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A Distinctive Legacy: The Musical, Historical, and Practical Evolution of the American Concertmaster from the 1950s to the Present. A Comparative Examination of the Concertmaster Position and Concertmaster Lineage in Modern-day America.

By

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE Doctor of Musical Arts

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ABSTRACT

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Kirsten Yon

This document examines the historical role and lineage of the current American concertmaster. Foundational discussions include the establishment of the concertmaster, the professional relationship with the conductor, and the evolution of the role into its present-day format. Interviews with contemporary concertmasters of major American orchestras form the basis for a detailed observation of the modern orchestral audition process, the basic responsibilities of a concertmaster, the leadership, pressures, and community expectations involved with the position, and the future of concertmaster education in America. Interviewed concertmasters are: Bill Preucil of the Cleveland Orchestra, Emmanuelle Boisvert of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Seattle Symphony, Andrés Cárdenes of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Juliana Athayde of the Rochester Philharmonic, and Joseph Silverstein, the former concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.
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I dedicate this document to the memory of two outstanding musicians who will be greatly missed and whose valuable insights, wisdom, and humor constantly encouraged my pursuit of a rich musical life—

to Jim Moon and Raphael Fliegel.
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Preface

The modern American concertmaster represents a musical heritage that is rich with meaning and based in tradition. This lineage has its roots in a multitude of traditions, including those of violinist, conductor/leader, soloist, editor, and diplomat. Each of these factors contributed to the current duties and musical personalities of the American concertmaster in today’s artistic society. The job title has altered from the days of its European conception, but many of the same responsibilities exist. A concertmaster serves as the joining force between conductor and orchestra; a concertmaster must assist with the preparation of orchestral parts, then interpret and communicate these musical ideas through his/her instrument; and a concertmaster upholds the quality of performance standard within each orchestra.

As the concertmaster’s professional arena has gained in stature and financial security, so too, the pressures inherent in the job have risen accordingly. The audition process is highly competitive and the hopeful candidates are many. Trial periods and unusual hiring practices abound as orchestras across the country search for the right violinist to lead their ensemble. A three-way match is ideal, between orchestra, concertmaster, and conductor. A shift in any direction by any of these factors and the careful balance can change dramatically. When a good fit is found, the concertmaster often remains in one position for decades, developing and deepening a relationship with the orchestra.

This document will examine several historically prominent concertmasters and their professional orchestral relationships from the 1950’s to the late twentieth century,
with an emphasis on the deep connection between conductor and concertmaster. It will then move forward to an interview comparison of four current concertmasters and one concertmaster turned conductor, whose legendary status and continued musical involvement bridges the gaps between generations. This paper will examine the audition practices and preferences of these current concertmasters, their daily involvement in the orchestra, how their leadership best manifests itself, committee and public duties, and their individual musical goals. I will also trace their concertmaster lineage and discuss where they believe concertmaster education is heading in the immediate future.

While the concertmaster's duties have evolved over the years from that of sole director to a role of collaborative leadership, the position remains a necessary and vital force within the orchestral structure. This examination of concertmaster lineage and achievements through the years serves as a testimony to the greatness of these violinists and their tireless efforts to preserve and improve their orchestral heritage through the mediums of performance and education.
Part One- The Days of Yesteryear

A Musical Examination of the Historical Concertmaster
Chapter One: A Brief History of the Concertmaster’s Role in the Orchestra

Historically, the first-chair violinist of an orchestra carries the title of “concertmaster.” This title naturally implies a position of power over a concert ensemble and is derived from the German word, Konzertmeister. As a position that has been in existence for several hundred years, there exists a plethora of traditions, duties, and expectations that are intrinsically tied to it. These duties have understandably evolved through the decades, and they have only grown more complex. The position has never become obsolete, even though the continuous impact of historical, political, musical, educational, and financial forces has resulted in a refinement of the concertmaster/orchestral culture and a mounting dedication to the education of future violinists who will occupy this chair.

The concertmaster position initially arose from the need to unify instrumental ensembles as they began to break away from their traditional role as accompanimental ensembles and form cohesive and independent ensembles in their own right. As purely instrumental music became more popular in late seventeenth-century Europe, the line between instrumental (traditional “dance” music) and sacred music (with choral participation) blurred and became less definable. This pivotal period in history took shape as the social bond between church and society began to dwindle and composers began to write music solely for instrumental ensembles. The idea took hold, and the

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instrumental ensemble, without written vocal contribution, became firmly established in
the repertory, where it remains today.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the concertmaster of an instrumental ensemble
was an acknowledged leader of the group. Here the term leader, or concertmaster,
defined the first chair position in ensembles large and small, with or without solo vocal,
choral, or theatrical collaboration. For a short time during this transitional period, the
term “concertmaster” was applied to the leader of a group, regardless of his/her
instrument. The naming of a violinist to the directorship role was a change that signified
a turning point in ensemble organization. As the keyboard part diminished in
importance, the role and leadership of the violin increased.

In the Baroque era, leaders presided over chamber ensembles of varying sizes: the
large-scale orchestras prevalent today did not yet exist. The smaller ensembles were
preferred for a variety of reasons, including shortages of instruments, the relative lack of
available professional, as opposed to amateur, performers, the vogue of “living room”
concerts in small physical space, and the slow evolution of instrumental music as a stand-
alone creation. These are but a few of the many reasons for the prevalence of smaller
ensembles in the eighteenth century. The modern symphony orchestra began as a natural
outgrowth of these early chamber ensembles/orchestras; the groups that played pieces
such as Corelli’s Concerti Grossi, Op. 6 (1714) evolved easily into those that played the
classical symphonic literature and beyond.

In the days of the Baroque chamber orchestra, the concertmaster would usually
lead the group from the first chair position by means of waving his bow and through
nodding vigorously with his head and violin at key moments. Considering the repertoire
available at that time, with its fairly simple rhythmic patterns and easily traceable melodic structure, and considering that the first violin part contained the leading melodic line the majority of the time, this was an excellent and very practical solution. As orchestras grew in size, as their repertoire expanded, and as the technical demands placed on the players advanced, it became more difficult to establish unity and clarity through the efforts of one player who was also performing in addition to leading the group.

While conductors were occasionally used in the early 1800’s, and although they were a standard and crucial fixture in the opera world from its inception, it was most likely the increased complexity of new compositions that made conductors necessary in the early nineteenth century. Erich Leinsdorf attributed the necessity of employing an orchestral conductor to Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3, “Eroica.” The legendary conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra wrote, “Whereas every simple metric division can certainly be rendered perfectly without a stand-up conductor, no composite meter can be so rendered unless there is a stand-up conductor. … The “Eroica” symphony might, in this sense, be credited for bringing the concert conductor into the world.”² Without a doubt, the abundant varieties of hemiolas and other rhythmic intricacies produced by the sophisticated composite meters in the “Eroica” certainly signified new challenges for orchestral ensembles and created the need for a conductor to step in and lead the way.

There is pictographic and written evidence³ that in London a conductor, often seated at a clavier in the middle of the orchestra, shared his leadership duties with the concertmaster. Traditionally, the concertmaster set the initial tempo and the conductor

established the finer points of the piece from the keyboard with physical gestures when necessary. In Germany, Anselm Weber and Reichardt finally assumed more extensive control over the ensemble in the late eighteenth century, shocking the orchestral world by advocating the use of a baton for the first time in orchestral history. This technique was already in practice in operatic productions, but it was not a welcome idea to purely instrumental concert audiences and participants.

Louis Spohr was among the famous violin leaders and conductors who agreed with Weber’s ideas regarding baton use with an orchestra. Perhaps because of his violinistic roots, Spohr faced the orchestra when conducting, a new practice that Jullien, Mendelssohn, and many of his colleagues did not share. Spohr’s actions were duplicated by Berlioz and others, but the novel concept ran against the idea that it was impolite to turn one’s back to the audience in spite of the dire consequence that may occur in the ensemble. In these early instances where the conductor faced such a dramatic physical and logistical challenge connecting with the orchestra, it is clear that the concertmaster’s authority and musical direction were critical to the success of the performance. Indeed, even after the conductor’s full evolution to the front of the orchestra, facing the musicians, the amount which the conductor actually conducted was still open to interpretation well into the 1860s.  

It would still be several decades before conductors beat time in every measure. For example, documentation from 1846 proves that Mendelssohn seldom beat more than the first few phrases in a symphony, only utilizing the baton to show dynamic markings that were not already present in the score.

\[4\] Mueller, 315-317.
\[5\] Ibid.
The conductor’s position leading the orchestra continued to gain strength in Europe through the Romantic period while orchestras continued to grow in number. The concertmaster’s position had become that of the supportive liaison between orchestra and conductor, editor of details, and general right hand of the conductor. By the mid-nineteenth century, leaders/concertmasters were firmly established in their secondary role, supportive to the conductor and fundamental to the ensemble. The symphony orchestra flourished and established itself as one of the primary paradigms of culture and refined society, eventually finding its way to America.
Chapter Two: The American Symphony Orchestra in the Twentieth Century

An authentic artistic and social institution, the American symphony orchestra has enjoyed a long and satisfying life, spanning from its humble beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. When compared to the well-established orchestral traditions in Europe, America's early musical contributions understandably lagged behind their cultural predecessors. A lack of descendant royalty meant a distinct lack of natural sponsorship for court orchestras or other musical groups. A smaller population in a larger quantity of land, as compared to European nations, produced a smaller number of musicians dispersed across the young country.

However, as the United States of America grew, gathering more momentum with each passing year, so too did the idea of the American orchestra becoming a significant aspect of our valuable artistic life. Leinsdorf writes that, "By 1936 the major orchestras of the United States had become the equals, in terms of ability and stature, of any comparable music ensemble in the world."\(^6\) In the decades since the 1930s, the American orchestra has continued to evolve; following in the footsteps of modernity, its transformation rate has increased dramatically in the past fifty to sixty years.

According to the League of American Orchestras (formerly the American Symphony Orchestra League), U.S. orchestras have risen in number from fourteen

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\(^6\) Leinsdorf, 193.
hundred orchestras in 1966\textsuperscript{7} to more than fifteen hundred organizations in 2005.\textsuperscript{8} These orchestras have historically been divided into four groupings, according to their budgets, the size of the orchestra (basic core personnel), and the number of services rendered. Originally referred to as the Major orchestra, Regional orchestra, Metropolitan orchestra, and Urban orchestra, the League has reorganized its calculations in the past ten years. Due in large part to orchestral expansion and widely diverse budget/applicable service ratios, they now group orchestras into eight classifications solely according to their budgets. These new categories range from those orchestras with a budget of less than $149,000 to groups operating on a budget of $14.4 million and greater.\textsuperscript{9}

The orchestral classifications of Classical Music America echo a similar trend with their organizational system. This system reflects the major growth of orchestras outside areas previously qualified as metropolitan or urban, and it signifies the expansion of the amateur orchestra into a viable, paid ensemble. The immediate consequence of this growth, and the growth of the American orchestral job into a possible single-income career, have both had a considerable impact on the education and training of those seeking leadership positions in a professional orchestra. However, it is not on the symphony orchestra itself that this document will focus, but on the evolution of the often understated yet key principal position upon which orchestras and conductors alike have come to rely: the concertmaster.

\textsuperscript{9} Jan Wilson, League of American Orchestras Manager of the Information Resource Center, e-mail message to author, January 18, 2008.
Donald Rosenberg, in "The Cleveland Orchestra Story," credits James R. Oestreich from the *New York Times* with the observation that: "For a music director, the choice of a concertmaster is analogous to a President's choice of a Supreme Court Justice, since the appointee may continue to shape the orchestra's style long after the music director is gone." This fact has certainly been proven true through multiple major orchestral histories in the late twentieth century and into the current century. Despite a few early wanderings into uncharted waters—namely, experimental conductorless orchestras such as the two-year American Symphonic Ensemble, New York, 1928— the relationship between conductor and concertmaster remained germane to the heart of an ensemble in the first half of the twentieth century.

Examining the American musical scene in the 1950s, we encounter an era when conductors such as Toscanini, Stokowski, and Szell, among others, often displayed immensely strong and individualistic personas. On a professional level, these larger than life personalities formed crucial symbiotic and political relationships with their first-chair leaders. Conductor and concertmaster both felt strong ties of guidance and responsibility to their orchestras.

Despite what ideally would have been a cooperative relationship between conductor and concertmaster, in the early and mid-twentieth century the conductor actually exercised extreme power over the orchestral personnel in general and the concertmaster in particular. Raphael Fliegel, former longtime concertmaster of the Houston Symphony Orchestra (1946-1971), recounted several occasions when a new principal music director would arrive on the scene, deftly appointed by the board of

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11 Mueller, 321.
directors. Fliegel, with his characteristic droll humor, recalled his readiness to pack his bags and leave, should the new conductor take exception to him and decide to replace him.

This was the case in orchestras around the country, as concertmasters of this time were often excluded (by choice and/or tradition) from American Federation of Musicians union negotiations and left to individually settle their own contracts with an orchestra. As Leinsdorf also noted, “During the incumbencies of Koussevitsky, Ormandy, Szell, Bing, and so on, there was no question who decided what. It was conceded of these gentlemen by friend and foe alike that whatever one liked or disliked could fairly be credited (or debited) to one man at the head.”

Not only were these great conductors of the past very selective and demanding regarding their concertmasters, but they specifically controlled and shaped the sound quality of their orchestras into distinct entities in a manner never before heard in the concert hall. Philadelphia and Ormandy, Cleveland and Szell, Boston and Koussevitzky, NBC and Toscanini—these are pairings that will be remembered for hundreds of years to come because of their unique and immediately identifiable aural signatures. Other combinations that violinists, musicians and critics will instantly recognize are: Philadelphia and Carol, Cleveland and Gingold, Boston and Silverstein, NBC/Detroit and Mischakoff. The gentlemen mentioned here helped define the legacy of their orchestras as they created a heritage for their successors in the concertmaster position.

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13 Leinsdorf, 261.
Chapter Three: The Triumphs of Famous Conductor-Concertmaster

Pairs from the Twentieth Century

The Philadelphia Orchestra, founded in 1900, has the distinction of having had only two conductors during an almost seventy-year period. From 1912 to 1980 the orchestra’s principal conductors were Leopold Stokowski and Eugene Ormandy, a fact that dramatically helped to shape the orchestra’s distinctive and opulent string sound. When Ormandy took over for Stokowski in 1936, his ideas polished the orchestra into a finely-tuned vehicle for the “Philadelphia Sound” that we know today. With forty-four years to work with the group, the rapport between orchestra and conductor was particularly well-refined. By the time he hired his last concertmaster, Norman Carol, Ormandy’s singular devotion to the orchestra, and their returned devotion to him, had defined the performance style of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Norman Carol was the only concertmaster hired by Ormandy with previous concertmaster experience, and he presided in this position from 1966-1994. In an article from the *Music Associates of America*, Carol quotes a characteristic which comprised what came to be known as “the Ormandy sound”: "Not only did he have a certain string sound in his [Ormandy’s] ear but, more important, he knew how to get it."¹⁴ David Kim, the current concertmaster of the ensemble, describes the historic, rich sound as, “a combination of a slow, sticky bow on the string and vibrato with a sort of ping....not such

of a floaty back-and-forth feeling...more of a Russian longing, with some roughness in
the sound at some points."^{15}

Interestingly, the string sound from the Philadelphia of Ormandy’s era (1938-
1980) has been transformed to some extent by more recent conductors Riccardo Muti
(1980-1992), Wolfgang Sawallisch (1993-2003), and Christoph Eschenbach (2003-
2008), and it now has considerably more classical clarity and brilliance. But if one
listens to contemporary recordings of the orchestra, the deep, luxuriant sound of the
bowed strings is never buried too deeply under the surface. One still cannot ignore or
disregard it; it remains an integral part of the orchestra’s heritage.

As concertmaster during a golden age of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Norman
Carol’s position required him to hone his musical and non-musical abilities while sitting
in the hot seat. He describes it thus:

I say hot seat because the concertmaster must be prepared to make a great
many split-second decisions. Of course, he must set the standard of
bowings for the whole string section, in consultation with the other
 principals. He is responsible for playing all the incidental solos in the
repertoire. He has to be a mind reader and know what a conductor wants
— sometimes before the conductor realizes it. And at times he is also
called upon as a ‘father confessor’ or a go-between."^{16}

The relationship that Ormandy maintained with his orchestra was one of professionalism
and appreciation. The end result was an aurally unified, singing style that exemplifies the
ease with which leader and ensemble together endeavored to create their musical
expression.

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^{15} Micaela Baranello, “Philadelphia Orchestra concertmaster gives master class to Swarthmore violinists,”
^{16} Sturm, “Norman Carol.”
Josef Gingold, too, has commented on the impact that a concertmaster can have on an orchestra, and vice versa. A young violinist who started his career in the famous NBC Symphony Orchestra with Toscanini, Gingold sat in the first violin section under the great concertmaster, Mischa Mischakoff, from 1937-1943. Andrés Cárdenes, a former student of Gingold and the current concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony, remembered his teacher describing how he “modeled his concertmaster career after Mischakoff ... what an opportunity it was for him to learn from the greatest concertmaster of his time [in the NBC orchestra], and that he was sitting right there watching everything he did and hearing him play. ... Mr. Gingold always spoke of him with such reverence and tremendous respect.”

Josef Gingold advanced into the life of a concertmaster himself in 1943, when he accepted the offer to sit at the head of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. However, Gingold’s name is most associated with Georg Szell and the development of Cleveland’s orchestra into one of the finest in the world. When first hired by the Cleveland Orchestra, Szell specifically recruited Gingold away from the Detroit Symphony to be his concertmaster in Ohio. Gingold at first demurred, but later was swayed by Szell after hearing his detailed plan to take Cleveland to the top of the orchestral world. A beloved concertmaster in Detroit, Gingold’s short journey to Cleveland was called foul play by many in Michigan. But by all accounts, the brilliance and precision of the orchestra under the collaborative guidance of Szell and Gingold soon became a standard to which other orchestras aspired.

18 Rosenberg, 530.
A great success with orchestra and conductor alike, Gingold’s natural charm, self-effacing humor, nurturing attitude, and gentlemanly demeanor combined brilliantly with a virtuosic violin technique, rich vibrato, and sophisticated musicality. On the tenth anniversary of the Szell-Gingold pairing, Szell wrote to his concertmaster, “... I am convinced that this type of unfolding of a variety of virtues of an orchestra would have been unthinkable without you. This broad statement is meant to cover both your superb artistry and your moral influence on the consciences of us all.”

