passage once or twice. This first step is to allow your musicians to correct, as far as possible, the problem (s) in question and for the leader, to detect and then target the persistent problem and find the way to solve it. Secondly, the leader makes a first zoom on the problem, for example to play only the musicians who have a certain type of rhythm. It will be repeated a few times, to resolve the situation. In the case where the error persists, we go to the third stage, where we make a second zoom, more focused, always to stay in the same example: only the trumpets that have this rhythm. There is way to zoom several times as needed: we can say now we play more slowly, or we play one by one.

Once at the center of the problem, in the maximum zoom is useful for the correction of the problem, and we find ourselves in the middle of the "hourglass". Once we have zoomed enough and the errors are resolved, comes the next step of the first de-zoom. We gradually put the elements together and the different parts we removed are added to the previous group. Here again, the conductor takes the time needed, at each step, so that the musicians playing again in this phase of de-zoom fit perfectly to those of before, so on until the moment initial where everyone plays.

It is called the "hourglass work technique" because if you view one, starting from one of these two ends, and you join the other end, you go through the central part which is the finest (phase zoom), where the sand flows, then it widens again (de-zoom phase), and you find yourself in the opposite part, on the other side of the hourglass. So we come back to the same dimension, with the difference that the passage is now perfectly set up.

Thirdly, I want to address the topic of repertoire in the different amateur groups. Third or fourth category ensembles usually only prepare one musical program in their season. That means from September until May of the following year, they look into an hour and a half of music in all. In higher level ensembles, a second program is often prepared, and thus their season is split into two, usually at a year-end concert in December. This allows the musicians, inasmuch as possible,



to prepare twice as much music during the work year. The resulting benefit is in my opinion excellent, here are the three main criteria that improve: - The speed of preparation of the ensemble, because he has only half the time to set up a program. - The musical level of the orchestra will improve because we work faster and we prepare more works. - Greater fervor of the instrumentalists, there is less time to be bored because the work period is shorter and intense. In addition, musicians will perform in concert more often. Performance itself is the pinnacle of the musical season. In excellence-level ensembles, they may present three or even four different programs in a single year.

For the fourth point, I want to talk about the leaders of the groups of instruments and assistant or assistant conductors who help the Maestro. It often happens in high level ensembles that the leaders of each group organize some of the preparation work with their respective colleagues. There is also more regularly one or more assistant conductors in these types of ensembles. They will alleviate somewhat the responsibilities of the chief conductor, perform part of the work of the first phase, that is to say, the one where the technique and the individual preparation of the instrumentalists are rehearsed by individual groups. It sometimes happens that the assistants direct part of the concert, they prepare their works throughout the rehearsal phase. For the music director, this practice allows him to concentrate more on the last period of the rehearsals and to have a plan B and to be able to be replaced in case he is ill or if he has an impediment. In lower-level sets, it is much more rare to rely on ancillary aids. You usually have to fend for yourself!

For the last point, I want to discuss the difference in the individual work of the conductor. Obviously, when you conduct an amateur orchestra of excellence, you are often faced with works of a better quality than in the repertoire of weaker ensembles, which are sometimes also a great difficulty. You must first master individual complex scores and then guarantee to have them rehearsed in the right way, with the appropriate teaching techniques. It often happens that the more complicated musical scores are technically more difficult for the director. There are more changes of battues and delicate transitions and finer writing to pass in your instrumentalists. Administrative leaders and musicians of high-level amateur orchestras have much more pointed expectations regarding the musical evolution of their training. The conductor therefore has greater pressure, he must constantly be on the page and be able to question and adapt. This does not

mean that he does not have a say in the musical aspects! He must fight to impose these choices. But as I said in a previous chapter, the aspirations of the different ensembles can vary considerably and this often has a direct relationship with the musical level.

There is one more point that I must address, because it is of paramount importance, especially in the world of amateur ensembles: the next generation. Without this regular arrival of new "blond heads", amateur training disappears quickly. Since operation and maintenance is based solely on the pleasure and desire of musicians to be part of it, many amateur ensembles have very well formed music schools and zeal to recruit young people. Sometimes the head of the ensemble is involved in some of the tasks of this recruiting organization. He sometimes participates in committee meetings to develop strategies for this entity. Sometimes, he also directs the orchestra of young student musicians. This ensemble serves as a preparatory step before integrating the ranks of the main ensemble. Since the salary of the amateur musicians is the pleasure of living within an ensemble, the conductor assumes the great responsibility of guaranteeing as best as possible their remuneration, their happiness to participate in the life of this ensemble.

