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11-2022

## The Effective Concertmaster: A Look at the 21st Century Role

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## **The Effective Concertmaster: A Look at the 21st Century Role**

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## The Effective Concertmaster: a look at the 21st century role Annotated Bibliography

### Abstract

The role and responsibilities of the orchestral concertmaster have evolved alongside the orchestra over the last several centuries, shifting away from composing music for the ensemble and organizing events, and towards being aware of union standards, etiquette, and musician morale, as well as the important task of writing bowings. What makes an effective concertmaster? In attempting to answer this question, this paper will be examining both the musical and extra-musical duties of the modern day concertmaster, primarily focusing on leadership qualities such as cueing and leading with the bow. The paper will draw on biographical sources of current concertmasters of major orchestras and examining their personality and leadership style, with special focus on second-hand accounts of how their leadership style is perceived. The “effectiveness” of a concertmaster will be determined by their success in the field, reception from players in their section or orchestra, and primary source analyses of video and audio materials of their work. In answering the question at hand, the paper aims to provide useful information to aspiring leaders and concertmasters by analyzing the qualities of good leadership.

1. Andai, Daniel. “A Contemporary Approach to Orchestral Bowings for the Concertmaster.” DMA diss., University of Miami, 2011.

This doctoral dissertation delves deep into one of the specific responsibilities of the modern-day concertmaster: determining bowings. There are many intricacies when it comes to deciding whether to play down-bow or up-bow, taking into account articulation, style, phrasing, and comfortability. In addition to these, the concertmaster has to consider the size of the string section, since a passage played in unison by 18 first violins, for example, will produce a different result than the same passage played by one violin. The placement of the bow with regards to producing different tone colours is also an important consideration when blending with the rest of the orchestra. These are all crucial decisions that contribute to the efficacy of a leader and thereby the success of an orchestra. Some conductors like to be heavily involved in the process, while others leave it entirely up to the concertmaster, highlighting the unique relationship between the two positions. While many of the other sources in this bibliography consist of first-hand accounts, this study aims to present objective information while still being open to interpretation.

2. Beau, Gaelle. “Beyond the Leader-Centric Approach: Leadership Phenomena and Aesthetics in a Conductorless Orchestra.” *Society and Business Review* 11, no. 1 (2016): 62–79.

Written at the ISTE Business School in Paris in 2016, this article provides an extra-musical perspective on the hierarchical structure of an orchestra organization. In their research, Beau examines the leader-centric tendencies exhibited by many organizations by using the conductorless orchestra as a case study, aiming to determine if the aesthetic product is affected by the lack of a centralized leadership (in this case, a conductor). Beau presents findings in which the final musical product of a conductorless orchestra is aesthetically superior to one constrained by the ideas of one leader. Even though the structure is more egalitarian, the first violin takes on a subdued leadership role. While this role provides guidance in interpretation and group harmony, it is completely open to artistic input and can easily assume the role of a follower. Unlike a conductor, the first violinist is a participator in the music, moving the instrument

while simultaneously playing to show musical intent. Beau concludes that leadership and followership are a social construct. In a conductorless orchestra, players assume a leader or follower role at different times based on the score. This chamber-music-oriented approach to the orchestra helps us gain a different perspective on the concertmaster role as we take the conductor out of the picture. A concertmaster regularly has to assume sole leadership of the ensemble, whether the conductor is aware of it or not, and this article does a great job of portraying the desired and resulting dynamic.

3. Flesch, Carl. "The Orchestra Violinist." In *The Professional Symphony Orchestra in the United States*, edited by George Seltzer, 187-93. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975.

Taken from George Seltzer's collection of articles, this short essay is written by Carl Flesch, one of the most prominent figures in violin pedagogy. Written in 1940, it illustrates the life of an orchestral musician, from the conservatory training and audition process, to the trials of weekly preparation and dynamics within the workplace. As many of the sources deal directly with the business of concertmaster duties, it proves beneficial to understand the work required by section musicians and how it differs. After all, in order to be a good leader, one must first understand what it means to be a follower. This article tends to be quite subjective and has a dark undertone of subservience, so it would be wise to take it with a grain of salt. Good supplementary material can be found in several of the other articles preceding and following this one in the collection.

4. Mischakoff Heiles, Anne. *America's Concertmasters*. Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2007.

Anne Mischakoff Heiles is the daughter of renowned concertmaster Mischa Mischakoff and an established violinist herself. Her direct lineage to one of the great American concertmasters of our time gives us a glimpse into the type of person who occupies the chair. Besides providing extensive historical background on the ten major American orchestras (as well as one Canadian orchestra and one summer festival orchestra), this source includes interviews, conducted by the author herself, with many of the orchestras' most recent and current concertmasters. These first-hand accounts look back on the careers of the players, from studying with prominent teachers, to working with legendary conductors and soloists, to offering tips and advice to future concertmasters. Many of the other sources in this bibliography cite Anne Heiles' work, both *America's Concertmasters* and *Mischa Mischakoff: Journeys of a Concertmaster*, since the interviews provided are such an excellent primary source.

5. Piastro, Michel. "The Concertmaster's Job." In *The Professional Symphony Orchestra in the United States*, edited by George Seltzer, 184-7. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975.