Gingold stayed with the Cleveland Orchestra from 1947-1960, making eighteen solo appearances with the ensemble, a mark of the high esteem in which Szell held him. The position was truly stressful, as Szell exemplified the drive and commitment of a true taskmaster. Gingold commented later that the year he left the orchestra was the first time in fourteen years that he rested well each night. Despite the honor of leading an orchestra that drew such praises as: “When he [Szell] arrives at a point where you think the orchestra has just about reached its top of perfection, he surprises you by going on to even higher levels of virtuosic refinement and brilliance,” Gingold’s occupation was often that of the tightrope walker between the orchestral members and the great maestro. Arnold Steinhartd, who joined the orchestra as assistant concertmaster from 1959-1964, lauds Gingold’s ability to doubletalk as one of the saving graces of the orchestra. He credits Gingold with defusing many tense situations by stopping to ask Szell a question about a bowing, then proceeding to, “launch into this doubletalk, interspersed with a few strategically placed string-playing terms.” The orchestra would wait with anticipation,

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20 Rosenberg, 314.
21 Rosenberg, 268.
and after some close score study and more obfuscating doubletalk, the situation would evaporate miraculously, Szell reluctantly turning the matter over to Gingold to correct. Steinhardt stated that "it was heroic of Joe."22 The well-beloved concertmaster also discreetly led the ensemble when needed, in the occasional absence of necessary input from the podium. He was viewed as the perfect diplomatic balance to Szell’s often unreasonable and offensive tirades.

One example of the respectful ties between the two musicians is illustrated by Gingold’s description of an ingenious idea of which Szell conceived during their time together. Before each new set of concert rehearsals, Szell held an extra rehearsal with just himself and the principal string players to decide upon the bowings and articulations for those pieces. An experienced chamber musician, even Gingold was amazed at the difference this extra rehearsal made in his understanding of the score. He believed “that this rehearsal method was one of the primary reasons the Cleveland Orchestra, which still has key players who were trained in the Szell days, sounds like a large chamber music ensemble, always playing with incredible precision.”23

Despite their turbulent interplay, the two men formed one of the great partnerships in orchestral history and regarded one another’s musical gifts with great admiration. Their legacy continues to this day in Cleveland, with an orchestra that is still considered to be one of the top American and international orchestras. Josef Gingold retired from the orchestra in 1960 to join the faculty of the School of Music at Indiana University in Bloomington. Here he used his vast knowledge to educate and inspire future generations of violinists and musicians from every instrument and area. A great

22 Rosenberg, 254.
many of his violin students continued on to become distinguished concertmasters of professional orchestras around the world.\textsuperscript{24}

As mentioned above, Gingold greatly admired another famed concertmaster from one generation earlier, Mischa Mischakoff. A true mentor to young violinists such as Gingold in the NBC Orchestra, it is interesting to note that Mischakoff would later in life take over Gingold’s earlier post as concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. This example of concertmaster round robin was extremely common among the highly successful orchestras and their leaders. Mischakoff truly enjoyed one of the longest and most high-profile careers as a concertmaster in American orchestral history. His musical training began in his native Ukraine and St. Petersburg, where he was to become a young concertmaster for the first time at age twenty.\textsuperscript{25} His career soon followed a trajectory that brought him to the first chair positions in Moscow, Warsaw, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit. In addition, he served as the founding concertmaster of the NBC Symphony under Toscanini and at the Chautauqua Summer Institute Symphony and several smaller groups throughout his life.

A concertmaster by choice and by talent, Mischakoff excelled in his work and has been hailed by many to have been the greatest concertmaster of his generation. Unlike many concertmasters to appear before and after him, Mischakoff made it clear that he never felt the urge to become a conductor himself, but that his preferred position was in the “hot seat”. Mischakoff held his titled position with a wide variety of the finest orchestras for over sixty years before his retirement from the Detroit Symphony in 1968.

\textsuperscript{24} Gingold taught concertmasters including: Joseph Silverstein, Boston; Raymond Kobler, San Francisco; Jacques Israëlevitch, St. Louis and Toronto; Herbert Greenberg, Baltimore; Richard Roberts, Montreal; Isidor Saslav, Baltimore and Minnesota; Bill Preucil, Cleveland; Adreés Cárdenes, Pittsburgh.

\textsuperscript{25} Heiles, \textit{Mischa Mischakoff}, 27.
Never before in American orchestral history had a violinist dedicated his adult life so thoroughly to honing and perfecting the necessary skills required for a concertmaster’s career.

Mischa Mischakoff had the good fortune to work with a number of conductors over his long and illustrious career, but possibly one of the most troublesome was his relationship with Leopold Stokowski during his time with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Instead of balancing each other with their individual and opposing personalities, as with Gingold and Szell, Mischakoff and Stokowski’s relationship proved to be rocky and disharmonious for all involved. As Mischa’s daughter, Anne, says in her father’s biography, “Of all Stokowski’s many experiments, however, the one that most affected the conductor’s relationship with concertmasters was the advocacy of ‘free’ bowing.”

Infamous for this bowing preference, it is well-recorded that the conductor often preferred his string players to play with bogen frei, watching him for cues on when to change notes instead of unifying the changes according to a specific bowing. During rehearsals and concerts, “Stokowski maintained almost mesmerizing eye contact with orchestra members; watching a concertmaster for bowing could undermine this eye contact and total control from the podium.”

Mischakoff, conversely, was a dedicated advocate for uniform bow changes, matching bow distribution, and clear string articulations within a string section.

Mischakoff also disagreed with the celebrated conductor’s score interpretations at a fundamental level, stating that he “could not accept Stokowski’s lack of respect for the

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26 Heiles, Mischa Mischakoff, 91.
27 Ibid.
printed score—removing two bars here and two bars there as the mood took him.” As a concertmaster, a difference of opinion can be easily overlooked and lead to compromise, as it is the concertmaster’s job to serve and share in the conductor’s musical vision.

However, the elemental disagreement in musical performance philosophy between the two men came to a head when a combination of events occurred: in March of 1929 Mischakoff was turned down for a raise at the same time that Stokowski, complaining of the string tone and technique in a passage from Mozart’s Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, asked each first violinist in the section to individually play the measures in front of the orchestra. When this last event occurred, Mischakoff promptly stood up and resigned on the spot.

Following a less dramatic sojourn as the concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (1930-1937), Mischakoff accepted an invitation to occupy the lead violin chair of the NBC Symphony Orchestra, arguably the first great orchestra of the radio age. Under the baton of Arturo Toscanini, the most famed conductor in the United States at that time, Mischakoff began an exciting and hectic fifteen-year association with Toscanini, a man renowned for his passionate, fiery, and demanding musical genius. In a letter to Toscanini, Artur Rodzinski (the contractor and assistant conductor for the NBC Symphony) writes:

We have spared no expense in selecting and getting players. Our string section will probably be the finest in the world. The Concertmeister is Mischa Mischakoff, who is now the Concertmeister of the Chicago Symphony and considered better than any concertmeister in America. We have had to pay him a great deal of money to get him to come and he is now probable the highest-paid concertmeister in the world. He is also a first-rate soloist.

28 Ibid.
29 Helies, Mischa Mischakoff, 135.
Their partnership was to prove greater than that with Stokowski, for both musicians sought earnestly to serve the underlying soul of music as intended by the composer instead of imposing an unexpected interpretation for personal purposes. Mischakoff pronounced, “This work with Toscanini is an experience I shall cherish all of my life. If I were to lay my bow aside now, I should feel as though my musicianship were not acquired in vain; for to play with Toscanini is a goal musicians strive for all their lives.”\textsuperscript{30} Admittedly, playing for the volatile Toscanini was also like “playing on the edge of a volcano.”\textsuperscript{31} As dramatic and vocal as Toscanini was during rehearsals, often shouting directions and comments to players as they played, Mischakoff found him to be an inspiring leader for himself and the orchestra. Their partnership was highly involved and personal, ranging from public rehearsal discussions on musical items to close private social ties.

With the NBC Orchestra, Mischakoff lead the world’s best violin section in existence at that time. Hand-picked, each member was an artist in their own right at the time of the orchestra’s inception. The first violin section included such names as Josef Gingold, Oscar Shumsky, Remo Bolognini (known as “South America’s greatest concert violinist”), and Henri Nosco. The second violins, also immensely strong in talent, included Felix Galimir, Saul Sharrow, and Edwin Bachman, among others.

In each of the string sections, former concertmasters, principals, and section players of America’s greatest orchestras created the NBC Symphony. It is for this reason that The NBC (as it was called by its members) was technically and musically the closest predecessor to the high level of our modern orchestras. With such superb support and

\textsuperscript{30} Heiles, \textit{Mischa Mischakoff}, 129.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 233.
musical knowledge behind him, Mischakoff was able to transcend the basic role of an organizing concertmaster to become an artistic concertmaster in every sense of the title.

This virtuosic string section allowed him and Toscanini to mold, create, and propel their musicians towards amazingly detailed performances that knew no creative or expressive bounds. For every concert, Mischakoff labored intensively over bowings and articulations, always searching for the perfection that Maestro Toscanini demanded. In Mischakoff’s words, “It is positively uncanny, the way he can detect the slightest slur or faulty intonation on the part of one instrument in the back row while the entire orchestra is playing fortissimo! ... Every note, rest, and staccato mark for every instrument is etched in his memory, and he misses nothing while he is tirelessly directing difficult scores.”

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The two great musicians remained partners in this exacting manner until the death of Toscanini’s wife in 1951 and his own health decline threatened the stability and very existence of the orchestra. The NBC had been founded around Toscanini, and it was widely understood that it would disband should the Maestro retire. With heavy heart, Mischakoff considered simultaneous concertmaster offers from both the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Detroit Symphony. Due to his age, he felt compelled to turn down Eugene Ormandy, who had contacted him personally with the Philadelphia offer, and instead turned to Detroit as his last great leadership position.33 Anne Mischakoff recalls her father leaving the great orchestra.

It was with much sadness that my father left the NBC for Detroit. He had been profoundly influenced by Toscanini. Critics who had heard Mischakoff as concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony sensed a deepening in interpretation and a new authority in his playing after he had

32 Heiles, Mischa Mischakoff, 141.
33 Ibid., 183.
worked in the NBC... The excitement and rhythmic vitality, the conviction and dedication, the cleanliness of style, the expressive intensity that the Maestro demanded were identical to what my father sought. Mischakoff lead the strings, and Toscanini led the music.\textsuperscript{34}

Toscanini continued to conduct the NBC until 1954; three years after Mischakoff began rebuilding the string sections of the newly reorganized Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Mischa Mischakoff's years in Detroit were less publicized than his high-profile NBC career, but his energetic drive and influence were invariably felt by the musical world. Joseph Silverstein, a student of Mischakoff's in Detroit and the future concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, called Mischakoff the "Papa of the Orchestra."\textsuperscript{35} He describes the commanding concertmaster's approach to orchestral style and bowing as compared to a previous teacher, the great Josef Gingold: "Mischakoff was straightforward, very classic. Gingold, in contrast, was always looking for a clever or an innovative solution or way of doing something. ... Sustaining the sound and keeping the long line was the main concern in his [Mischakoff's] approach to bowing."\textsuperscript{36} His attention to details of rhythm, articulation, and style took precedence over flashy, showy solutions to technical and musical challenges. These traits served Mischakoff well as he and conductor Paul Paray slowly reshaped and rebuilt the string sections in the Detroit orchestra.

Mischakoff finally retired from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 1968, only to begin an active guest concertmaster lifestyle with orchestras around the country. His last official appearance as concertmaster occurred with the Southfield Symphony on August 3, 1979. His wife's belief that, "If Mischa retired, he'd fall apart," was proven to be true.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 188.
\textsuperscript{35} Heiles, Mischa Mischakof, 233.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 233.
shortly thereafter. After several strokes, his abilities to play the violin faltered. When making music was no longer possible, his health declined very rapidly, leading to a fatal bout of pneumonia in December of 1980. Until his death on February 1st, 1981, the violinist continued to live happily and fully through his music and teaching, still influencing fellow violinists and musicians with his remarkable insight into what, in his estimation, was the greatest occupation in the world. He was truly, "the Maestro’s Master, the concertmaster’s concertmaster."

One of Mischakoff’s students quoted above, Joseph Silverstein, also made his mark on the orchestral world as a great concertmaster. Silverstein remembers his time with Mischakoff, recalling him as an inspiring and demanding teacher who could demonstrate anything at any time. “His rhythm and intonation are already the stuff of legend. So working with him was an education for me, first of all, in what constituted the proper standard of playing. It was a relentless standard.” Motivated by brilliant teachers and performers throughout his education and career, Silverstein aspired to capture the way his mentors “were absolutely ferocious in being totally faithful to the text of the composer.”

Now in his late seventies, Silverstein has accumulated a legend comparable to that of his esteemed teacher. Conductor André Previn has called him “the world’s greatest concertmaster. That’s not opinion, that’s a fact.” After playing in the Denver, Houston, and Philadelphia Orchestras, Silverstein joined the Boston Symphony as a section player

37 Ibid., 272.
38 Heiles, Mischa Mischakoff, 274.
39 Heiles, Mischa Mischakoff, 286.
in 1955 at the age of twenty-three, the youngest member at the time, only to be appointed concertmaster in 1962, seven short years later.

Young Silverstein reached a turning point in 1971, when he was named the assistant conductor of the orchestra in addition to his ongoing and successful concertmaster role. Boris Schwartz observed that this was, "a job for which Silverstein is ideally suited, as an artist who can deal with any musical problem and whose quiet dignity commands respect and admiration." Silverstein’s rise in the Boston Symphony is unique, as he rose from the last chair of the second violins to the concertmaster role in only seven years. To him, it was a natural progression. Conversely, most other concertmasters of the time had achieved their positions by leapfrogging from orchestra to orchestra. Through his accumulated time with the orchestra, he was "very familiar with all the players in the section and there were no real surprises." Also an accomplished chamber musician and founder of the Boston Chamber Players, Silverstein left both positions in Boston in 1984 in order to direct his primary energies toward conducting.

The major concertmasters profiled previous to Silverstein shared a common ground regarding their placement in the orchestra. Each violinist pursued a clear preference to be situated at the first desk of the orchestra and not on the podium itself. However, Silverstein was not alone in his auspicious aspirations to conduct an orchestra. A leadership position as vital to orchestral cohesiveness as the first chair violin can often become a skilled tour guide of the string world, depending on a conductor’s string experience. If a concertmaster must advise a conductor with little knowledge of stringed instruments, the violinist begins to closely examine and understand the techniques of the

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conductor in a detailed fashion. The holders of the concertmaster chair can easily grow to be students of conducting by proxy, by talent, or by careful study.

A notable example of this career path is Alexander Hilsberg, who held the concertmaster/associate conductor position in the Philadelphia Orchestra for nearly two decades before substituting for Eugene Ormandy at a Carnegie Hall concert in 1946.44 Hilsberg was born in Warsaw and studied in St. Petersburg as a youth. A childhood friend of Jascha Heifetz, Hilsberg made his way to the United States in early 1920s after hearing and admiring a recording of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Several years later, in 1926, he recognized his dream, winning a section violin position. By 1931 he was the concertmaster.

A superb section leader,45 he swiftly showcased his conducting prowess with the NBC Symphony and others, easily leaving the first chair in exchange for being the maestro. He counted among his greatest Philadelphia Orchestra highlights playing the concertmaster solos from Ein Heldenleben with Toscanini as the guest conductor, and substituting for Ormandy in a Carnegie Hall concert containing Brahms’s Symphony No. 1. His transition to conducting was a triumph, as many others’ have been since then, and he crossed the threshold onto the podium without a desire to return to the concertmaster chair. Hilsberg gladly followed his conducting ambitions and culminated his musical career as the conductor of the New Orleans Symphony.

The history of the conducting concertmaster stems naturally from the earliest days of ensemble playing, as mentioned in Chapter One of this document. While early

examples of conducting concertmasters gained their vast experience from fulfilling both roles at once, modern holders of this role have evolved a more complex set of skills. Technology, innovation, and the expansion of music into the textural realms of composers like Mahler, Strauss, and Prokofiev, prompted the conducting concertmaster to emerge into the mid-twentieth century with a specialized hybrid of experience and expertise gained from being on the opposite side of the baton.

Concertmasters, with their widely-accepted tradition of leading (and often conducting) string sectionals combined with their close collaboration with conductors on intimate details of bowings, articulations, and other meticulous musical aspects, are often well-suited to the life of a conductor. The ability to lead an ensemble, whether from the podium or from a chair, requires a high degree of concentration, strict attention to detail, immensely accurate aural skills, and a very high tolerance for stress. Both jobs, when performed well, demand immense preparation. Isidor Saslav, who became concertmaster of symphonies in Buffalo, Minnesota, Baltimore, and Wellington (New Zealand), commented about his studies with Mischa Mischakoff, “One of the valuable things I got from Mischakoff [was] to be prepared and to pay attention to all the details beforehand,...to study those scores very carefully, very exactly, and find out every detail of what’s going on in your own part and in everybody else’s parts, and study everything. That was his approach, and that became my approach.”

In many ways, the conductor/concertmaster is simply a return to the roots of the concertmaster with a modern twist. Now, instead of leading a small ensemble with his bow, the conductor/concertmaster leads them with a baton. Bringing the vital experience of a principal player to the job, the concertmaster/conductor utilizes that knowledge to

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46 Heiles, Mischa Mischakoff, 283.
shape his players’ sounds from a unique and personal vantage point. Knowing the ins and outs of string bowings is second nature to a concertmaster and this translates into exceptional first-hand expertise on the podium.

The notion of the conductor/concertmaster only reinforces the necessary tie between these two positions. In today’s orchestras, one cannot exist without the other, and the two positions share a unique symbiotic relationship. As described above with Gingold and Szell, the communication and goodwill between orchestra and conductor may rest heavily upon the shoulders of the concertmaster. Mischakoff and Toscanini exemplified another complementary pairing, sharing the sincere respect and intense drive for perfection from which collegial musicians can build a lasting relationship.