### **6.3 The Agape Choir**

When I started conducting wind bands, I also had the chance to take over a choir of young singers from my village for three years. This other experience allowed to discover the world of the voice. I did not have much knowledge in this domain, but I took my responsibilities very seriously and asked for advice from several specialists. I immediately started singing lessons. In addition, I contacted a professor of the regional conservatory, so that he vocally coaches my singers during several rehearsals. We worked a lot on the body posture. This is essential for the voice to be free and in optimal position. We also worked upon important points of breathing, articulation, pronunciation and support of the voice.

During my rehearsals, as with wind ensembles, I would do a warm up about ten to fifteen minutes. I was proposing a whole series of exercises to develop the suppleness and flexibility of the voice, as well as the work of intonation and

mutual group listening. The major difference from the instrumentalists is that a great part of the singers of my ensemble could not read the music. So, I worked at two speeds. Some read their scores and knew their parts rather quickly, yet for others, I had to play their parts at the piano as well as sing them to several times, to print it by heart in their memory. This did not pose any major problems and finally, the singers who memorize often have, afterwards, greater freedom to sing.

I carried out each new work, sectional rehearsals, separating the choir four: female, soprano and alto voices as well as male, tenor and bass voices. There was a leader in each group who knew how to read music and who led the rehearsal. Then, I gathered the women's voices together and the men as well. Finally, when each group could sing independently, I gathered all the singers to set up the interpretation of the work, installing the various details such as the nuances, the accuracy, the breathing, the balance or the overall sound.

I did the following test regularly, when the work was relatively mastered: I asked my singers to mix themselves up with the others. There should not be two people from the same group side by side. This exercise can be very destabilizing because the points of reference and the mutual help that have been created in the group disappear. A tenor finds himself, for example, between a soprano and a viola, and he is the only one to sing his part, because he hardly hears his colleagues. This develops the autonomy of the singer and listening as well as the accuracy of the whole. I did it too, but more rarely, with my amateur wind ensembles. This "test" is fun and pleases the musicians, plus it gives good results.

For a conductor, it is essential that his conducting gestures breathe and musically incite the instrumentalists or singers. The work with the singers and the voice in general considerably brought me forward. It is essential for a maestro to know this area, and ideally to have practiced singing. As I noted earlier, the great conductor Hermann Scherchen clearly demonstrates this in his book entitled "Conducting". For him, singing is the the only way to define how to phrase a theme, but also to find out where the breaths are and what the ideal tempo is. He says this beautiful phrase: "Any music, in its conception as in its interpretation, is above all singing, for singing is the vital function of music."

Finally, we realize the similarities in the work of the choirmaster and the orchestral conductor. Both have a group of artists that they must constantly seek to push towards the best. In both cases, they inspire the ensemble and prepare music of quality with them.

#### **6.4 Amateur Youth Groups**

I started my career with youth groups from my village, both with younger members of a brass band then with the youth choir. There was nothing better to acquire my first weapons for conducting.

One beautiful aspect of these ensembles is that young people often have a huge desire to work and thirst for progress and novelties. We can request a lot of them, make them take risks. The conductor receives satisfaction in his work because the musicians or singers show a very large margin of improvement. Moreover, they did not, *a priori*, as in some older people who often tell you: "We have always done it like that!" Or, "it is the tradition." Often tradition is, in my view, the best way to hide a lack of knowledge or worse, the lack of a work ethic and of the desire to seek out an original and perhaps more true manner of making music.

As I wrote in the previous paragraph, collaboration often creates excellent working conditions. When working with a youth group, look for the most playful and captivating way to practice music. The very important thing is to offer them quality repertoire which makes them progress and which they like. You must constantly think about their evolution and their fulfillment, because every time they learn a new score, it must serve as a landing, allowing them to discover new horizons and open new doors.

Regarding discipline, it is sometimes not easy to manage in ensembles of very young musicians or singers. It is necessary from the beginning to establish precise rules and never depart from them. If you cannot work in silence and in a healthy climate, is impossible to obtain valuable results. Besides, the more you leave your group in the a state of hullabaloo, the more it will be undisciplined. It is almost impossible to find a good rehearsal quality once this stage is reached.

So you have to be very vigilant. However, that does not mean that a conductor should become a policeman. He just needs to master the situation and to ensure respect for a good working atmosphere.