Taken from the collection of essays *The Professional Symphony Orchestra in the United States*, this article outlines the role of a concertmaster. Although the collection was published in 1975, the article was written in the 1940s by Michel Piastro, concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic from 1931 to 1943. Although written objectively, as kind of a directive article, the author is undoubtedly heavily drawing upon his own expertise and his authority on the subject matter allows the reader to trust he is speaking on behalf of the entire orchestral musical field. Examining an older source such as this gives us a glimpse in time and allows us to examine

and compare the information to some more recent accounts, such as the interviews from the early 2000s seen in Anne Mischakoff's book and Kirsten Annica Yon's dissertation.

6. Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolay. *Scheherazade: op. 35*. Melville, N.Y: Belwin Mills Pub. Corp., 1980.

The score to Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite *Scheherazade* is a primary source which provides direct insight into the monumental concertmaster solo embedded in this work. The score is best studied alongside a recording of a performance; in this bibliography the suggested recording is by the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Herbert von Karajan in 1967 and with concertmaster solos performed by Michel Schwalbé. Rather than isolating and studying the concertmaster solo for its own sake, studying the score as a whole will give a more comprehensive picture of how the solo part fits in with the rest of the orchestra.

7. Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolay, Herbert von. Karajan, and Aleksandr Porfir'evich Borodin. *Scheherazade Op. 35*. Hamburg: Deutsche Grammophon, 1986.

This is a compilation album of the Berlin Philharmonic released by Deutsche Grammophon in 1986. Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* was recorded in 1967, conducted by Herbert von Karajan and with concertmaster solos performed by Michel Schwalbé. The recording is a necessary supplement when studying the score cited directly above, as well as to the instructional masterclass article by Bart Vandenbogaerd cited below. Although this recording presents only one player's interpretation, it aurally exemplifies the varying duties of the concertmaster as they confidently emerge as soloist from the rest of the section and retreat back within the sound of the whole. Studying a variety of recordings with solos performed by various concertmasters is recommended.

8. Russell, Thomas A. "Conductorless Orchestras." *The Musical Times* 79, no. 1143 (1938): 337-8. <https://doi.org/10.2307/922748>.

Russell presents a succinct argument with a practical view on conductorless orchestras, pointing out the dependency on hierarchy in all structures of life and therefore the inherent pitfalls and unsustainability of a conductorless orchestra. He sets off with assertions about the inevitable emergence of a leader in any structure, no matter how egalitarian. Even in as small of a structure as a string quartet, a leader is necessary to create cohesion within the ensemble. Russell supports his argument with evidence of a conductorless Moscow orchestra of then-USSR, attempting but ultimately failing to be self-sufficient and eventually employing a conductor. Russell's view vastly differs from that in Gaele Beau's article cited above and it's interesting to examine the two sources side by side. *The Musical Times* is a journal of authority on music and the arts, while Thomas Russell was an English orchestral musician at the time the article was written.

9. Schulenberg, David. "Bach the Concertmaster". *Bach*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Valuable insight can be gained on the topic by looking back through history at the origins of the concertmaster. In J. S. Bach's time, orchestras were significantly smaller, as was the repertoire being written for them, thus not necessitating a conductor. The ensemble would normally be led from the harpsichord, but since it isn't a most visual instrument, Bach often opted for leading from the first violin stand. This is similar to what we know today as conductorless chamber orchestras. The responsibilities of the first violinist leader were not as instrument-specific as they are today and included knowing the score and everyone's parts, rehearsing the ensemble,

and organizing concerts. While some of the other sources provide a brief historical background, this chapter gives a comprehensive overview of the development of the orchestra and the concertmaster position in Bach's time. David Schulenberg is a music historian, historical keyboard performer, and an authority on the Bach family (not just J.S. but also C.P.E. and others), currently teaching at Wagner College and having held faculty positions at various prestigious institutions.

10. Seaman, Christopher. *Inside Conducting*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013.

This source explores the role of the concertmaster through a conducting lens. With much of the book focused on the inner workings of leading from the podium, we learn about the vital relationship between conductor and concertmaster. The two are in constant conversation as the violinist is the first point of contact between conductor and orchestra. Many of the other sources in this bibliography give anecdotal examples of the conductor-concertmaster dynamic which can be superimposed on the relationship framework outlined here by Christopher Seaman. The author's extensive expertise on the subject matter translates well into practical advice for the young leader, often overlapping and applicable to the role of a concertmaster as well.

11. Vandenberg, Bart. "Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* op. 35." *Strad*, Oct 2014.  
<http://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=98700507&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

This article in popular string magazine *The Strad* complements the score and recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite *Scheherazade*. Written by Bamberg Symphony Orchestra concertmaster Bart Vandenberg, the article takes the form of a masterclass, painting the plot of the musical story and placing the famous concertmaster excerpt in context. It includes specific and appropriate technical suggestions to help achieve the desired result in painting the story. In studying this excerpt in depth, one gets a better sense of what is required of a concertmaster in switching between blending as part of the section and coming out of the texture with a technically and musically demanding solo line.

12. Yon, Kirsten Annica. "A Distinctive Legacy: The Musical, Historical, and Practical Evolution of the American Concertmaster from the 1950s to the Present." DMA diss., Rice University, Houston, 2008.

This dissertation closely follows recent developments in the role of the concertmaster over the last 70 years. It does well in outlining its scope as it is most common today, as well as provides interviews with five recent and current concertmasters, three of which overlap with profiles in *American Concertmasters* by Anne Mischakoff Heiles. This source is a great addition to the bibliography as it not only presents the developments and current state of the orchestral concertmaster, but looks forward to the next generation of concertmasters, looking at education and the constantly evolving career paths.