If a concertmaster and a music director are at odds with one another, the basic foundation of the orchestra is at risk. Certainly it can be assumed that the conductor desires to collaborate with the musicians in the orchestra, and vice versa, but the cooperation of the concertmaster is essential to the success of both parties. If the balance of personalities is unpleasant, or the method of communication is not clear, both parties threaten the musical cohesiveness of a performance. The best combination continues to be mutual respect and appreciation for both jobs. As contributors to this goal, each historically noteworthy concertmaster impacted the genre in ways small and large, laying the foundation upon which future generations would gratefully build.
Chapter Four: The Changing Orchestral Atmosphere

As with any great cultural institution, the American orchestra embodies the characteristics of its inhabitants, reflecting trends in general and the country's overall development. As the twentieth century progressed, so did America's view of culture, art, and music. Multiple factors led to the rapid growth of the community orchestra, the full establishment and financial support of the major metropolitan orchestras still in existence today, and the evolution of the orchestral musician from a novelty occupation to a fully professional career option. The internal organizational structure of the orchestra rapidly kept pace with the alterations, and orchestral establishments sought financial support from new sources as they matured. Personnel equality became a catchphrase in several senses, hanging hesitantly in the atmosphere as women and minorities became important members of the orchestral community. In an economy-driven society, the quest for musician salaries that were competitive and sustainable through an entire year became the end goal. Overall, these changes affected the entire orchestra, and they especially had an impact on the concertmaster.

World Wars I and II combined with the Great Depression dramatically impacted the way Americans united in the face of adversity, including a protective stance toward our cultural and creative heritage. These wars, among other causes, produced a wave of support for large orchestras and began a serious campaign that resulted in the emergence of the amateur community orchestra. They also propelled hundreds, if not thousands of musicians from their native European countries into America, a land whose countryside
was not being destroyed by war. This influx of artists during the wars was the culmination of an immigration wave that Eduard Hanslick, the famous sharp-tongued Viennese critic, had observed decades earlier, "America was truly the promised land, if not of music, at least of the musician."47

The wars and the associated draft also affected the personnel of America's orchestras, creating a place for women in what had been a male-dominated world. By the end of World War II in particular, women had gained grudging acceptance in America's orchestras, although there were still many prejudices against them and contractual fairness was hardly a consideration. The first step had been taken, and during the middle of the twentieth century, women added to the swelling numbers that formed the many orchestras of America.

The trend has been clear: following a substantial orchestral boom in the mid-nineteenth century, both amateur and professional American orchestras have continued to grow at a slower and steadier pace. It is sadly true that in some communities the burden of artistic development has been too heavy, and a number of orchestras have fallen into financial ruin. But for the most part, the field has matured and expanded. Evidence of this important social and economic shift is found most obviously in the conversion of amateur volunteer orchestras into ensembles with only professionally paid engagements.

In this situation, the term "professionally paid" does not necessarily mean that the musicians in question earn a living wage from their services, but instead implies that the services pay compensation of some monetary value. In many communities, these professional musicians have proven themselves to be part of an indispensable cultural phenomenon. "While we still look to the Major orchestras as conservators of the art,

47 Mueller, 22.
many smaller-budget groups meet exacting standards of performance and, in proportion
to their budgets, more than pull their weight in broadening and enriching the symphonic
repertoire."^48 This proliferation of symphonic orchestras and their desire to earn a
professional identity in turn led to an obvious increase in important concertmaster
positions throughout the country. In the mid-1900s, the positions at the high end of the
spectrum paid a decent, but not livable, wage. The concert seasons were short, the
concerts themselves were often erratically planned with many compressed rehearsals in a
small period of time, and the musicians were usually left to find their own income during
the summers, as a year-long season was a luxurious thought, not a reality.

For example, when Mischakoff was offered the concertmaster title for the newly
founded NBC Symphony in 1937, he was reputedly the highest-paid concertmaster in the
world with his salary of $18,000 a year. This figure was more than double what he had
been paid just a year earlier as concertmaster of Chicago.^49 This illustration serves to
point out that even one of the most sought-after concertmasters of his time, playing with
one of the greatest orchestras in the world, was subject to searching for a living wage and
greater financial security as late as the 1930s. The NBC Orchestra, through its
competitive and modern wages, was able to fund one of the most amazing string sections
the musical world had ever known. The establishment and great success of this high-
profile orchestra with its matching high-profile salary certainly encouraged other
symphonies to emulate their formula.

^48 Robert R. Craven, ed., *Symphony Orchestras of the United States: Selected Profiles* (Westport, CT:

^49 Anne Mischakoff Heiles, *Mischa Mischakoff*, 135. Minimal scale for NBC's section pay was only $4200
a year. NBC's contract included twelve services per week for forty weeks, with recordings to be paid at
one-fifth his salary and that all outside performing engagements interfering with this schedule required the
approval of the management.
Slowly but surely, orchestral musicians as a whole began to fight for their right to a permanent job in an ensemble. John Mueller describes the American ideal of the “permanent orchestra” as having the following traits: “exclusively professional membership; full season contracts; the orchestra as principal employment of its members; all other employment (e.g. teaching, concertizing, etc.) compatible with priority of orchestral requirements; regular and adequate rehearsals; [and a] financial base sufficient to insure the above conditions.”\(^{50}\) Mueller asserts that in 1900, barely four established orchestras closely approximated a title of “permanency”, with six remaining ensembles gathering forces in the wings.

Following the orchestral boom of the early twentieth century, the 1950s showcased over twenty orchestras with budgets that surpassed $100,000, while several scores of minor professional orchestras and six hundred community orchestras sought prosperity and survival. Reacting to this trend, the orchestral race to permanent professionalism among musicians, concertmasters, and conductors alike catapulted full-tilt into the late twentieth century.

At the same time that the orchestral surge was roaring forward, the American Federation of Musician’s Union was working to keep pace with the increasing needs and demands of professional musicians. In keeping with the developing national labor movement, the musician’s union began to take a stronger stance toward musician’s working conditions in the twentieth century. A protective entity for musicians that has been in existence in some form since 1886, the American Federation of Musicians has struggled to equalize salaries and minority hiring, has codified hiring and firing practices

\(^{50}\) Mueller, 36.
in general, negotiated fair working conditions/hours, provided ground rules for conductor involvement, and has regulated other basic contractual issues.

The union message expanded through the middle of the century, into the tumultuous sixties and seventies, until they unquestionably produced a base of support in every major city across the United States. Their protection of musicians’ rights and responsibilities form the basis for the vast majority of orchestral contracts in present-day America. Over time, union representation evolved to include both adequate representation and the right to include musicians in the decision-making process associated with creating orchestral contracts. It is now a rare and unique phenomenon for a major orchestra to exist without union representation and involvement.

As the American Federation of Musician’s Union gained strength through the twentieth century, the concertmaster was strongly affected by the group’s power and influence on orchestral politics. First chair players came to understand that raising the basic level of pay for section players improved not only the musical/technical quality of personnel with which they worked, but also the orchestra’s community standing and hence, the general negotiation rate, from which they could also benefit.\textsuperscript{51}

The shift of power away from a sole conductor into the hands of committees, a board of directors, and the political sway of public opinion also precipitated the question of the concertmaster’s leadership role within the group. In an institution based on specified levels of involvement and responsibility, such as Principal Horn, Second Bassoon, Associate Concertmaster, the conundrum became how to incorporate the vital leadership of a single violinist into the a worker’s union? The answer has become one of the concertmaster’s greatest challenges, as the inheritors of the title struggle to maintain a

\textsuperscript{51} Brodine, 88.
clear social and musical balance between responsibilities to musician colleagues, to conductors, to the union, to their board of directors, and finally to a waiting audience.

The audition process is another key facet of concertmaster life that has been seriously impacted by the advent of the American Federation of Musician’s Union. Before the union standardized the audition process, concertmasters, principals, and section players alike played for a conductor in a personal audition, without the use of audition screens, established protocol, or player committees to influence the final decision. The conductor/music director had complete and individual control over the personnel in his orchestra and the hiring process was decidedly autocratic. Auditions could take place in hotel rooms, on the orchestral stage, or anywhere else the conductor saw fit. The audition could last for hours or be as brief as several minutes. The possibility for personnel changes was rapid-fire and not even the concertmaster position was free from the sudden shifts in orchestral employees. One musician’s hiring could inadvertently be the cause of another’s imminent firing without any advance notice or warning. What could serve as a remarkably successful audition in one venue for one conductor might not make the grade in an equally ranked orchestra on a different day.

Georg Szell reputedly listened to one violinist tuning for minute after minute, wearing down the conductor’s already thin patience, only to cut the auditionee off just as the player was about to begin playing his actual audition pieces.\(^{52}\) Not a single note of his prepared audition pieces was played. In contrast, Joseph Gingold’s audition consisted of Szell watching/listening to him perform as concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Later, according to now-legendary accounts, Szell gave Gingold twenty minutes to decide if he would accept Szell’s offered contract for the Cleveland Orchestra.

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\(^{52}\) Rosenberg, 255.
With that, the matter was fully decided without any further discussion or input from anyone outside of the two gentlemen.

Today this sort of agreement would be frowned upon for a number of reasons, one of which is that Mr. Szell broke the unwritten rule that an orchestral director should not hire a musician away from another orchestra (the Detroit Symphony Orchestra) without proper notice. At that time, the poaching of another orchestra’s musicians was a professional faux pas, but Szell simply ignored accusations of wrongdoing in pursuit of his ideal orchestra.

Another modern cry of outrage would be heard from the union, since Mr. Gingold was not given a fair contemplation period in which to decide his intentions about the offered contract. In all fairness, he could have turned it down and walked away from the proposal. Thankfully he did not, because on the opposite side of this issue is the observation that these exact events led unquestionably to one of the most fascinating and successful partnerships in recorded orchestral history. It is impossible to predict how modern union rules and regulations in the future will influence unwritten history, but it is naive to assume that these now obsolete practices only produced negative consequences in the past.

Many of the historically accepted forms of auditioning musicians allowed the possibility for great racial and gender discrimination to emerge. Many suspected that the older audition practices gave the appearance of dismissing equivalent opportunities for all. Women and minorities in particular were the victims of these traditions, as American orchestras struggled along with the rest of the country in their efforts to work through the civil rights movement and establish gender equality. Wrestling with the issues of racial
segregation and maternity challenges, developing communities searching for an identity based on simple equanimity provoked deep responses from musicians.

For example, in the St. Louis Symphony, women were not represented in the orchestra until 1943, when the wartime shortage of men influenced the positive hiring practices of women to the orchestra ranks. Prior to this, the lack of women’s dressing rooms were among the many excuses utilized by the management to justify the lack of women appointees. Suddenly these excuses were no longer valid, as male musicians became rare and female musicians were readily available for job openings. As late as 1964, after women had become accepted in orchestral roles in general, the St. Louis Orchestra contract carried a clause that described pregnancy as a physical condition that caused audience distraction and was therefore reason to terminate a contract. These examples of gender discrimination serve as only several examples of the levels through which orchestras have evolved since the search for gender equality began.

Tensions in the major orchestras remained high for minorities through the forties and fifties. Donald White was the first African-American to be officially admitted to a major orchestra, personally auditioned by Szell for the Cleveland Orchestra. Reputedly he told Szell over the phone that he was colored, and Szell replied, “I don’t care if you’re green; can you play the cello?” Despite several protests from touring cities, etc. throughout his career, the orchestra supported his hire and he spent a total of thirty-eight years performing and touring with his musician friends and peers.

53 Brodine, 115.
While the Sphinx Organization estimates that only one to three percent of major orchestral musicians are racial minorities,\textsuperscript{55} that number is growing with every passing decade. For example, Andrés Cárdenes, one of the profiled concertmasters in this document, takes pride in his Cuban heritage and has spent a large part of his career as an artistic ambassador. With these developments in mind, it is clearly only a matter of time before a major orchestral concertmaster of African descent makes his/her creative mark on the musical world.

These responses came to a head in the seventies and eighties, as many orchestras went on strike in support of various contract revisions concerning civil rights, women's rights, and general musician contractual rights. Orchestral accounts are varied in their records of such troubling protestations, but the voices of dissent and disapproval were eventually heard. Current orchestral rosters display the remarkable talents of musical representatives from every race and gender more so than ever before. This is clearly indicated not only within the smaller circle of concertmasters, but also within the larger body of orchestral section players, as violinists exhibiting musical dedication and artistic mastery provide orchestras across the nation with leaders, both male and female, from a variety of racial categories.

Thankfully, the audition process has grown substantially more egalitarian for players of every instrumental rank since the days of unrest in the seventies and eighties. Orchestras, as a modern business, have developed a tendency to better appreciate the larger picture of united musicians, conductor, and management, working together to bring

\textsuperscript{55} Teresa Clark and Afa Sadykhly, “DaimlerChrysler Services Help Put Laureates Center Stage,” \textit{Quarter Note} 6, no.4, found in the Sphinx Organization (Fall 2005), http://www.sphinxmusic.org/about/newsletter.html (accessed February 5, 2008).
the best available players to the organization. One hopes that a player’s competence and creative personality are the only necessary requirements to win a position in a major symphony orchestra or as a prominent concertmaster. Although there is still tumult and strong personal opinion inherent in the audition process, orchestral politics is unmistakably following the nation’s attempt to set a good example through its diverse hiring practices.
Part Two- The Life of the Current Concertmaster

All of the factors mentioned previously contribute to the varied development of distinct paths down which current concertmasters travel. I will examine five of these individualized paths, from four current concertmasters of major orchestras across modern America and one legendary former concertmaster/conductor. By means of their interviews and other source material, I will trace their concertmaster heritage, education, and the evolution of their concertmaster duties as compared with those from the mid-twentieth century. I will also share their predictions for the future of the American concertmaster and the next generation’s musical leadership in America.

Interviews include the following: Bill Preucil of the Cleveland Orchestra, Emmanuelle Boisvert of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Seattle Symphony, Andrés Cárdenes of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Juliana Athayde of the Rochester Philharmonic, and Joseph Silverstein, the former concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.
Chapter Five- The Paths to the Modern Concertmaster Chair

The Audition Process

An audition is by far the most accepted means by which orchestras the world over find new musicians for their ensembles. This process varies from orchestra to orchestra and also from position to position. The modern concertmaster audition process is a complicated subject, as it is not always governed by the same rules as a section position audition. The repertoire list is longer, the stakes are higher, and the pay is commensurate with the tremendously high level of stress present in the job. Moreover, the concertmaster audition process appears to be as changeable as the needs of each individual orchestra. The audition may be a straight-forward screened audition that takes place in a concise period of several days. An orchestra’s audition process for the top chair can also be a progression from a systematic search for the right candidate, through a formulaic series of auditions, into a lengthy quest over a large span of time. Both versions exist in the modern orchestral world, as orchestras hunt for the right personality to introduce to their eager audiences and critics. Finding the right concertmaster at the right time is a distinctively difficult procedure with varying rates of success across the country.

A modern concertmaster audition can sometimes require a formal audition that receives the approval of an audition committee (created from orchestral musicians), a board of directors, and the conductor before final decisions can be made. Since a concertmaster position is so highly specialized, the basic rules are very often reshaped in order to fit the extra measures and responsibilities intrinsic to this particular chair. The
degrees to which the normal audition guidelines are altered depend on the immediate
need of the orchestra and/or the immediately apparent personality fit of the auditionee.
There are as many different paths to the concertmaster chair as there are concertmasters,
and each interviewed concertmaster described his/her distinctive journey along that path
as well as their existing perceptions about the audition process as a whole.

The current concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra, Bill Preucil grew up in a
musical household in a small college town in Iowa. With a violinist mother and a violist
father who were both professional musicians, Preucil remembers being surrounded by
music from a very early age. He studied with his parents at first, and then attended the
Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan for two years of high school. It was here that he
first experienced the thrill of playing in a large orchestra. Thor Johnson conducted the
orchestra, and Preucil remembers his time in the ensemble. “We played things that were
just almost beyond our understanding in a certain way, but we could understand it
emotionally and it was a tremendous, life-changing experience.”

His college years were spent at Indiana University, in the studio of the renowned
Joseph Gingold. Preucil fondly remembers his time with Gingold:

As I was there longer, as I was lucky enough to be given the responsibility
of concertmaster of one of the five orchestras, at the end of my second
year there, some of my lessons became more training towards orchestral
playing, solos and stuff. Although when I look back at it, not enough. I
wish I had brought in more of that stuff. I wish I’d asked more questions.
But at the time, it seemed that I was doing what I was supposed to do, and
there were recitals and concertos and sonatas to learn, and all those things
... and I am grateful for all those times when I did play orchestral solos
and tutti passages and stuff for him, but there could have been a lot more
of that if I had looked into the crystal ball of the future a little better.

56 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
Preucil’s two musical dreams, to be a concertmaster and to play in a string quartet, pulled at him towards the end of his studies at Indiana University. Inspired by Gingold, Preucil finally decided to use the end of his college years to prepare for orchestral auditions, most notably those for the concertmaster chair.

In some audition cases, a young applicant may win the audition over the presence of many more seasoned veteran orchestral players, as was the case with Bill Preucil’s first concertmaster position. Specifically, his studies with Josef Gingold, hearing about his years with the NBC Orchestra, Detroit, and Cleveland, fed a romantic longing to experience the life of a concertmaster. As he puts it, this longing combined with the fact that it is much easier to take an orchestra audition when you are in college than it is to form a quartet. When I had the chance for a concertmaster job [with the Nashville Symphony in 1980], I jumped at it and to this day, I am thankful that the people were eager enough, or far-sighted enough, or stupid enough to hire a twenty-two year old boy as their concertmaster. But nobody was more excited about it than I was, or proud of it. And I think I did a decent job for them and I loved it.57

Nashville was to be the first of several concertmaster positions that Preucil would eventually win. Of the concertmasters profiled here, he carries the largest number of varied concertmaster titles from his orchestral auditions (Nashville, Utah, Atlanta, Cleveland, Philadelphia—awarded but not accepted).

Still interested in chamber music, Preucil pursued a second musical career as the first violinist of the Cleveland Quartet for many years (1989-1995) before returning to the orchestral scene. When he won both concertmaster positions in the Cleveland Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra within twenty-four hours of each other in 1994, the situation was historically quite unique. Having prepared the exceptionally long required

57 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
list of concerti and excerpts (both section excerpts and concertmaster solos) for the Philadelphia audition, Mr. Preucil then traveled to Ohio the following day for the Cleveland Orchestra concertmaster audition.