Finally, apart from a few details and an adaptation to the situation, the conductor's function in these ensembles is quite similar to those in which all age-groups are represented. There is, however, one element that captivates me and that clearly appears within this type of ensemble: it is the very strong team spirit welded between young people. We help each other and have a common desire to make beautiful music and to have fun. This positive spirit and full of freshness can multiply energies. For a conductor, working with young people is happiness itself and very inspiring.

## **6.5 My Experience in the EIN String Orchestra**

Before leaving Switzerland for the Czech Republic, I had the opportunity to be the musical director for two seasons of a very good amateur string orchestra from the canton of Bern. This ensemble had the distinction of relying on a professional solo violinist. The musician was hired to play throughout the season and served as a mentor and musical coach. It was a real delight for me, as I do not come from the world of stringed instruments, I found myself at each rehearsal in an ideal class, dedicated to this subject. There was a very good relationship between me and my violinist. I told him what sound or articulation I wanted at this or that place and it translated my desires into technical information. He also made several proposals to me, allowing me to discover all the sonic possibilities. So I learned a lot about it.

The rehearsals were mostly tutti. Sometimes at the beginning of a new work session, we would divide the whole into two groups. I took violas, cellos and double basses, and my colleague took violins one and two. This allowed to work in more detail all the important parameters: the technique, the sound of each register, the homogeneity, the complicated passages and still the intonation. The orchestra was preparing two programs a year. For one of them, the committee hired wind musicians and percussionists to play symphonic works. The

collaboration with this ensemble was for me very rewarding; I gave, but I also received a lot.

A conductor must know the basics of a maximum of instruments of his orchestra. He must perceive how sound is created and what are the limits and the different possibilities. He will be able to ask for more of his musicians if it is possible, and to require even more precise and specific sound details or finesse of colors.

## **6.6 Established Ensembles and Project Orchestras**

I had the chance to work regularly with project orchestras. This type of training is very often made up of professionals. The musicians meet only for the preparation of a specific musical event. It happens that these ensembles meet on many occasions, as with the Valais Chamber Orchestra, which has more than a dozen projects a year, or less often, like the Sedunum String Orchestra that I created and with which I mount one to two projects a year. The work with these ensembles is very similar to those built, which work regularly throughout the season. The only two big differences are that with bands that do not have enough programs, you may not always meet the same musicians. This can be a problem because it is often beneficial when musicians are used to playing together and working with a conductor. The second disadvantage when you do not play often is that the instrumentalists lose the reflexes of orchestral playing, the habit of listening to each other, listening to colleagues and breathing together.

I have created several orchestras for opera productions in Switzerland and the Czech Republic, and I must say that the task is not easy. As the different musicians do not often know each other at all, it is necessary as a leader and as one who can rally a group, to build the connections, to link the musicians between them, to make them become a united ensemble going in the same direction, to allow to make music quality. It is a big challenge, but it is exciting.

## **6.7 Orchestras in the Pit**

I want to finish this chapter on the work and the relations of the leader in the different ensembles, by addressing the specifics of the opera orchestra, which I had the opportunity to direct several productions. For me it is a really exciting world. There are many facets to this work, such as preparing the soloists and the orchestra, sometimes taking care of the choir too. There is also the staged aspect that must be one with the musical score. These multiple connections with other art forms are really beneficial and very rewarding for each artist. During performances, the responsibilities of the maestro are much greater than during a symphonic concert. If the ideal of the latter is that the leader gives freedom and confidence to the musicians and makes sure to let them play; in the pit it is quite different. Especially with singers and choirs on the stage who need a clear gesture and feel really comfortable during the performance. In addition, the conductor must constantly monitor the balance between the orchestra and the voices, take care that everything stays together, and ensure that the soloists, who still sing by heart, find themselves in place as soon as possible, in case they made a mistake, or if they get lost in the text.

The essential qualities of the opera conductor are flexibility and suppleness, very precise and clear intentions, the speed with which to handle a possible problem and above all, how to breathe with the singer, while having the orchestra breathe like a singer.