By contrast, the Cleveland audition did not have a set list of repertoire or excerpts. As an auditioning concertmaster he was simply expected to perform any and every major piece in the standard orchestral literature, primary concertmaster solos, and several solo concerti. Since Mr. Preucil was prepared with the Philadelphia list in addition to knowing orchestral literature well from his past concertmaster experiences, he offered them his concerti, performed a selection of his excerpts from the Philadelphia audition list, and accordingly was offered both jobs within a day of each other. Preucil chose the position in Cleveland, quoting that, “The Philadelphia Orchestra is a great orchestra. I have great respect for everyone there. All that said, it’s Cleveland where I need and want to be.”

Emmanuelle Boisvert is a musician who has stayed constant with her initial concertmaster roots. A graduate of the Curtis Institute and a section violinist with the Cleveland Orchestra, she also exemplified a successful young concertmaster auditionee when she applied for the job with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 1985. At the age of twenty-five, Boisvert became the first woman to win a concertmaster position of a major American orchestra, an honor followed shortly thereafter by Jorja Fleezanis, who won the same title with the Minnesota Orchestra. Notably, Boisvert also became one of the youngest concertmasters of the major orchestral circuit at that time.

58 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
59 Rosenberg, 530.
Following the announcement of her audition triumph at such an early age, she was certainly aware of possible tentative reactions from her soon-to-be orchestral colleagues. A fully screened audition through the final round, she later heard that several of these cautious reactions were indeed voiced once her youthful age and applicable experience were revealed. However, the overall response of the audition committee was the simple statement, “The screen spoke.”60 In other words, her audition was clearly the best of all the candidates and she was therefore the clear winner.

She proceeded to perform as concertmaster for a three-week trial period, after which the final decision was made clear. The result was an overwhelming response from the orchestra and she has been the concertmaster since that day. A year and a half later, she received full tenure. Boisvert has now guided the orchestra for over twenty years through a tremendous growth period and has assisted its catapult into one of the leading orchestras within the United States.

Andrés Cárdenes, the current concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, describes his audition as an event considerably less formal than the two described above. A young violinist with multiple competitions and honors already ascribed to his name, his initial audition for Lorin Maazel was intended to be solely a concerto soloist interview. After playing his prepared repertoire for the conductor privately, he was indeed offered a future concerto appearance with the conductor.

Maazel then additionally mentioned that he knew of Cárdenes’ work as a concertmaster and asked if he might be interested in filling that particular position with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. The conductor requested several orchestral excerpts, which Cárdenes happened to recall easily due to his many years of orchestral

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performances. He made his way by memory through violin excerpt portions of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Strauss, and other major orchestral composers without any music or any specific preparations other than his own past experiences.

The audition was an undeniable success and Maazel invited Cárdenes to officially join the orchestra. Positioned as he was for a long and successful solo career, Cárdenes politely turned down the full-time position. However, he did agree to serve in the concertmaster capacity for several weeks in the current season, provided that the orchestra did not find a permanent candidate for the job. The two men agreed and began to make their plans for his temporary seat in the orchestra.

The time passed, and the search was repeated the following year without finding a suitable candidate. At the request of Maazel, Cárdenes again graciously agreed to lead the ensemble for a few weeks at a time while the search continued. As the ties between the young violinist and the orchestra grew stronger and gained in depth, it became obvious that the position had evolved into a perfect fit between orchestra and leader.

The violinist recalls his time with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra following the audition:

So I played for a couple of weeks with the orchestra and then he [Maazel] asked me if I would be willing to play eight weeks next year while they continued to look and I said, “Well, you know, I don’t really want to do this, but I enjoy working with you so I’ll play the eight weeks.” And then, next thing I know he’s saying, “Look, what do you need in order to be our concertmaster? What do you want?” And then I gave him a ridiculous list of things which he honored. And that’s how I got the job. And it’s totally not what I had planned… \(^6\)

Terms were negotiated, and Cárdenes officially assumed the concertmaster chair, where he remains today. He has now been firmly established in Pittsburgh for nineteen years

\(^6\) Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
with the orchestra, and has several professional chamber groups, a flourishing conducting career, and his originally intended solo career happily occupying space in his musical life.

Juliana Athayde, concertmaster of the Rochester Philharmonic since 2005, is the youngest concertmaster profiled in this document. While her childhood familial influences embraced both classical music and jazz, she followed in the footsteps of her violinist mother, insisting upon a violin of her own at age two. She recalls, “I grew up with violin lessons all the time, and pretty much just from the earliest age I seem to remember feeling that everyone played an instrument, ‘cause everyone that came to our house did!”

She continued her studies in the San Francisco area, playing her first orchestra concert, Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, at age twelve with the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra. By age fifteen, she was concertmaster of the group, remaining in the chair for three years. By the end of this time, she remembers thinking, “I really started getting into the idea of it: ‘Wow, being a concertmaster, that would be really great!’” I liked the thrill and the excitement of being in the hot seat, and we did a live performance recording of Zarathustra when I was sixteen. MTT [Michael Tilson Thomas] was there, and I just thought ‘wow, this is really exciting.’” She has been addicted to orchestral playing ever since those memorable encounters with the medium.

After studies with Paul Kantor at the University of Michigan and in Cleveland, she was the first student to enter and graduate from Bill Preucil’s new Concertmaster Academy at the Cleveland Institute of Music. A novel approach to concertmaster

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63 Ibid.
education, the competitive program is designed to prepare qualified students for a career as concertmaster of a major symphony orchestra. It is also intended to demystify and expose prospective concertmasters to those elements of the concertmaster job that are not included usually in a contract, such as the political duties and the intense musical preparation. Athayde successfully graduated from the program with her Master’s Degree in 2005. She credits her learning experiences at CIM as a highly significant component in her current achievements as concertmaster of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

A perfect fit for the Concertmaster Academy, Juliana states that over time, her attitude toward the specific nature of the concertmaster position came into clearer focus. She says,

As I was going through college I remember beginning to realize that not only did I really enjoy playing in the orchestra and enjoyed the repertoire, but, as far as a lifestyle, it seemed so great, because you could do a little bit of everything. You can teach, and play chamber music, and play concertos with your orchestra or other orchestras, and maybe most of all, you can have a normal life and be in one location. So, I always was attracted to the idea of getting to have a little bit of everything in the music world, and not living out of a suitcase.⁶⁴

For Athayde, becoming a concertmaster was the culmination of a lifelong goal. She prepared for her present job audition while still at CIM and the Concertmaster Academy. Of the audition itself, she recalls,

I either naively or bravely chose to play the Beethoven Violin Concerto for my audition. I also played Mozart Concerto #4, and a slew of concertmaster excerpts. I remember playing Heldenleben in a tiny recital hall with twelve to thirteen people in it sitting ten to fifteen feet away, or closer. And they all clapped, like it was a recital or something! And I thought, “They seem like a nice group of people!” Only later did I find out that that was not normal procedure and that they had been actually impressed with what I did.⁶⁵

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⁶⁵ Ibid.
The rest of her audition was comprised of chamber music and additional section orchestral excerpts.

Athayde’s audition event was not typical, even by concertmaster standards. Rochester’s leadership seat had been vacant a long time while the orchestra waited for the right musician to enter their doors.

Rochester had been without a concertmaster for four years, and they were well past the days of cattle-call auditions. At that point they were inviting people in to audition. And I played for them and they liked it. They asked if I would come back for some trial weeks with the orchestra, which I did. At the end of the second trial week, they wanted another audition, but this was almost a recital. I played my concerti with piano and played my chamber music and after that, they offered me the job.66

The timeline from the first audition in October to the job offer in February ensured that the orchestra management and musicians had every opportunity to consider Athayde’s personal style and musical direction with the group. At the same time, it also gave her studies with Preucil a palpable direction for her audition preparations. As a result, the chance to jump from graduate school to an immediate job was something that Athayde worked very hard to achieve. Of the experience, she says, “By the time I graduated [from the Concertmaster Academy program], I already knew that I had this job to go to. I was very lucky to have no lag time between school and employment. … I haven’t lost an audition yet! I haven’t taken thirty-six [of them], of course, but I have had success with that. I wouldn’t say that I have the common experience, I would say that I have the less

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common experience."\textsuperscript{67} She describes her arrival in the job as, "the jeans that fit—they get a little more worn and a little more comfortable every day."\textsuperscript{68}

Joseph Silverstein's long career has been extremely varied, and he considers his early training as a violinist to have laid the stage for his adult concertmaster experiences. A consummate violinist and conductor, he began his musical studies in Detroit, Michigan in 1935, when he was three. His first teacher was his father, who had studied himself with Franz Knieisel in New York. Of his lessons with his father, Silverstein says, "He left me with a love of music and of playing the instrument that has only intensified over the years. He was very special."\textsuperscript{69}

Silverstein was to continue with his childhood musical education with exceptional teachers. For example, from twelve years of age until his college years, he had the good fortune to take lessons with Joseph Gingold, then concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. He even studied the concertmaster solos to Strauss' \textit{Heldenleben} with Gingold when he was only thirteen years old.\textsuperscript{70} Experiences such as these prepared Silverstein for his admission to the Curtis Institute of Music and subsequent section violin posts in the Houston Symphony (three years), Philadelphia Orchestra (one year), and a one-year concertmaster appointment in the Denver Symphony.

His next move was to the last chair in the second violins of the Boston Symphony in 1955. Silverstein remembers his first audition for the Boston Symphony with great clarity. "In 1955, when I auditioned for the Boston Symphony, we played our preliminary audition behind a screen. The finals were in the open, because we played

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Juliana Athayde, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 17, 2008.
\textsuperscript{69} Helles, \textit{America's Concertmasters}, 56.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
only for the conductor, the concertmaster, and personnel manager. But of course later on the extensive audition committee evolved and I guess that’s the way it is everywhere now.”71 Of this transition, Mischa Mischakoff told him, “You’re making a big mistake. They’ll never move you up there. You’ll never become concertmaster.”72

However, in an incredibly unusual situation, he first advanced by audition to the third stand of first violins, and eventually won the concertmaster chair in 1962 when Richard Burgin retired. Silverstein’s section violin audition was very different than his concertmaster audition several years later, as it was only screened through the first round. Several years later, with several competition honors to his name and a wide array of orchestral experience under his belt, he emerged victorious from a completely screened concertmaster audition. Of this event, conductor Erich Leinsdorf wrote that Silverstein “won hands down- a difficult stance for a violin player- to the displeasure of a few important musical figures in New York.”73

It is clear that the audition process, whether for a concertmaster, principal, or section position, has always been a source of controversy and interpretative detail. The methods of effectively auditioning a concertmaster, as described above, showcase the diverse manners through which such musicians can be professionally employed. Once offered a chair in the orchestra, the salary negotiations begin. In most orchestras, section negotiations now take place with union representation to ensure quality, fairness between players from instrument to instrument, and to solidify the same minute contractual details with each player. However, because of the deeply personal and demanding nature of the

71 Joseph Silverstein, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 26, 2008..
72 Heiles, America’s Concertmasters, 57.
73 Ibid., 59.
concertmaster’s position between conductor/music director and orchestra, the
classicist’s position is most often negotiated separately.

At this point a long-established practice, the private negotiation has become a
commonplace and complex part of the concertmaster audition process today. It is
important to point out that this pivotal aspect of the concertmaster’s hiring is noticeably
different from that of the other orchestral member’s employment and contractual
agreements due to the concertmaster’s enhanced responsibilities within the group. Terms
of negotiation can include salary, vacation time, concerto appearances, solo appearances
with other ensembles with which the orchestra has connections, summer festival
involvement, pops/educational outreach events, and other details. With the obvious
exception of the conductor, there is no other position in the orchestra with as much
personal negotiating power as the concertmaster.

Another important facet of any orchestral audition is the divisive topic concerning
whether or not auditions should be screened. Fundamentally, a screened audition is an
audition (or portion of an audition) where a player is hidden from an audition committee
or audition judges by a screen. The screen is typically placed so that no portion of the
player’s body or instrument is shown to their listening audience. Interestingly, the panel
of concertmasters interviewed for this document voiced extremely differing private views
regarding the basic question of screened auditions and shared their unique personal
experiences with this contemporary issue. Each orchestra carries its own practice toward
the auditions, and without exception each concertmaster holds a very strong belief about
the manner in which a screen could or should be used. Due to its sensitive nature, this
topical subject matter will be presented anonymously, drawing its perspectives from the extensive interview contents transcribed and researched by the author.

As mentioned earlier, screened auditions were first introduced in the 1950s when the musician’s union began to place pressure on orchestras to desegregate and diversify their personnel. Screens were viewed as a basic measure of fairness, a way to level the playing field for any person that may be in danger of discrimination for personal reasons, regardless of their aurally evident technical or musical prowess. This viewpoint is recognized as being a valid concern, given the turmoil of segregation and feminism that the United States endured in the mid-twentieth century. These practices were born of necessity in an attempt to create equality for all musicians seeking employment. One concertmaster remembered their use as an attempt to be “scrupulously fair...because the personnel managers during these years were very, very conscientious about maintaining a standard of integrity in the orchestra audition process.”

One concertmaster held the opinion that a screen was unnecessary for modern audition purposes, since the issues of discrimination are largely behind us in the twenty-first century. “The audition can be fair or unfair whether it’s screened or not, and my first concern is that it is fair.” This individual asserted that it could also be extremely helpful to see a player’s bow hand and arm, to examine the technical qualities that a player brought to an audition as an orchestral candidate. Such facets of information could be considerably useful to a concertmaster, whose responsibilities include shaping the sound of a string section appropriately. As this concertmaster states, it can be true that physically seeing a player’s individual technique can allow a concertmaster to judge

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74 Anonymous quote
75 Anonymous quote
if the player will fit well within a string section's current sound quality. Since every orchestra has a different expression of string sound, this argument can carry significant weight despite its assumption that racial and gender discrimination has been eradicated from the audition process.

On the other hand, another concertmaster lauded the screen as one of the clearest ways to audition for any position. This person cited their own past audition experience (not necessarily for their current job) as personal positive proof for the utilization of a screen, mentioning that it contributed to their own comfort level as an auditionee. The quoted concertmaster also believes that a fully screened audition additionally protects the identity of the unsuccessful auditionees, ensuring that they may audition at a future date without previous prejudice from an earlier audition that perhaps did not go as well as they had hoped.

Comments such as this reflect upon the desire to take unnecessary pressure off auditioning instrumentalists. This is part of the audition controversy: the debate about how candidates deal with pressure. Since they will be under performance pressure once they are on stage and a part of the orchestra, some individuals argue that adding visual pressure to the audition process is a step in preparation for the eventual demands of the job. On the other hand, intensive individual pressure, where the committee sees a candidate, may unduly create such performance anxiety that an audition is negatively impacted, whereas the candidate may be an excellent player within the safety of a group or when cloaked in anonymity.

This same concertmaster expressed great satisfaction when talking about a fully screened audition, because he/she felt that it generated a situation where a job is won
completely due to the merits of the violin playing, without any doubt as to the complete competency of the performance or any preconceived prejudices against the musician’s physical persona or previous interpersonal relationships. The declaration made here is that in a screened audition, a concertmaster can hear exactly how a player uses their bow and how they physically play simply by listening carefully to fingering choices, string choices, tempi, rhythm, and articulations. Listening in this manner should give a committee all of the information that they require to make a unified decision.

Yet another common preference is the dual combination described by Joseph Silverstein earlier in the chapter. Several concertmasters feel a desire to keep auditioning candidates anonymous to a certain degree, but inevitably they would like to see who and what they are hiring before the process is officially finalized. By removing the screen in the final round, they can acquaint themselves to a higher degree with the playing style of their soon-to-be future colleagues and contemplate the strengths and weaknesses that each candidate brings to the table. One interviewee acknowledged that

You can be lucky to know more about someone auditioning for the orchestra. How many times does it happen that someone plays a great audition but they are like vinegar in the orchestra? That can happen. Or they don’t mix well, or they aren’t a good colleague (have a negative attitude), or they aren’t prepared for rehearsals? Hiring with a certain sound in mind, training musicians to produce that sound—if that’s being passed down, it’s almost an aural tradition.\footnote{Anonymous quote}

Another concertmaster articulated his/her ambiguity about the situation, saying:

You know my personal opinion is that I’m not sure that the screens coming down in the second round or in the finals are a good thing. I think the first round is great. I just find that my personal experience now is that once we get to the finals, if people know the finalists and they’re keen on getting them in, they find a way to get them in. And it’s not always based
on who plays the best. Democracy, I like to say, democracy is the gatekeeper of mediocrity.  

The fundamental point of this outlook addresses the topic of audition committees and whether they function for the true development of an orchestra or against the greater good through their collective deliberations. A committee can be unanimous in their vote or wholly undecided, where each member is in favor of a different auditionee. A growing trend in modern orchestras is the search for the perfect candidate to satisfy everyone on a committee, a process that can last for years while auditions are held each year. Some defend the committee system, enjoying the democratic process and the hard-won right for orchestral members to be involved in the hiring practice. They are glad to see an end to the older procedure where the music director alone hired ensemble musicians. In their opinion, it does not matter if the audition period is indefinitely extended, as long as the ‘right’ candidate is eventually hired.

Others have asserted that the protracted audition is simply a way for orchestras to save money, since it is cheaper to hire substitute players at lower rates than to pay retirement, insurance, salary, etc., for a contracted member. One concertmaster recognized the input that a concertmaster can have in string auditions, but disapproved when the final outcome is decided “by committee, which I think is stupid, because I think somebody has to be held responsible for the decision and committees are very hard to hold responsible for anything. There’s always the other guy who did it wrong. My feeling is that the decisions I’ve made on behalf of the orchestra, in terms of giving it life, have followed my heart as for what is best for the orchestra.”

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77 Anonymous quote
78 Anonymous quote
Viewed with complete objectivity, the addition of each new musical personality to an orchestral section can alter the careful balance, either positively or negatively. With the welfare of their orchestras in mind, all of the concertmasters interviewed expressed an equally earnest interest in the maintenance and morale of their string sections. Finding the right player at the right time is essential as today’s orchestras move forward in their struggle for musical and technical perfection. While the audition process is far from perfect, it is abundantly clear that the established protocol of the audition is the simplest and most accepted way to add players to the ensemble, building unified instrumental sections one player at a time.

An initially screened audition and open finals round is one option which allows for the concertmaster to voice his/her opinion about their particular assessment of each candidate’s musical character, to witness any physical boundaries that could prove to be troublesome to the section as a whole, and to weigh the strengths of each candidate as they exhibit their performance skills. The debate surrounding this topic maintains deep roots that continue all the way back to the beginning of orchestral playing. While a perfect solution is unlikely, given the wide scope of personalities evident in such a situation and the disparity of protocol from orchestra to orchestra, the focus of each interviewed concertmaster is indubitably on accepting the highest level of candidate to his/her section in order to better the overall quality of music-making within the orchestra.

It is important to note here that while the concertmaster’s opinion is valued, particularly during string auditions, this opinion is not necessarily followed. Occasionally string appointments can occur without the concertmaster’s approval and they have no choice but to accept the chosen musician. When this occurs, the
concertmaster must recognize the decision of the committee or director and proceed accordingly. Of course, as with any democratic procedure, there can be an infinite number of reasons for a clash of professional opinions between audition committee members. When this conflict occurs, the unheeded voice of the concertmaster during the audition process is occasionally correct in the long run and can lead to future re-auditions for specific spaces in the orchestra.

Every concertmaster’s job description contains mandatory membership on audition committees as a common denominator. The epitome of the primary public figurehead of the orchestra, most concertmasters must be present for a certain combination of auditions each year, dependent on the openings in their orchestra. Some interviewed concertmasters calculated each string audition and every principal wind audition among their requirements. Others had more flexibility with non-string auditions, contributing their listening expertise on an as-needed basis without pre-set formal guidelines. One concertmaster admitted that there were times when he/she handed responsibility for string auditions to other colleagues in the ensemble, completely trusting their judgment about new additions and expressing a deep desire to involve the section players in the process. Regardless of their official involvement, each concertmaster interviewed expressed a strong inclination to be connected in some way to the addition of future members of their orchestra.

The concertmasters’ verbal reactions to the expansion of their orchestras and their own participation in the process ranged from personally protective to professionally analytical and encompassed every outlook in between. I found that each concertmaster articulated an unwavering responsibility to their newly hired musician colleagues, a
responsibility that included the assurance that each new coworker was truly the right person for the job. This attitude proved to be inclusive of all positions in the orchestra, not only in the string sections. The most essential element in their minds was the hiring of competent, artistic musicians above all else. This high level of professional commitment to the overall excellence of the orchestra artistically and interpersonally is a hallmark of the concertmaster’s dedication to the position.
Chapter Six- The Basic Orchestral Responsibilities of a
Modern Concertmaster

Rehearsal Duties, Bowings, and Interpretations from the Baton

The audience should be aware of how the core duties of a concertmaster affect the music that they hear. Simple tokens which a concertgoer may take for granted, such as several string sections' bows moving at the same speed and in the same direction during a unison passage, or perfectly executed and aligned sixteenth notes between the first violins and the double basses, located at opposite ends of the stage, or simply tuning the orchestra, are all clear-cut examples of the concertmaster's everyday tasks. Whether or not the concertmaster is featured on a concert series with a solo violin passage or a solo concerto, he/she is busily working to unite the orchestra under the conductor's musical inspiration and direction.

Logically, each orchestra differs in its daily routines, including how they allot rehearsal time. In decades past, concertmasters such as Mischa Mischakoff and Josef Gingold were relied upon to lead string sectional rehearsals on a regular basis. This practice gradually disappeared from orchestral regimes as guest conductors slowly took over this responsibility during the late twentieth century. Currently, none of the interviewed concertmasters lead string sectionals on a regular basis. This is partially attributed to the overall rise in the level of the average orchestral section player. Joseph Silverstein has witnessed firsthand this increase in talent over the past decades.

I would say that the depth of the violin sections of most of the orchestras now is greater than it was forty-five years ago. The quality of the players going right through the section is such that the responsibilities of the
concertmaster today are perhaps not as trying as they might have been twenty-five, thirty years ago, because you have violinists now in the section that are such fine players.\textsuperscript{79}

As the expertise of participants has escalated, the lack of necessity for a string expert to stand in front of the string sections and guide them through difficult passages has waned. Several of the concertmasters did volunteer that they have, on several occasions, led a sectional when working with youth orchestras or other ensembles aside from their usual work. However, none of them utilize this particular skill with their own ensemble in their daily work in the manner of their predecessors of decades past.

The concert season varies in length from orchestra to orchestra, as does each concertmaster’s obligations within that season. Several of the concertmasters interviewed included children’s concerts and pops concerts in their average season, but the overwhelming majority did not. The typical subscription series for modern concertmasters is anywhere from twenty-six to thirty-plus weeks. This does not always incorporate any summer engagements, tours, or other festivals in which the orchestra may appear. It also does not account for weeks containing overlaps between series, multiple programming weeks, or special fund-raising concerts.

Additionally, each concertmaster consulted for this document is currently contractually obligated to make at least one solo appearance each year with their respective orchestras. In some orchestras, and under specialized circumstances, this concerto expectation can be expanded to incorporate several solo appearances such as a double concerto, a special event, etc. This often depends on the yearly organization of the subscription series, if the concertmaster is required to fill in for another soloist at the

\textsuperscript{79} Joseph Silverstein, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 26, 2008.
last moment, or if there is a special fund-raising event for which the concertmaster’s performance is requested.

The last official stage component to the position is the performance of concertmaster solos from the orchestral literature. Major orchestral works repeatedly contain miniature solos during which the concertmaster must shine as a sudden soloist player. The immediate transition from section leader to a single solo line and back again is one of the great challenges of this career. Musically and physically, it takes amazing control to launch oneself into the technically demanding excerpts concert after concert, in the midst of leading a larger piece. In addition to the extreme mental focus that this process demands, the solos frequently contain virtuosic musical material that necessitate numerous extra hours of practice and preparation. When asked how often she plays concertmaster solos, Emmanuelle Boisvert responded, “Oh my, it seems like there’s never a week without them. Let me look in my book in front of me- Poulenc, Prokofiev, Vaughan Williams, Dvorak, Strauss. Almost every week there is something that creeps up. It’s literally just every week.”

To an audience member, the results of the concertmaster’s organizing, coordinating, and making physical note of the bowings is readily apparent. When the concertmaster has not accomplished these tasks, it becomes very obvious because the direction of the bows become haphazard instead of functioning as a unified whole. As mentioned earlier, the bowings executed by the string section are traditionally based on the concertmaster’s part, as the leading first violin of the orchestra. Since the first violins primarily deliver the melodic line in the highest register within the strings, they are a logical choice from which to infer the bowings for the rest of the string sections.

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Regardless of the division of melody in contemporary music, this tradition is maintained today in all styles of music in an effort to streamline and coordinate the stringed instruments of the orchestra.

Most concertmasters interviewed receive copies of the music from their orchestral library months in advance in order to study each work in a concert series and produce the bowings most appropriate for each piece. If rental parts are being used, the time frame for this activity is dramatically shortened, sometimes requiring a sudden turnaround of only several days in order to place the suitable markings in the other string parts. After leaving the concertmaster’s hand, their parts are distributed to the other string principals, who in turn make bowing decisions based on the first stand. The domino effect of bow markings continues, as the orchestral librarians accomplish the last segment of this large undertaking, writing in the decided bowings into the remainder of the string parts. Such an immense task begins with one part, that of the concertmaster, and is eventually translated into every stand in the string area.

Hopefully, most major orchestras have been financially fortunate enough to purchase full sets of frequently performed masterworks, which form the bulk of each season’s subscription concerts. Having a full set of parts in the library for a major orchestral work substantially reduces rental fees over time and creates a larger window of time for the bowing process. It also allows modern concertmasters to examine and re-use bowings from archival concertmaster sources.

For example, the Cleveland Orchestra has carefully preserved the bowings from the concertmaster eras of Joseph Gingold and Raphael Druian, to name but a few historical holders of that chair. When the current concertmaster, Bill Preucil, receives a
part from the orchestra library, he usually changes a few items to his or the conductor's personal taste, but he is able to rely on the past experiences of the great concertmasters who came before him. He shares his recent bowing practices:

When I first started in this orchestra, we were using the same parts that they got when they first formed the orchestra, you know. And then lately conductors have been interested in upgrading some new scholarship which means rebowing all that, and that's fine. I do all that. But there are a lot of pieces that we have that we just take out of the archives, and then I'll make changes depending on who's conducting what. And then, it seems like every concert there's one rental piece that's either clean or needs bowings or was played somewhere that's been played by a professional orchestra and the bowings are pretty good and I change a couple of things or whatever. And if it's been played by a youth orchestra somewhere then I have to totally redo it.\(^{81}\)

The established music library in Cleveland allows Preucil to spend his official “concertmaster” time on other significant aspects of the job instead of organizing every bow within his part, a highly time-consuming task.

In complete opposition to this, Andrés Cárdenes joined the Pittsburgh Symphony at a time when there were no historical bowings to consult. For various reasons, the orchestral library bowings in Pittsburgh were inconsistently maintained in the years prior to his hire. The parts on file contained different bowings between parts within a section as well as a lack of consistency across the orchestra. Therefore, Cárdenes was obligated to bow a first violin part to every major symphony and orchestral work in his first decade of performing with the orchestra. He remembers:

back in '92, [I bowed] virtually every single piece of a subscription season. I had to bow everything from scratch and that was tough. Now it's down to maybe twelve, fourteen pieces a year that I have to bow from scratch and maybe another dozen or so that I check over because they may have come from a different orchestra or they come with the conductor. So now the job has become a little less difficult.\(^{82}\)

\(^{81}\) Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.

\(^{82}\) Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
An incredibly tedious process, it is only after almost twenty years with the orchestra that he has established a library containing full documentation of personal bowings and articulations for the entire orchestra to preserve for generations to come. This indispensable preservation of orchestral history can be a heavy burden for concertmasters to bear if they must independently lay its foundation starting from ground zero. Orchestras with carefully documented bowings are viewed as luxurious when compared to those that must build their collection piece by piece.

Emmanuelle Boisvert considers it her duty as the concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra to preserve the bowing heritage from past concertmasters such as Mischa Mischakoff and Gordon Staples. When she pulls a piece from the archives and notices a historically important bowing, she immediately brings it to the attention of the music librarians and exerts a serious effort to preserve it for future generations of players. She bemoans the fact that older music is constantly in danger of being replaced, and urges the staff to keep records of the heritage present in older marked parts.

For instance, Mischakoff wrote all of his Detroit Symphony bowings in blue. When asked to change a bowing during a rehearsal, Boisvert will defend the “blue bowings” with energy, seeking to maintain the archival information. She says with conviction of the older bowings:

They’re my peace of mind, and I don’t want them gone...I tell my stand partners all the time, ‘I’m not going to get much younger than I am. I’m not going to be here forever—when you see this sign in the margin...’ There are two sets that we love. Well, the first one is all my parts that I’ve done in blue bowings off of Mischakoff’s [parts], and I still have all of his answers in the margin, and we’ve kept both of them. When a conductor

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83 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
asks me to change it, I say, “Ah...that’s a blue bowing. I’m not changing this!” Because they are excellent.\textsuperscript{84}

Boisvert continuously attempts to keep clear records of each concertmaster’s former bowings, using distinguishing formats like the letter “S” for the markings that belonged to former concertmaster Gordon Staples. She also strives to preserve the markings from past conductors. She carries great respect for Jerzy Semkov, who has been guest conducting the orchestra for thirty years and who bows all of his own parts. Of him she said

He’s the only conductor that I’ve never minded changing bowings for, because whatever he changes is brilliant. Usually, three months before he comes to Detroit, he asks us or me, the library to send my part, and then he’ll look at what we have, and he’ll make recommendations in the margin. And every recommendation for the last twenty-five years that I have been there have been magnificent! It’s the kind of stuff you go, “Oh my god! It’s beautiful!”\textsuperscript{85}

Recently, she discovered bowings of Schubert’s Symphony No. 5 in the library from a previous concert with Jerzy Semkov years ago. With great excitement, she immediately rushed the parts to the librarians, informing them of their treasure, exclaiming,

“Oh! We have Semkov’s bowings for Schubert Fifth! They’re beautiful! They’re beautiful!” And we all look .....it’s great! It’s great...The bowings are magnificent! So I ran to the library—and Neeme [Järvi] doesn’t mind what bowing. He’s not a bowing person at all, couldn’t care less what we do, as long as it sounds good...And then I started looking at it—not only are they great, [but] they’re Classical, they’re old-fashioned, they’re forty years old in spirit and in style, and I’m just afraid that in the future there’s going to be a young conductor who’s going to insist we buy Bärenreiter Schubert Fifth. (I don’t even know if there is such a thing as a Bärenreiter Schubert Fifth, but there probably is, or if there’s not, it’s coming) That will be worrisome because all the young conductors are making us replace our Beethoven symphonies with Bärenreiter, which I can’t stand, but we’re doing it because...they have done it before. They

\textsuperscript{84} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
put it in their contracts. It’s insane. So, the Schubert Fifth—somebody’s
going to make us buy Bärenreiter—it will be unplayable! Because it’s the
articulation from the score, has nothing to do with experience, nothing to
do with bowing, nothing to do with tradition. And I told the library, “Oh
my, these bowings from Semkov for Schubert Fifth are magnificent. We
have to keep them. We have to make a note of them when we buy our next
part in the future, you know we can’t play with the Bärenreiter bowing.”
And I don’t care how young the conductor’s coming in that says, “This is
not the articulation Schubert wanted!”

The exacting nature of Semkov is a perfect contrast to that of Järvi, a man whom
Boisvert claimed, “changed how I enjoy life and how I enjoy music. With Neeme
nothing was about work. It was all about the spur-of-the-moment and the
performance.” It is fascinating to note the difference between Boisvert’s descriptions of
the two conductors’ bowing judgment. The two men could not harbor more contradictory
attitudes about bowing and the orchestral traditions tied to them. For her part, Boisvert
regretfully accepts that, despite the intellectual or musical brilliance of pencil symbols on
a page and her sincere attempts at their preservation, “you know, nothing lasts forever.”
As illustrated above, this is paradoxically as true of Schubert’s original bowings as it is
with Semkov’s markings.

Joseph Silverstein spent many years marking bowings in collaboration with
conductors such as Erich Leinsdorf, Seiji Ozawa, and William Steinberg. During his
lessons as a student, he collected first violin orchestral parts from Mischakoff and
Gingold, analyzing their bowing content and principles. Later when marking parts
himself, he went to great lengths to find bowings that elicit specific rhythmic and
expressive effects from the section players. In reference to these, he joked, “I had a lot of

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
bowings that my partner, Mr. Krips, used to refer to as defensive bowings. They were bowings that would avoid gratuitous accents or assure certain dynamics and phrasing."

When a bowing is changed from its original version to a new incarnation in a concertmaster’s part, it is often to suit the musical taste of the conductor or to facilitate the particular tastes of that certain concertmaster. A bowing can also be altered to pay tribute to new scholarly work that has emerged about the piece, the composer, or a specific articulation detail throughout a work. In general, I found that changing historical bowings was not something that concertmasters took lightly, but rather an issue to which they gave great thought and attention. In the event that a bowing is modified, it is considered of paramount importance to protect the spirit of the musical idea above all else, seeking only to communicate that precise concept with greater clarity and expression than its previous incarnation.

From a smaller orchestra than the other interviewed concertmasters, Juliana Athayde remarked on the bowing legacy that she feels she is leaving for the future concertmasters of the Rochester Philharmonic. She also stresses the restraint which she often exercises, as she works to refrain from changing a bowing just to “leave her mark” in a territorial sense.

It is possible for a good bowing to emerge from the discarded ideas of past bowings, in much the same way that a good concept can be discovered through comparison with unsuccessful solutions. As Cárdenes declares, “I would say that some of the conductors that I don’t like influenced me in the sense that when I conduct and I play concertmaster for other conductors, I make sure I know what not to do. I always

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89 Heiles, America’s Concertmasters, 63.
find it fascinating to see how everybody works, and what results they get, and how they maneuver, and how they try to get what they want. And some are better than others at it. Consequently, with each unique conducting approach, the most impressive concertmasters observantly notice each music director’s communication techniques and adjust their actions and their results appropriately to find their resolution.

The amount of complete score knowledge necessary to properly make these decisions varies with every piece, but every concertmaster agreed that proper score study is an essential, and often overlooked, ingredient in a concertmaster’s daily responsibilities. An intelligently conceived bowing can bring a phrase to life, connect melody with harmony in a new and exciting manner, or create the perfect backdrop for another instrument’s solo line. Score study is vital knowledge that propels these artistic decisions. A true concertmaster is always in search of a great bowing, and there are usually several different options from which to choose. Bill Preucil sums up this belief with the notion, “Maybe this is the most important ... Know your score. Know what’s going on. You can’t lead if you don’t have the whole map.” The secret ingredient appears to lie in combining individual score analysis with the knowledge of what a conductor is searching for underneath the physical notes on the page.

When asked who the greatest concertmasters were from the last fifty years, Preucil elaborated further on this opinion:

You can’t just listen to a record, to how somebody sounds and know how they were as concertmaster, because that’s only like one percent of the job, the solos that they play. I’ll answer instead with something that I think each one had, Mischa Mischakoff, Joe Gingold, more recently Joe Silverstein, which is a knowledge of the whole score and what is happening every time. The knowledge that every conductor is supposed to

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91 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
92 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
have. These guys had it. I remember a lesson when Joe Gingold was talking to me about concertmasters. And he said, “You know, Joe Silverstein, he knows everything that is going on in every instrument at every time.” Later on, I realized that he was telling me because I needed to do that. You know, and I figured it out. And I think that is so important for a concertmaster. The people who can do that (like Joe [Silverstein] who went into conducting because he is so knowledgeable that way), those are the people that were the great concertmasters.⁹³

Andrés Cárdenes lends his support to this sentiment, musing about playing concertmaster solos in his lessons with Gingold. He recalls how he [Gingold] discussed in great detail the orchestral things that were surrounding it and the structure of it. And of course, how the piece came to be and how it represents so many different characters. So when we did study the solos we didn’t just study the solos per se, but the whole structure of the piece and the writing behind it and the ideas behind it. It wasn’t just: play the notes and play them well—but where do the notes come from? What do they mean? Who it was written for? Etc., etc. He delved into it very deeply so that you really understood what you were playing.⁹⁴

Score study as an elemental part of the concertmaster’s job description has unquestionably maintained its worth during the years since the mid-twentieth century and is predicted to be of great consequence in the future. To reiterate Isidor Saslav, quoted in Chapter Three, his most valuable lesson from Mischa Mischakoff was that the most important aspect of the concertmaster job is to know the score in its entirety.⁹⁵ There will likely never be a need to reconsider the great significance of score study and of knowing the music as thoroughly as possible when one is seated at the front of the orchestra. Whether creating markings months in advance or making split second decisions in the heat of the moment, nothing can take the place of genuine knowledge.