To conclude this chapter, I wish to highlight the perpetual enrichment of the profession of the conductor. I truly believe that every situation lived within any ensemble allows the conductor to evolve, to learn about music, but also, about the many extra-musical aspects that his profession entails. This ultimately allows him to learn a lot about himself. In my career, I had the great chance to have exciting experiences in various countries. Among other things, I worked with an orchestra of young professionals from Palermo in Italy, as well as groups of young amateur musicians in Beirut, Lebanon, or with several orchestras in Switzerland and the Czech Republic. I must say that despite the different cultures and habits, mentalities sometimes far removed from mine, music has always existed. And when the music is born, the emotions of the musicians and the audience appear at the same time. When you conduct the orchestra and

share music and emotions, your goal is largely achieved. Everyone wins and grows, the orchestra, the audience and the Maestro! What an incredible opportunity for the conductor to help bring music to life. I think there is no better way of sharing.



## **Conclusion**

At the end of this Master's Thesis, I can note the following: First of all, the enormous personal enrichment that this project has brought me. Indeed, the theme of the conductor's job in different types of ensembles, which I have had the chance to develop in this thesis, is a subject that I particularly like. While it is true that much of this book has been based upon my own different experiences in the conducting community, to which I have devoted a fairly intense amount of time, and in which I have immersed myself more deeply, asking myself many questions, has allowed me to channel my knowledge and bring it all together for a summary. This project is a kind of balance sheet encompassing my thoughts and my professional experience.

Second, this work demonstrates the many complex facets of the profession of the conductor. As there are many types of ensembles, as well as great disparities in the skill levels of the instrumentalists, the conductor is able to adapt to each situation and obtain the best out of his musicians. For this, I identify the specifics and I make a comparison of the various environments in which the conductor evolves, such as in wind orchestras, choirs, ensembles of young musicians, project ensembles or in opera orchestras. I unveil many ways to improve the ensemble, and to perform adequate preparation work for the group in question. I am also developing a method of work that is dear to me and that I have used for many years. It consists of targeting a problematic passage and improving it significantly and quickly. The theme about amateur and professional musicians is also carefully developed while highlighting the fundamental skills that the conductor must possess.

In addition, this work is enriched by numerous external resources which provide complementary and indispensable visions, thus giving a more objective and exhaustive perception in this thesis. Indeed, I have had the opportunity to interview specialists in conducting, the choral world and wind ensembles in French-speaking Switzerland. These three conductors have extensive experience at the head of musical groups and are renowned teachers. The research that I have also done in the literature on this subject has added to my training as a conductor and my various personal experiences—valuable baggage which is not insignificant for the rest of my training as a musician and conductor.

I can conclude the theme on the conductor's profession in the different types of ensembles, by the following synthesis: This profession is intoxicating and full of wealth. It is also very demanding and requires an iron discipline and a constant search for quality, in order to allow each ensemble to obtain the best possible musical result. Each orchestra, whether amateur or professional, has specific needs and demands. The point is to find the right leader to carry out the mission of the entire group. The conductor must adapt his method of work according to his musicians. In addition, the human aspect is, in my opinion, essential, the conductor collaborates with artists, endowed with sensitivity. He must strive for a healthy and balanced work environment, as he needs to get the best out of his orchestra to make music and to do his job.

Music also needs an audience, and for that I would like to end this conclusion with a question I regularly ask myself that worries me a lot: "What will happen to classical music in twenty or fifty years ?" In this question, I wonder, of course, what will the conductor be doing at that moment ? It is true that today as ever, the public who goes to the concert is increasingly older and especially well-off financially. Young people are no longer interested in going to concerts. This is because all the music you want to listen to is available on the internet, just one click to find fifteen versions of a Beethoven symphony. In addition, the promotion to attract youth often seems obsolete, and finally young people tell you that classical music is "bad" or "for the old" because they do not know it at all! Seeing this drop in audience, major sponsors, whether private or public, remove or significantly reduce funding essential to the survival of musical institutions. It scares me a lot. First of all, to see classical music become an art for old and snobby people but finally, to see it disappear little by little. If it disappears, the profession of conductor will die first, since we have the disadvantage of not being able to make any music without the collaboration of other musicians.

I also share this concern in the amateur world. Ensembles are struggling to find a new generation. There are so many opportunities today to be entertained without getting tired. Young people today often do not have the patience and the desire to make the effort to learn to play an instrument. This society of the "paper handkerchief", where you change your cell phone or woman as you change your shirt. So many young people practice a year or two of an instrument, then one day on a whim, they get tired a little and send all ballad. I know of

many musical ensembles that are in a very bad situation or have already ceased to exist.