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⁹³ Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
⁹⁴ Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
⁹⁵ Heiles, America’s Concertmasters,
As a fundamental part of their career, an expert concertmaster’s decisions about volume, bowing, and articulations set the standard for the rest of the orchestra. Each leader must use their experience and skill to establish the best solution for a conductor’s aural image of what is essentially an abstract idea on a piece of paper. Small changes can alter the larger picture and every note must have its appropriate place in the greater whole. The difference between a down bow and an up bow can indicate the difference between the beginning of a new melodic phrase or the conclusion of a musical line.

Some conductors appreciate a great deal of input from their concertmaster, and some conductors prefer to arrive with their own parts already bowed for the string section to use. During his time as concertmaster in Atlanta, Bill Preucil portrays his relationship with conductor Robert Shaw as a very profound connection, one that had a momentous professional impact on his musical expectations. He recalls how Shaw, “as a non-instrumentalist, relied on his principal players (strings and winds and everything) more than some of the conductors that I played with who played an instrument. ... We tried to respond to [this] by accepting that extra responsibility and feeling more a part of the whole music-making process, which is great. So I guess I felt more involved.”

In relationships such as these, the conductor and concertmaster have reached a deep understanding of how best to help one another reach their maximum potential in pursuit of musical truth. The formula for this success can be flexible and ever-changing, dependent on the style of music, the conductor’s experience with a particular piece, or the general mood of the orchestra. The concertmaster must weigh all these factors daily to decide what kind of help is most needed by the conductor, and then to offer it with practiced diplomacy.

96 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
Pittsburgh’s concertmaster, Cárdenes, greatly enjoys the time that he spends with both the primary and guest conductors of his orchestra both in the rehearsal and in social situations outside of work. He uses his personal knowledge of their wishes to help uncover their musical bearing, bringing that information to his bowing decisions and leadership each week.

I try to really psychologically understand how they work so that I can help them maximize what they want. The people like Charles Dutoit, he likes what he likes and I know well enough to leave most things alone. I will surreptitiously change bowings or something like that without telling him only because I know he won’t care, you know—it won’t bother him if I change something because I think it will work better. It doesn’t bother him. On the other hand, people like Mariiss Jansons, they don’t like you to change anything of theirs. If it’s their part they don’t like anything changed. Lorin Maazel is always flexible if I suggested something. I think he only overruled one or two bowings in nine years that I was his concertmaster.97

On the reverse side of this issue, there are some weeks and some conductors that can be more difficult than others. Cárdenes admits that

some conductors don’t like you to make any suggestions because they think they know everything. So with those conductors a good concertmaster knows when to back off and leave him alone and (fortunately in some cases) let them muck around in their own inabilities to get what they really want because they’re not willing to listen to a seasoned expert in that particular genre or that particular area. And there are a few conductors like that. So you just drop your hands and say, “Okay, fine, whatever you want. You’re the maestro. I’m here to try to help you.”98

When this occurs, the concertmaster’s position can easily turn into damage control instead of a joint musical collaboration.

In addition to score study, it takes years of musical interpretive study to develop the ready proficiency to predict these nuances in accordance with a conductor’s gestures.

97 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
98 Ibid.
Emmanuelle Boisvert says, "Every second I make a decision about what a conductor is doing, interpreting that motion and then leading the rest of the section. But after ... years in the position, I have to say that there is also sometimes self-doubt or anxiety in being able to read the conductor." Translating them onto a paper score requires the subtle understanding of the impact that such gestures hold, viewed in light of the entire orchestral ensemble. To Boisvert, this is the most important facet of a concertmaster's job. Since the bowings must be decided upon so far in advance, the concertmaster must calculate their bearing well before the first rehearsal.

The interpretation of the conductor goes far beyond simply reading a simple beat pattern. The complications in music call for much more subtle and sophisticated translations from a conductor's physical motions. For example, Boisvert points out that "The good conductors will be able to conduct a bar in advance so you know the transition coming up because you feel it. Yet I have to be able to apply – even if the conductor's great – I have to be able to apply the decision and convey it to everybody so that we don't start reading it differently."

Sometimes the point of interpretive study must be as flexible as human nature. That has been the case with Neeme Järvi's longtime association with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Boisvert spoke admiringly of his larger than life personality and ability to convey emotion and drama with ease and flexibility. With him, the orchestra learned:

The ability that we have to go with the flow. That music should not be all talked about and discussed, but it has to be created. That it's live. I think that on purpose he would play a Sunday performance that was entirely different than a Thursday performance. He wanted to keep us on our toes,

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99 Heiles, *America's Concertmasters*, 236.
100 Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
and he was also bored with what he had created earlier in the week. And to us that was an amazing experience—that it doesn’t matter how much you rehearse or how much you talk about a ritard. Neeme tended to do opposite [things] from night to night, even tempos. He would also, without talking, let’s say, change the repeats in the trio in the Mozart symphony or Haydn symphony or Beethoven, and he would skip repeats or add some without rehearsing. So we just knew, with him, from how he changed his direction, what he wanted to do.\(^{101}\)

The most astounding detail of his work, admits Boisvert with wonderment in her voice, is that the orchestra never fell apart during his adventurous time on the podium.

“What has amazed us is that in all the fifteen years with Neeme, is that no matter how we changed the performance, we never had an accident, never had a crash—like a car crash—never. And yet, with other conductors, you could spend a whole week rehearsing, and you still crashed.”\(^{102}\) I feel that this is the perfect representation of an orchestra, conductor, and concertmaster engaging in an artistic dialogue of the highest caliber.

When an ensemble is so cohesive that a flick of the wrist and a look in the eye can capture the spirit of the entire stage in unison, then a special kind of connection has been forged.

When the situation is not as fortunate as the one described above, the concertmaster must sometimes reconcile their own musical viewpoint when it conflicts with that of the conductor, putting the greater vision ahead of any private misgivings. In essence, they must bring the orchestra together in the face of disparity or misunderstood communications from the podium, no matter their personal views about the situation.

The public face of the concertmaster towards the music director must be supportive, communicative, and skillful in its own right. Hopefully the two align musically without too many discrepancies. However, if they do not, it is the concertmaster’s first priority to

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\(^{101}\) Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.

\(^{102}\) Ibid.
attempt to bridge any gap in understanding. As Joseph Silverstein said in a recent interview, “The concertmaster has to respond to the conductor as if the conductor has presented an absolutely infallible idea. Then, the concertmaster is doing his job.”

Musical style is one area in which a conductor and concertmaster must find agreement within certain parameters, or the result will be confusing and disorganized for the entire orchestra. Bill Preucil describes his approach to musical style with the following thoughts: “With style, I try to play in the style of the music, what I think is correct. I try to play each style individually. I’ll push the style up to the line, until the conductor says it is too much. I try to get the section to do that with me until I’m told to back off. And that’s fun! That’s one of the joys of the job. It is, I think, what will move the audience.”

While a clear style is a necessary quality in a conductor, how each orchestra fills that stylistic expectation is what keeps the music interesting and alive. The concertmaster’s role in this equation is to balance the personality of a conductor with the character of the orchestra, celebrating the spirit of the combination. Preucil adds that if he could give advice to future concertmasters, it would include the suggestion to, “remember what you’re there to do. You know, you’re there to serve the music. But in this particular case here, serve the music first by serving the conductor in terms of helping him and helping your orchestra understand what he wants.”

With a similar point of view, Joseph Silverstein recalls that some conductors conveyed their musical style in specific terms on paper. For example, during his time

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104 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
105 Ibid.
with Eugene Ormandy in Philadelphia, the conductor marked all his own bowings, so the concertmaster really didn’t have much to do in that area. However, Silverstein judges the most important facet of a concertmaster’s employment was to make the conductor feel that their gestures had a very, very palpable effect on my playing. I tried to exemplify in my playing what I felt was the meaning of the gestures. For example, while playing with Eugene Ormandy, I wanted to really try to play with an extremely sustained, rich sound all the time. Whereas when you played with someone like Sir Colin Davis you wanted to be rhythmically very precise and play very much on the point of the beat to follow exactly the type of the gestures they were making. And I felt it was important for the concertmaster to give the conductor a sense that their gestures made an impact on my playing.\textsuperscript{106}

Turning gesture into communicative expression truly lies at the heart of a concertmaster’s orchestral collaborations.

Despite the busy concert schedule with a professional orchestra, most concertmasters also pursue separate solo careers. They regularly program concerto appearances with other orchestra, chamber concerts with colleagues in other cities and countries, or violin recitals during their off weeks from their chief employment in the orchestra. These extra activities are definitely not a requirement for their concertmaster profession, but rather a by-product of the lifestyle that these individuals prefer to lead. Modern concertmasters unfailingly tend to exemplify the class of musician that thrives on continuous musical stimuli and unerringly searches for exceptional professional experiences. As Jorja Fleezanis mentioned when discussing our difficulties finding an interview time in her crazily hectic schedule, “I suppose that if I weren’t so busy, I wouldn’t be the kind of person that you would like to talk with about all this right now!”\textsuperscript{107} This attitude, when combined with an inspired musical drive and the boundless

\textsuperscript{106} Joseph Silverstein, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 26, 2008.
\textsuperscript{107} Jorja Fleezanis phone interview, Feb. 26, 2008.
energy that these violinists seem to have, inevitably results in multi-faceted careers that embrace virtually all aspects of music-making and artistic expression.

Although the basic structure of a concertmaster’s daily duties have not altered dramatically since the mid-twentieth century, many internal facets of the job have shifted. The concert season is longer, there is a greater variety of services in a season (pops, children’s concerts, fund-raisers, etc.), the pay is better, and the overall quality of the performers is substantially higher than in the orchestras of Gingold and Mischakoff. Concertmasters continue to balance the needs of the orchestra against the needs of the conductor and the management, hoping to find the elusive middle ground that satisfies all involved.

New scholarly contributions and the idea of performance practice have become highly relevant topic that bring added dimensions to bowing decisions, score study, and conductor preferences. The combination of these dimensions brings a unique character to each concertmaster and their orchestra. As in years past, they continue to struggle with the balance of personal and professional relationships in the orchestra, seeking mutual excellence in each musical experience with their colleagues of every instrument. Perhaps most importantly, with each passing year, the concertmasters of today’s orchestras continue to strengthen and protect a rich tradition that has been passed to them by their predecessors, propelling their ensembles into the future.
At first glance, the two topics described in this chapter may not appear to be related. But upon deeper examination, they share many commonalities and are inextricably linked to one another. Both subjects pertain to the most central aspect of a concertmaster’s job: communication. In the interviews I conducted, each concertmaster took great care to define the manner in which they viewed their physical leadership style. Some expressed a desire to be more demonstrative, while some admitted to consciously refraining from larger gestures or motions. Similarly, several concertmasters spoke in detail about their deep involvement with the daily affairs of the orchestra and others shared a history that had shaped them into more subtle political participation. Regardless of their perspectives, they all presented compelling snapshots of their physical and political leadership, verifying their need to preside in the concertmaster chair with distinctive and authentic communication.

The first order of business for a section string player is to emulate the concertmaster’s style, articulation, rhythm, and pitch, with the understanding that they are, in turn, doing their best to interpret these ideas from the conductor. Andrés Cárdenes spoke in glowing terms about the most physically impressive concertmasters he had ever observed:

I think the most impressive concertmaster as a pure leader that I ever saw (and I don’t know which concertmaster it was) was one of the concertmasters of the Vienna Philharmonic. This was back in 1984. Leonard Bernstein conducted Mahler 4. And I believe this is the concertmaster who tragically died in an Alpine accident—he slipped and fell and died. But this gentleman, he was amazing, just amazing. It was
mesmerizing to watch him: how he led, how every bow stroke was completely clear and everyone followed him. He had this presence about him and I just remember being completely bowled over by him. And I think of all the concertmasters I have ever seen, I thought he was the greatest I had ever seen with my own eyes.\textsuperscript{108}

This observation is of a concertmaster’s bodily leadership skills uniting the strings is the most public trait that a career concertmaster can develop. When in the “hot seat” on stage, a player’s original physical approach to their instrument can be the driving force behind a concert. Whether a concertmaster utilizes large motions or prefers to deliver more subtle cues, an orchestra must understand the body language with absolute clarity. The language that each concertmaster uses is vastly different, as each player is unique in his/her field. But every interviewee agreed that the best way to communicate with any instrument in the orchestra is through physical means before interrupting rehearsals or concerts with verbal interactions.

Orchestral practices in the days of Mischa Mischakoff and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra share many practices with today’s youth orchestras. As mentioned earlier, Mischakoff would run sectionals, mark fingerings, explain bowings to his section, and act as much like a coach as a colleague. Verbal commentary from the concertmaster was an accepted byproduct of the times, and was used with freedom when needed. The situation today has evolved far from its family tree, and verbal communication is often viewed as a last resort instead of as a first line of defense. A man who shared many stages with Mischakoff, Joseph Silverstein commented on how he absorbed aspects of both his and Gingold’s approach. “Later on I tried really to be influenced by the manner in which they performed in the first chair. How they played all the short notes very short and all

\textsuperscript{108} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008. The concertmaster mentioned in this quote was Gerhart Hetzel, longtime concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic, who died in a tragic mountaineering accident.
the long notes very long. Sforzandi were very strong. Every element—rhythmic and dynamic element of the music was pronounced by them in a way which had extreme clarity and filtered back into the section.”

However, Silverstein’s eventual communication style in that chair had more in common with current concertmasters than with his former mentor.

Well, I didn’t turn around a lot. I just didn’t, that’s all. If I wanted to change a bowing, I’d hold my bow up in the air, sort of wave it around, and I would hold it up really high so they could see me, and that was it. But I would always defer to the conductor, when it came to speaking to the section as a group, because the last thing in the world that the violin section in most orchestras want is to get a lesson from the concertmaster. It’s only in a situation such as when Mischa Mischakoff went to Detroit as a man in his late sixties and he played concertmaster of the NBC orchestra, that he could not only stand up, but he could walk up and down the section and give instructions to the players in the section. But that’s just not done anymore. And it certainly wasn’t done when I was concertmaster of Boston.

I asked the interviewed concertmasters where they rated on a scale from one to ten, with ten being incredibly verbally communicative and one representing very little speaking. Every single musician believed they were either a one or a two, and most professed a desire to speak even less during services. Cárdenes authoritatively states that “If I say anything I have a rule. The rule is three seconds or less. That’s the rule. Whenever I have to say it I have to say it in three seconds or less.” He continues to explain the obvious brevity that this rule enforces:

Number one, I don’t like to take up the conductor’s time. Because it’s her or his rehearsal. It’s not mine. It’s his. So I like to keep it as brief and as direct as possible. And secondly, nobody needs to hear me talk. They would just rather know what to do and they don’t need a lecture or a dissertation, they just want me to tell them what to do and they’re happy to do it. They know I am not being curt. They know that I am just not wasting their time, so, I try to make it as minimal as possible. If I can do

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110 Ibid.
it without saying anything, then I prefer to do that. I’ll gesture around, just make the bow go up in the air—that’s staccato; make sure you know what I’m talking about.\(^1\)

In Cleveland, Bill Preucil also works to keep his in-rehearsal comments to a minimum, stressing the importance of body language when imparting information.

I try to do what I need to do as much non-verbally as possible. I mean, I will communicate across the stage with Bob Vernon the principal violist with hand signals and mouthing things so as to not interrupt the conductor while he is working with the brass or something, we’ll fix a bowing you know. And I’ll try to show phrasing or even bowing changes just by doing it in a big way so we don’t have to stop during rehearsal and take time. Time is expensive in a professional orchestra. So I’ll do as much as I can non-verbally. I mean there are times when you have to say something, either because you’re making a change or because something’s not right and you need to clarify it so that everybody understands what happens to be right that week. Or there will be times when you have to ask the conductor a question, but I try to keep it to a minimum. So, if your scale of ten is a lot, and your scale of one is not very much, then I would say I would try to be a one, and I’m probably a two.\(^2\)

When grading himself on his physical leadership, he rates himself as a full ten on the communication scale. “And probably to the point of annoying people who already got it, but just to make sure that everybody gets it, you know, I do it a little over. It’s better to do that and have a few people being annoyed, ‘Why is he showing us that again?’ Except when some people find it [to be] new and it helps out.”\(^3\) Preucil works diligently so that his motions exemplify the mood and character of the piece, not just the rhythmic impulse on the page. He claims that this expressivity is a considerable part of how his personal leadership style has developed over the years. Indeed, with his animated facial representations and vivid body movements, he communicates with the

\(^{1}\) Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
\(^{2}\) Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
\(^{3}\) Ibid.
orchestra a natural language that is all his own. There is never a single doubt about his deep emotional tie to the music he is performing.

Emmanuelle Boisvert agrees with this philosophy in large part, although her attitude towards her physical leadership is measurably distinct from that of Bill Preucil. It is a rare occasion when she verbally gives instructions of any substance to the section. According to her, she speaks “maybe once a month if it’s something absolutely tragic that maybe twenty of us are not getting. Or if the conductor said something to the cellos and we didn’t hear it so I might say it. Otherwise, very, very little. Most of it is done by demonstration, just by example at that moment.” She relies deeply on the stability and talents of her colleagues in the surrounding area. “You know the thing that we have in front, the four regular players that play right next to me don’t rotate around—it’s really tight. So there’s very little that I hear that’s not together. Right in front I am very lucky.”  

Where Boisvert diverges most from Preucil and Cárdenes is in her interpretation of the physical leadership that is necessary for the position. Over the years, she has slowly subdued her physical motions and developed into a more subtle leader than many concertmasters. Of her gradual transformation, she says,

I continue to do that. I find that leading less works better, especially if things start to fall apart. ... Very often I find ... that the leadership does not necessarily come from us [violinists], and that by also realizing this for me, I’m making the other people around me realize, “okay, I’m not going to lead this. We’re just going to look at the cellos.” Because sometimes the cellos and the basses, they have the line and our notes are going to have to be played with their freedom, not with what we’re doing. So, it’s giving other people a chance, giving other sections a chance. ... Or the pizzicato could be with the timpani. Then there’s no reason for me to try to lead and lose my hair. We have to be with the timpani. Period. So

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then it’s way less leading than I used to [do]. Over the years I think I do less and less and try to pay more attention to what is going on.\textsuperscript{115}

This type of leading has worked well for Boisvert, who performs regularly to rave reviews in Detroit and throughout the United States and abroad. While it may not suit every player, she has clearly settled into this technique and adapted her strengths to suit her leadership approach with elegance and clarity. Her string colleagues are appreciative of her respectful expectations, which continue to raise the level of their musical endeavors. Always in search of consistency, excellence, and simplicity, Boisvert revels in the connections that can be drawn from section to section and player to player.

Silverstein walks the line in the middle of these two mindsets, claiming that the use of body language to cue and lead is of limited value when compared with the simple energetic force that a concertmaster can command. He reminisces that, “The best concertmaster that I saw didn’t move around all that much. If there’s a certain visceral energy in what you’re doing, they’ll feel it. It’s not necessary to move around a great deal.”\textsuperscript{116} Using the position to be a musical role model, he believes, can translate into having the presence of a good leader. He finds that if a concept, bowing, or articulation is communicated with physical clarity and mental commitment, other well-trained and intelligent musicians will follows instinctually.

With her first full-time employment in Rochester, Juliana Athayde has spent two and a half years discovering the substantial variety of means by which she can influence the sound of her section and the entire orchestra. This aspect of her job has surprised and inspired her work with the ensemble. She declares that the significance of this realization aside from purely physical leadership, is that there also exists

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Helles, America’s Concertmasters, 61.
on the more nuanced side, how the concertmaster can affect and shape the sound/the tone quality of the string section, and how to do that non-verbally, I guess. You can always ask your colleagues to play a certain way or with a certain stroke, but to find ways to inspire the kind of sound that you’re looking for even in a performance, you know, just on a whim, if you get something from the conductor and you want to translate that immediately to everyone, what is a way that you can show that?117

Athayde is similarly enthusiastic about where these communications can lead as a section develops more cohesive bond to one another. She describes it as the “difference between painting with primary colors to having a whole range of colors, and maybe with every year of work, or every few years of experience, you widen that range, and have more tools at your disposal.”118 She is working toward this goal every day, she says, to do her part to create the most fulfilling performances that the orchestra can offer to their audiences and to their colleagues on the stage.

In an alternate vein, each concertmaster emphasized the absolute necessity to be a diplomat within the orchestra as well as an ambassador between the players and the conductor. On the occasion that a conductor will appear with an orchestra and there is friction between the conductor’s conducting style and that of the orchestra, it is the concertmaster’s responsibility to smooth things out between parties. Inevitably there are different personalities emerging through a single concert presentation. Depending on the situation, musicians will regularly comment on a performance afterwards to the concertmaster, sharing their observations about tempi, ensemble, and other quirks from a concert. The concertmaster must balance his/her response to each comment, filtering and interpreting these remarks, balancing them against their own perceptions.

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118 Ibid.
There can sometimes be such severe discord about interpretation among the musicians participating on the stage together that the ensemble pulls apart at the seams. Even the small details, such as a single phrase ending, can lead to disgruntled responses from the first stand to the last stand. Emmanuelle Boisvert describes some of these conflicts when talking about her bowing choices, “Decisions cannot be perfect. Everybody would like to do bowings differently. I’m stuck with the hours of work that it takes marking the bowings, and I would love to let somebody else do it. Then I, too, could gripe about it! The way I see it is that bowing is a chore that has to be done; I do it and it’s done.”

The inevitable differences of opinion do not, however, mean that the end result must be chaotic or destructive to the music. Preucil adds that his second piece of advice for future concertmasters is, “Respect your colleagues. You’re there with professional musicians. They have a reason to be there, they are professionals. They know what to do if you tell them the right way to do it and you treat them with the proper respect.”

The meeting of minds between concertmaster, players and conductor can lead to a musical conversation with exciting new inspiration for everyone involved. In fact, keeping the orchestra inspired and positive about its collaboration, says Juliana Athayde cheerfully, is also a large part of her job.

Taking the political arena into full consideration, Bill Preucil admits that while playing beautiful solos and a wonderful audition will win you a job, he finds that the other ninety-nine percent of the job consists of:

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119 Heiles, America’s Concertmasters, 237.
120 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
Saving the conductor rehearsal time (and there’s lots of ways that that happens); communicating with the section as far as what we want to do technically and, more importantly, what we want to do musically (whether that is an idea that I have or whether that is something that I somehow divine that the conductor has, or doesn’t have the time to express or in some cases can’t express, in string terms); or keeping things together to the best of your ability when they start to fall apart—if people trust you. And that would be one of the more important things, which you can’t do by trying harder, it’s just by being there and eventually they either trust you or they don’t. [The job consists of] working well with colleagues (like other principal string players and all the other string players) so that if something is starting to fall apart, somebody has to be the go-to guy. Traditionally that is the concertmaster if he has earned the respect to be that—then you have to be there for them. This goes back to what I said...about knowing the score, which is almost the most important thing.122

The trust given to a concertmaster by the orchestra is essential during moments in performance when the ensemble stands on shaky ground rhythmically or melodically. In a world where the term ‘jet set conductor’ is becoming more common by the year, the concertmaster repeatedly serves as the ever-present glue between the baton-wielding conductor and the players. Absolute trust from the orchestra is the goal towards which every concertmaster strives; the great ones achieve it. Without it, the leadership chair is a highly uncomfortable place to be. Split second decisions must be made with clarity and precision, and without apologetic thoughts. As Jorja Fleezanis says, “You have to lead without remorse. You make the decision, stand by it, and execute it for the sake of the music. You can’t have doubts. You lead the section toward a musical end: that end is accomplished through the composer’s decisions, the conductor’s, and then yours.”123

Concertmaster Andrés Cárdenes also makes a point to emphasize the complexity inherent in a successful concertmaster position.

123 Heiles, America’s Concertmasters, 334.
If you’re a great violinist who can play the solos flawlessly (and you play them better than anybody can play them) but you can’t relate to your section, or you can’t be a diplomat or if you can’t be a strong presence without being condescending or if you can’t leave your ego at the door when you are playing pieces that require section playing when there aren’t any violin solos—if you can’t do all those things you can’t be effective as a concertmaster. You have to have ninety percent of those traits in order to even be able to function in the chair. If you’re missing a few of those traits, you’re bound for trouble, you’re bound for failure.\textsuperscript{124}

The ways in which a concertmaster deals with the inevitable friction or sluggishness within a group have changed dramatically since the mid-twentieth century. Andrés Cárdenes acknowledges the shift in duty moving into the next millennium:

Mr. Gingold has often told me that if the orchestra wasn’t playing well he’d call a meeting and say, “Okay boys, we’ve got to stop this. Let’s get together, let’s organize ourselves. This guy, that guy, we’ve got to do better on the bowings, we have to watch better here, you know, follow me here, and make sure you don’t rush here, okay?” And everybody said, “Yeah, sure.” Nowadays if you call meetings like that you’d file a grievance, you know, saying I had no business telling them what to do and how dare I call a meeting. Why would I question professionals who know perfectly well what to do? That’s the conductor’s job. So that part of it has changed. I just can’t call a meeting to organize things because people will be offended, bothered, or say I don’t have the right. I deal with it and I say, “Fine okay.” What can I do? I can only do as much as I can do. (He chuckles) Although I’d like to call a meeting now and then. It just isn’t going to work.\textsuperscript{125}

Between union rules, management doctrines, and the rights of the players, Gingold’s solution cited above is not a viable option today. Instead, concertmasters must seek alternate resolutions to squabbles or differences in attitude.

One might think that attempting to fulfill the physical and political directional role in one orchestra would be more than enough, but this year Emmanuelle Boisvert has taken on both her full-time leadership responsibility in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and is acting as a part-time concertmaster in the Seattle Symphony. In an unprecedented

\textsuperscript{124} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
hiring situation, the Seattle Symphony announced this fall that it would hire four rotating concertmasters to guide the orchestra. The four candidates are: Emmanuelle Boisvert; Frank Almond, concertmaster of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra; Maria Larionoff of the Seattle Symphony; and Ani Kavafian, the concert violinist, chamber musician, and professor. This kind of arrangement can be common in European orchestras, but is a rarity among American symphonies. It is also very unusual that three of the four players are originally from outside the orchestra. The concertmasters will fly into Seattle to lead for a week or two at a time, then return to their separate lives. The situation raises many questions about how the overall leadership of the orchestra will be affected.

Boisvert shrugged away the publicity noise that the media generated this fall, saying simply that,

It fell into my lap, and I don’t think that that’s what the orchestra had in mind or management of the old symphony had in mind originally. But I think it was just a situation that worked out for everybody. And I don’t think that it will last indefinitely. I think it’s just a matter of time until they will want something different. I think it was a shock to everybody at first, but I think now they’re very happy with the situation.\textsuperscript{126}

The arrangement, which was technically in place last year (2006-2007) but without the media hype, has become a surprising and wonderful musical outlet for Boisvert. She attributes the origins of the situation to the years spent by the audition committee, searching for one official concertmaster. The results of that quest were unsatisfactory, so the idea of rotating leadership was born out of necessity. Boisvert had several contacts in the Seattle area and came to the attention of the management and musicians there. The rest fell into place easily, and with some adjustment, she is happily playing four concerts a year with the orchestra in Washington State.

\textsuperscript{126} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
The learning experience, she says enthusiastically, has been amazing for her both personally and musically.

Oh, it feels very different. And now, after four weeks, this year, it feels like my second home, where I’m looking forward to going. I like it for the enrichment aspect, because after working twenty years in Detroit, it’s nice to see how another place functions. I think it’s actually very important and I would recommend for everybody to do this. And I think I know also why these sabbaticals are so important, because you need to get out of your environment. You need to see how things are done in other places, and I think that’s been very enriching to me. I mean, I come back to Detroit, and I’m enriched. When I go to Seattle, I am enriched. You know, I bring the best of both worlds, and what I learn in Seattle, I bring back here. It doesn’t have to be musically related. It could be something on a personal level, too, or how the orchestra manages itself. How do they handle personal problems? Some of the guidelines that I’ve seen in their book, I’ve brought back to Detroit. So I can say ‘You know, I think this is something we should look at. I’ve done the same thing going to Seattle.’ Otherwise, it’s more of the same, I think, except for working with different musicians, which has also been great. But I think the enrichment, overall, has been amazing. It’s given me, like, a second leg on life. I come back energized. It’s just like playing chamber music. It’s like playing chamber music is when you play with different group, you know, you get an inspiration or different point of view.127

Performing as the concertmaster in both orchestras gives Boisvert a chance to broaden her awareness in a new setting. The new orchestral circumstances have expanded her knowledge of new bowings and helped to freshen her perspective on favorite pieces. For example, she performed Beethoven Symphony No. 9 with Seattle last December and found herself invigorated by the challenge of leading and merging styles with a new orchestra.

It’s the same thing in Seattle, when I go there, it’s quite direct and I wasn’t used to that either. It’s not just me leading in Seattle, when I go there I have to blend in to how they’re playing. On New Year’s Eve we were in Seattle with Beethoven 9 and I used their bowings—there was no need to change—and I learned a lot. I even told my stand partner in Seattle “I love this one! Where did that one come from, isn’t that great?” “I’m not sure where that one came from but we’ve had it for a long time.” You

know it was just a little silly bowing that nobody had thought of before. Like, wow, this one’s great. I’m going to have to take that one home.”

Boisvert’s new position allows her to step outside her usual boundaries and explore life as a concertmaster without the daily build-up of tensions, expectations, or personal drama. It allows her to step into an orchestra with a new psychology, a new set of personality traits. She claims that her leadership skills operate in the same basic manner in each orchestra, but that the ensembles themselves propel her with unique forms of energy. I am certain that there are downsides to this arrangement, as with any position, such as the lack of consistency with leadership and the difficulty of establishing a personal connection with players that are seen once a month, if that often. But Boisvert seems to navigate the pitfalls with ease. She has maintained her good relationship with the musicians and management in Detroit while enjoying the modest change of artistic scenery on the West Coast. The situation seems to bring her great joy and gratification as she puts her physical and personal leadership talents to dual use. If the other concertmasters feel similarly, the orchestra may stand to gain tremendously from the wealth of perspectives and experiences the concertmasters bring to the chair.

The pure psychology of leading an orchestra is a complicated issue to address. A concertmaster must serve many purposes, some of which are uncomfortable and some of which are highly pleasant. He or she must inspire, propel, and guide the orchestra. Their position is not as commanding as that of the conductor, but they possess a rank more senior than any other player in the orchestra. This balancing act can be thornier within the violin section than amongst the other sections of the orchestra.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
A concertmaster must be prepared beyond simple readiness to play a piece. They must be prepared to perform a work at the first rehearsal, with a strategy already in mind for the entire orchestra’s execution of the piece. Obviously this strategy must coincide with the conductor- the point is that they are fully equipped for success. Case in point, Silverstein outlines the insecurities that can accompany a concertmaster’s position as a member of the violin group. “The quality of the individual players in the section is excellent, much higher now than in the past. It can be daunting. You have to demonstrate that you are as good as or better a player than any of them to be a convincing leader.”

A concertmaster must analyze how best to deal with these pressures, both externally and internally. Andrés Cárdenes elaborates on this with attentive introspection.

I’m Latin American, with a short fuse: I demand excellence and I demand it quickly. So I’ve had to learn. How do I use this fusion—my character, my desire to be good, my desire to make the orchestra as good as possible—and still find a way to communicate that without being overly overbearing or overly demanding, unreasonable, or impatient? It takes some skillful maneuvering and some very good psychology to get the best results that you can without giving up everything you are.

Juliana Athayde reflected on how being a concertmaster has contributed to her artistic and personal growth since she entered the career field in 2002. As the youngest member of her violin sections, she faced special communicative and political challenges. One of the most important facets of her daily life is spent:

dealing with all the different personalities, whether that’s members of the sections of the orchestra as a whole, or the conductor and the various visiting conductors, and sort of smoothing the relations between all those different viewpoints. So a lot of it I think has helped me grow and mature,

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129 Heiles, America’s Concertmasters, 60.
130 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
because you have to deal with people in a way, especially being young, and maybe female (although, thanks to Jorja Fleezanis and Cecylia Arzewski, that’s probably not as much of a new thing), but certainly being younger— in my section everyone is older than me. [It’s about] finding a way to communicate with people that demonstrates your knowledge and your leadership, but also respects what they have been bringing to the orchestra probably for longer than I have been alive. So it’s been an interesting thing to find— I’ve always found that if I came to the job completely prepared, and just playing my best that that didn’t usually seem to be a problem.

More specifically, Cárdenes addresses the challenging learning curve inherent in overseeing the violin sections of an orchestra.

When you’ve got twenty-five violinists behind you with varying degrees of egos and insecurities and personalities etc., you have to find a way to blend everybody together and make everyone feel like a cohesive unit. And so, that takes some skill and some maturity. It’s also a learned project. You can’t just always get it the minute you start. You’re a little bit like walking around [in] the dark the first year or two just trying to figure out how best to get what you need and how best they react to your needs and your demands and how best you can communicate with them. So I’m sure Mr. Gingold, as great as he was, even when I played with him—I am sure he had to learn too. He probably had the diplomatic side already established. I am sure he had certain frustrations, certain demands that he probably had to figure out how to get from his section of the Cleveland Orchestra as well. It’s not something you just have. Every orchestra is different. That’s another thing. What might work in the Philadelphia Orchestra might not work in the Pittsburgh Symphony. It may not.131

One factor that may have influenced Cárdenes’ outlook on leadership methods is the fact that he has branched out in his musical career, slowly pursuing a conducting career in addition to his violinistic aspirations. As mentioned earlier in the document, this is not an unusual step for a concertmaster to take. Bill Preucil agrees, “I think conducting is a natural combination to being a concertmaster because of what goes on from that chair.”132 Physically and mentally, the shift from concertmaster to conductor

131 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
can be a smooth transition. When viewed as a return to the concertmaster’s historical roots, the current concertmaster may take advantage of many opportunities to explore this sphere.

In a chamber orchestra setting, each interviewed concertmaster has served in the dual role of instrumental leader and conductor with concerti such as Vivaldi, Mozart, or other Baroque and Classical works. Whether or not the concertmaster takes a place at the podium for this or remains seated in his/her usual position seems to be a matter of taste. It certainly is for Cárdenes, who speaks of his recent conducting events:

I do it [conducting] in many different ways, depending on what the repertoire calls for. For instance we played a piece by Bach, the D Major Suite, and I sat down, played that with the orchestra from the chair. I just conducted Beethoven Symphony No. 8 and I stood up and conducted that. I did Mozart [Symphony No.] 40 sitting down. It depends on what I think calls for the best action to make the piece as good as possible, so it’ll vary, you know. I’ll sit, I’ll stand.\(^{133}\)

By contrast, Emmanuelle Boisvert, Juliana Athayde, and Bill Preucil all prefer to sit unless they are performing a solo concerto. Even when standing in front of an orchestra, Preucil is not comfortable using a baton to communicate his musical ideas. He states, “...when I give a musical impulse I much prefer to have some sound come out of my being, which means my instrument. I am still a young man, so that could change, but for now, when that musical impulse comes, I like having that sound come out of my violin.”\(^{134}\)

The tangible motions of a conductor follow a physical path through the air with many similarities to the movements of a bow. As Susan Eddlemon discerned:

The motions used by a conductor have a single quality in common to those used by any string player; that is, that each motion is prepared by the one

\(^{133}\) Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.

\(^{134}\) Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
immediately preceding it. The very nature of string playing is preparatory and requires a physical coordination in which one hand is moving independently of, and yet in coordination with, the other. The same is true of conducting, provided the conductor’s left hand is not content merely to mirror the motions of the right! Each motion must be prepared by the one before it in some kind of timing or tempo which is noticeable to the orchestra, just as the motions of the first violinist of a string quartet communicates his tempo in advance to the others in his group. The conductor’s left hand indicates subtleties of dynamics and phrasing, while the right hand independently indicates the tempo—as compared to the violinist whose bow arm produces nuance and shading while his left hand produces the actual pitches. There is a parallel here which might partially account for the kinship between the concertmaster and conductor.\textsuperscript{135}

Boisvert studied orchestral conducting at a nearby university when she first won the concertmaster job in Detroit, but she admits that she never felt at ease with the medium. In her estimation, it is a skill that must be pursued, or at least considered when one is very young. She declares, “I wish I did more because there’s a use for it. You know, when we coach civic orchestra—the sectionals and so forth, it would be really nice to know how to conduct…. I don’t have a talent for it. It is a natural ability. It starts with a natural ability and then has to be built on.”\textsuperscript{136}

Cárdenes himself began studying conducting informally when he was fourteen years old, and while he has continued his study of the craft throughout his educational years, the violin remained his primary focus. Moving to Pittsburgh offered Cárdenes the intriguing opportunity to direct the chamber symphony, which he called the “perfect time … to start doing some interesting projects, so it kind of started to spark a renewal in the conducting area. I never really put it away but I never really did pursue it either.”\textsuperscript{137}

Now at the age of fifty, a young age for a conductor, he is looking forward to performing less on the violin in his upcoming years and exploring further the world of conducting.