The only solution to counter this sad phenomenon is to prepare the public or the future instrumentalist very early, if possible from childhood, in music schools and conservatories, but also thanks to a compulsory, good basic training received in school, taking him to concerts, then encouraging the practice of an instrument as an amateur, so that he always keeps a desire to make, or at least to listen, to music. I still remain very positive. Music is an art of inestimable value. It has such a rich and powerful power over humanity. People who have the chance to understand and live it are so beneficial. The quote from the philosopher, poet and pianist Nietzsche is undeniable: "Without music life would be a mistake." We have to fight so that music, which is a pillar of our culture, never falls into disuse.

The conductor has his role to play.

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## Appendix

### Biographies of the three conductors interviewed

**Jan Dobrzelewski**, conductor and violinist, was born in Neuchâtel. He completed his studies with A. Schneider, A. Temkin, A. Navarra, M. Frager, A. Culler and S. Wislocki. In 1968, he won the Colmar International Competition with the "Neuchâtel Quartet". To date, Jan Dobrzelewski has given more than



1,500 concerts. In addition, he has premiered many American, European and Japanese works. He is invited annually to conduct and perform in Europe and North and South America. After four years as the Music Director of the Neuchâtel Chamber Orchestra, six years as the conductor of the City Symphony Orchestra, and twelve years at the University of Fribourg's "Jugend Sinfonie-Orchester" of the Basel Music Academy, eleven years at the Orchestra of Saint Maurice, of the Rhodanian Philharmonic Orchestra during the International Summer Academy of Music of Tournon during fifteen years, Jan Dobrzelewski created the international festivals "Morzine Music" in France and "Musical Flâneries de Champéry" in Switzerland. Since September 2003, he has also set up various cultural development projects in Costa Rica. He has been appointed Artistic and Pedagogical Advisor of the "Municipal School of Integrated Arts" Santa Ana in Costa Rica. From 2006 to 2016, Jan Dobrzelewski was the director of the HEMUVs (High School of Music of Valais) and the Tibor Varga Academy of Music Foundation.

**Bernard Hérítier**, is a choirmaster from the Valais region. He studied the art of choral music with J. Baruchet. He graduated in Friborg with a degree in theology and a professional degree in singing in 1985 in the class of T. Westendorp. By participating in several masterclasses (with J. Stämpfli, H.



Cuénod and at the Summer Academy of H. Rilling in Stuttgart), in choral and orchestral conducting courses, Bernard Hérítier has a solid education that combines very intense musical activity. Indeed, he has sung in various Romance

choirs and, in 1980, founded the Choir Novantiqua, of which he is the musical director and with which he explores the greatest pages of ancient and modern choral literature. Over the course of his career, Bernard Hérítier has been called upon to conduct major Swiss and foreign orchestras, such as the Ensemble Ad Fontes, the Ensemble la Fenice in Paris, the Geneva Chamber Orchestra, the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra, the Tibor Varga Festival Orchestra, etc... With the Novantiqua Choir of Sion, he won the City of Sion Cultural Prize in 1987 and the Valais State Consecration Prize in 2003. With the Schola of the Young Singers, he won the City of Sion Prize. In 1998, Bernard Hérítier joined the diaconate, which enabled him to link his commitments to the Church to his life as a professional musician. Appointed member of the liturgical commission of the diocese of Sion, he is responsible for cultural and religious events. In 2004, he founded the Master of the Cathedral of Sion and developed sacred music. In addition to his musical activities, Bernard Hérítier teaches at the College de la Planta in Sion in Valais.

**Jean-Claude Kolly**, is a conductor from Fribourg in Switzerland. He studied piano, trumpet, singing and orchestration at the Fribourg Conservatory where he graduated in music education. At the Conservatoire de Lausanne, he studied conducting, orchestration and composition with H.



Klopfenstein and J. Balissat, work which was concluded with a diploma in conducting in 1988. Jean-Claude Kolly began his career as a conductor with the choir of Treyvaux, then in 1984 he took on the leadership of G erinia de Marly. He has been responsible for conducting at the Municipal Wind Ensemble of Vevey for three years and with the Brass Band of Fribourg for seven seasons. Appointed conductor at the Concordia de Fribourg in 1993, he now directs the two wind ensembles of excellence category that are Concordia and G erinia. Continually seeking to improve, he has had the opportunity to work internationally with E. Corporon (USA), H. Snell (UK), K. Wilkinson (UK), D. Bourgeois (UK) and H. van Lijnschooten (NL). He is often engaged as an expert in regional, cantonal, federal or international competitions. He presently teaches wind ensemble conducting at the University of Music of Lausanne and at the Fribourg Conservatory.