\textsuperscript{135} Eddlemon, 142.
\textsuperscript{136} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{137} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
Never one to hesitate, he is already establishing a successful career in this direction during his weeks off from the symphony.

When Joseph Silverstein established his conducting profession, it was quite a fortuitous, but accidental beginning. He says, “It really sort of happened. Oh people like to think, “Oh it was all part of the ‘master plan’” and it really wasn’t.” At first, he would step in when needed with the Boston Symphony, and was even the assistant conductor for several years without having his name formally on the program. Over time, he recalls that

other orchestras began to invite me as a guest conductor and soloist and it became obvious that I could no longer fulfill the duties of concertmaster of the Boston Symphony on a full-time basis if I wanted to accept some of those engagements. ... And at one point it seemed to me to be logical to move out of the orchestra and into a music directorship. The music directorship of the Utah Symphony orchestra opened at that particular time, and I applied for the job and I got it. And that’s how it happened. It was sort of a series of serendipitous events. It was not something that was part of a great commitment on my part. I would have been perfectly happy to stay as concertmaster of the orchestra.

The physical and psychological elements of conducting share a basic history with those of the concertmaster title. The overlap between these two modes of musical interaction generates a pathway from one form to the other that is easy to navigate if one has the interest in doing so. Obviously, the transition from concertmaster to conductor has its advantages. The leader with experience in both areas has an intimate knowledge of bowings, string language, and orchestral politics from the other side of the podium.

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139 Ibid.
They can use such familiarity to facilitate their musical ideas. Politically, they may better understand how to ask for what they want, and settle disputes quickly, knowing how the tide of personal opinion can flow in an orchestra. Such an understanding also allows them to add a unique perspective to their leadership process. For a concertmaster with aspirations to become a conductor, the possibilities are limitless.

Clearly the burdens of leadership described herein are worthwhile to those individuals who pursue a concertmaster career. It takes an exacting dedication to music and a superior ability to communicate to even get your foot in the door with a major orchestra. Those violinists who excel in their field as concertmasters do not just pursue their artistic passion, but anticipate the thrill of communicating their enthusiasm with colleagues and audiences alike. At the heart of the matter, physical or political, is the desire to share and experience the gift of music. As Cárdenes says, “You can’t equate the experiences of the music with technical aspects of preparation, diplomacy, and the position. When you sit down to play music, a lot of that stuff is essential to the success of it but it’s not the reason you simply play it.”

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140 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
Chapter Eight- The Chamber Music Connection

Each of the concertmasters interviewed for this document mentioned their profound joy in chamber music as a complement to their continued fulfillment as an orchestral musician. In fact, every single one of them participates in some variety of chamber music with great regularity, whether in a formal professionally named ensemble or as a guest member in ever-changing groupings with like-minded colleagues. Orchestral vacation time often provides an opportunity to pursue chamber music opportunities in different parts of the country or even across the globe.

Despite the apparent differences between the number of players in chamber music and orchestral playing, the clear emphasis on chamber performances by modern concertmasters outlines the deep connection that they feel between the two mediums. Indeed, there appears to be a direct correlation between enthusiasm for chamber music performances and a high quality of leadership. Most concertmasters’ early leadership experiences include those from chamber music settings, and they still enjoy pursuing this vehicle of musical expression in combination with their concertmaster duties. It is striking how orchestral playing can be viewed as an expansion of the chamber realm.

For example, Andrés Cárdenes is the concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Chamber Orchestra and also performs regularly in two professional chamber trios. One of his primary musical loves is that of chamber music, and he continuously searches for fulfilling outlets to express himself in this medium. Of his current chamber colleagues, he praises their professionalism and drive for excellence.
It’s one of the reasons I love playing in my two trios, because I have four other people that feel the same way I do about playing well. They’re very committed and they work very hard at it and there’s no such thing as a day off and there’s not such thing as—well, you know it’ll be fine. My string trio—sometimes we play a piece twenty times in recent months and we’ll still rehearse it like we haven’t played it before. We’ll play it at half tempo, we’ll work the intonation like we’ve never played it before. And I like that kind of work and I like the level of commitment.\footnote{Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.}

In a similar manner, Cleveland Orchestra concertmaster William Preucil tours often with friends and colleagues, concertizing with such artists as Eric Kim (principal cellist of the Cincinnati Orchestra), pianist Arthur Rowe, his father-in-law Janos Starker, and many others. The first violinist of the Cleveland Quartet for years, chamber music began as a childhood love and grew into a major component of his career.

Preucil is also a founding member of the Lanier Trio, a piano trio which performs throughout the United States. During the summers, he regularly participates in summer festivals such as the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Music from Angel Fire, the Mainly Mozart Festival in San Diego, the Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival, and others. He has been known to plan a vacation purely around the opportunities to indulge in two of his favorite pastimes: to play wonderful chamber music and a great game of golf.

Preucil discussed the common perception that playing in an orchestra, as opposed to other musical careers, can lead to a noticeable decline in a player’s technique, personally referring to his years spent as concertmaster of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. He also directly linked chamber music to his positive orchestral experiences, noting:

The orchestra playing that I did really helped my technique. I know that kind of goes against conventional wisdom, which is that if you get into an
orchestra you just kind of get worse and worse. I used to talk to my stand partner in Atlanta about how I needed to play this concert like there was a microphone just on me, and I had to listen to what I did afterwards. I wanted it to be good; and I wanted it to be good for the music; and I wanted it to be good for Mr. Shaw (whom I was totally devoted to), as if I was playing a string quartet concert. I had worked in a string quartet, and it just didn’t seem that much different, except I was alone [when playing my part in the string quartet].

As a former student of Preucil, Juliana Athayde remarked on what she learned from his leadership style during her time at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

He [Preucil] brings this unbelievable combination of awesome (and truly awe-inspiring) violin playing, but then also this sense of chamber music leadership that I think has totally affected the way the entire Cleveland Orchestra plays. I remember as I was coming to study with him and really getting into the program with him, being amazed at how natural his physical leadership is…Before I had the pleasure of studying with him, I thought, “Oh wow, he is a really good leader, he knows how to lead.” As I watched him more and more and studied with him, I found that it’s really just how he plays. He is not really doing any more than what comes totally naturally to him, and it seems as though there’s no disconnect between his physical movement and what he wants to come out of the sound. And how he plays, and how he shows everyone around him to play…this completely natural leadership that you can’t help but follow.

Athayde herself looks forward with great anticipation to her chamber music concerts during the year. Although she does not belong to any formal ensembles, she is in high demand as a guest performer with numerous organizations and festivals across the country. She, too, infers that her chamber music experiences have shaped the way she hears, interprets, and communicates music.

The kinds of leadership skills that you hone for chamber music are directly applicable in an orchestra. And I think the listening skills that you develop when you play chamber music, because you can listen more specifically, if you can translate those to the orchestra in stead of just hearing a massive sound, you can focus on: “OK, here we need to really be in touch with what’s going on with the oboe, or this spot we’re playing with the horns, and they’re going to play late because they’re at the back of the orchestra,

142 Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
so we need our sound to sort of sit back and reflect that tone quality; clarinets aren’t going to play sharp usually, they are going to play on the lower side.” All those things affect how you think of what you’re doing and working.¹⁴⁴

Chamber music can also continuously serve as a reference point for a player’s verbal and leadership skills. Athayde expands further on this thought, saying that through chamber music, one can

get more direct feedback on how your leadership is affecting people, and I don’t mean in a more general sense of personality and all that, but really just “Is this clear? Am I showing this clearly? Are we getting the sound we want?” Because sometimes in the orchestra, especially with a conductor, if the buck doesn’t stop with you, it’s not always your place to determine all those kinds of things. So I do appreciate getting to have the chance to play a lot of chamber music, to sort of keep in touch with my roots as it were.¹⁴⁵

In this manner, the intimacy of chamber music can provide an outlet to check up on one’s precision, artistic direction, and physical signals. If concertmasters use chamber music to make a quick window inventory of their communication proficiency, this can be of great benefit once they are on stage with dozens of players.

When approached in this way, the parallels drawn between orchestral and quartet playing become a matter of individual responsibility. A person whose goal is to continually strive for perfection and who fully comprehends the importance of their contributed fragment within a whole is the kind of musician who will thrive as an active participant or leader of any ensemble, no matter the size or scope. Ideally, the perception of individual responsibility should philosophically be the same, whether the ensemble is large or small. A truly remarkable player considers his/her involvement to be of great magnitude at all times and in all situations. It is true that it is easier to hear and evaluate

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¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
one’s work when participating in the lighter musical texture of chamber music, but a wonderful musician will carry that awareness into each and every setting.

Exactly as the first violinist in a professional string quartet is accountable for knowing the second violin, viola, and cello part at all times, so too are these concertmasters conscientious about their score knowledge across the orchestra. Through their gestures they interpret the conductor’s intentions and disseminate any necessary information across the orchestra in the same manner that they would in a small chamber group. With the same gestures that are used in chamber music, concertmasters communicate to all corners of the orchestra and with the string sections using their bows, instrument angles, heads, bodies, and facial expressions.

In fact, Emmanuelle Boisvert has consciously has altered her leadership style through the years.146 Twenty years ago she began as a more physically overt concertmaster and has intentionally developed into a leader who purposefully draws upon her extensive chamber music background as the primary basis for her current leadership techniques. Instead of large motions, she now uses more simple and subtle ways to convey her thoughts to other players in the orchestra. Internally, she interprets her movements in the same way that she would in a string quartet. She states: “I make eye contact with the other principals all the time. We have a private sign language, and extensive vocabulary that’s been elaborated over the years- face, fingers, arms, eyes, eyebrows, any part of the body. Even during a performance we’re able to adjust ourselves with this secret language.”147

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147 Heiles, America’s Concertmasters, 236.
Boisvert regrets that her current schedule, which includes a family of three children and guest concertmaster duties in Seattle, leaves her little time to play chamber music. She considers it to be one of the foundational aspects of her musical education and looks forward to a time when she can once again pursue it with more regularity. She says, “It’s another challenge. I can’t focus on that right now because my schedule is so tight every week, I don’t have time to put in another two rehearsals for chamber music. But we’ll see what life will bring in the future.”\textsuperscript{148} In the meantime, she continues to decisively experience her orchestral leading as if she were participating in an enormous chamber group.

Another legendary concertmaster, Joseph Silverstein, who had one of the longest single concertmaster track records with the Boston Symphony, was also a key founding member of the Boston Symphony Chamber Players in 1962. An alternative outlet for principal players to fill their fifty-two week contract season, the series was a great success from its inception. In addition to his regular concertmaster duties, Silverstein served as the executive director of the organization until 1983. About his time with the Chamber Players, he noticed that, “shortly after I became concertmaster, my relationship with the other string principals had extended into chamber music to such a degree that our philosophy of bowings really unified. … There was very little change of bowings during rehearsals.”\textsuperscript{149}

His appreciation for chamber music echoed the words of the celebrated Joseph Gingold, who described orchestral playing as an expansion of the intimacies of chamber music. Gingold and Silverstein both believed that if one could simply examine orchestral

\textsuperscript{148} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.  
\textsuperscript{149} Joseph Silverstein, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 26, 2008.
music with the same in-depth perspective that one would give to a string quartet, wonderful music would be created. Fellow Boston Symphony Orchestra violinist Harry Ellis Dickson described Silverstein's abilities as astounding. "I once played a Schubert quartet with him when he played the entire piece without turning a page. In the orchestra his knowledge of the score is uncanny, and even in piano concertos he can instantly reproduce the soloists' parts at any given point." Such a "phonographic memory" and skill can lie dormant, but it is the mark of a true leader to apply it in every possible circumstance, even when the spotlight is not on oneself.

This basic sentiment was conveyed unequivocally by all of the interviewed concertmasters. In similar fashion, each one clearly believes that the translation from chamber music to orchestral music can be viewed through the same lens, with the same basic responsibilities attached. With this concept in mind, I find that the concertmaster uses chamber music to hone his/her skills in a more intimate setting. He/she then brings these skills to the larger ensemble with a tremendous sense of personal accountability. The final step is the communication of their artistic and technical conscientiousness to the remainder of the ensemble and to the audience. With these concertmasters, the end result is a convincing and compelling performance worthy of the highest praise and the greatest accolades.

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150 Heiles, America's Concertmasters, 59.  
151 Ibid.
Chapter Nine- The Community and Financial Involvement of a Concertmaster

Being a concertmaster means performing at the highest levels, playing a crucial leadership role within an orchestra, and diplomatically facilitating communication between all musical members of an ensemble. But there are a considerably large number of aspects to the job that are more closely related to the business world than one might imagine. Outreach concerts, committee work, financial and union negotiations, public relations, and fund-raising comprise a large segment of the concertmaster’s daily schedule. These duties can occur during business hours, squeezed into spaces between double rehearsals, after concerts, or during personal time. There can be very little free time in a work week for a concertmaster who is committed to the general well-being of an orchestra.

Even vacation time can be affected by the concertmaster’s full schedule, as Cárdenes illustrates, "To me, there is no such thing, vacation time. I mean, yeah, I’ll take a vacation but if I’ve got to play then it’s only half a vacation because I’m practicing and getting ready and studying. I can’t take a vacation until the day the vacation’s up and then take up my instrument and expect to play well!"\(^152\) For a functioning concertmaster in a full-time orchestra, even a vacation can be filled with the physical upkeep and intellectual deliberation required for a prosperous career.

\(^{152}\) Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
One of the trademarks of a modern orchestra is the abundance of non-subscription concerts within a season. These concerts often take the form of run-out concerts, national and international touring concerts, and educational/children’s concerts. The extra services have evolved partly through the deliberate expansion of the symphony season, as mentioned previously. Adding more services helped transform an orchestral career from a part-time job for musicians into a fully professional career. In particular, children’s concerts and educational outreach are performance developments of the past half-century. They were not even possibilities for inclusion in Gingold or Mischakoff’s contracts and are now some of the most changeable elements in current concertmaster’s agreements.

In general, most concertmasters do not participate in the children’s concerts. That does not mean that they do not support the idea of the concerts, but rather it is considered an opportunity for the Associate Concertmaster to lead the orchestra while the appointed concertmaster pursues other interests. These weeks can be used for concertos, chamber music festivals, preparing for the upcoming weeks, or the rare vacation. Some orchestras, such as the Detroit Symphony under Leonard Slatkin, are taking a new turn with their children’s concerts and incorporating them into the subscription week, so they involve the entire orchestra, concertmaster, guest soloist, and all.

Juliana Athayde is one of the uncommon concertmasters to play every children’s concert. She finds it to be a very rewarding part of her musical duties.

I really do enjoy and appreciate being a part of those concerts because, I kind of feel like, if in that crowd of twenty-five hundred people, if one kid’s life changes because of that, it was worth it. ... Not only are we trying to encourage more performers, but we need to cultivate our audience. I think that when we play these concerts we are really training the next generation of ears.\footnote{Juliana Athayde, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 17, 2008.}
Her excitement and interest in the children’s concerts stems at least partially from her father’s profession as a school music teacher. She continues on the topic, asking, “‘What more important thing do we do? What better thing is there to do than pass it on?’ There could be an eight-year-old at the concert who isn’t affected as an eight-year-old, but is affected as a forty-eight-year-old. It is a long-term, indefinite investment. You are not looking for an immediate return.”

On a different note, Andrés Cárdenes is skeptical of the positive influence that these concerts are having on young audiences despite his orchestra’s proliferation of educational concerts and attempts to engage children in the symphony. There is a vast difference, he says, between education and entertainment. Questioning the educational department about the purpose of their concerts, he asked if there is any data that proved that the goals of the educational concerts were being met. He asked them:

“Well isn’t that the whole point of this, to develop audiences, to bring people to the symphony? To make them love the symphony, to make them come, to make them buy a subscription? To be a member of our symphony family?” But they couldn’t produce a single document or a single research item or a single ticket holder that said “Because I went to these concerts I fell in love with the symphony and I wanted to be a subscriber, I wanted to be a member of the family.” Isn’t that interesting?“

He continues on the topic, relating his deep wish for serious musical education to take root again in American schools and his hope that American audiences will forego mere entertainment for pleasures with a deeper history and purpose. Cárdenes equates the short attention span of children’s programming to be a certain kind of false advertising. He claims that

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155 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
it’s sort of like you’re saying, “Here, this is what the symphony is about,” but we’re not at all about that. We’re not about entertainment. We’re about education, depth and profound thinking and contemplation and meditation and the experience and life experience and emotion and conflict and impact and power and depression and happiness—it’s all about the human condition. And we’re not preparing anybody for that.\textsuperscript{156}

If this mindset persists, Cárdenes feels that his ideal of the symphony orchestra and its musicians will vanish into a void of incomprehension and apathy. One of his solutions is, “to find a way to reach young people in non-entertainment, but non-threatening educational ways. If we don’t, I think that the American concertmaster will be extinct and the American orchestra will be a dinosaur and it won’t really matter. They’ll survive most likely, but I don’t know who they are going to play for.”\textsuperscript{157} Given that Cárdenes’ own ultimate mission with music is to enlighten and improve the quality of people’s lives, this prediction paints a picture of a future which could negate the very soul of his musical life.

At the opposite end of this viewpoint, Joseph Silverstein upholds his firm belief that children’s concerts are positively enriching young minds across the country, creating musical momentum one concert at a time. An unwavering advocate for educational concerts, he states, “As we have abandoned music education in the public schools- which is really tragic- the responsibility for music appreciation and children’s concerts and outreach (assembling groups of musicians) in the public schools to play for the kids and give presentations that will attract the kids to classical music has become much, much more important... I think it’s great.”\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{156} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Joseph Silverstein, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 26, 2008.
Silverstein carries this belief into the schools and community personally all across the country. "I know when a symphony has me as a guest conductor, I always ask if there is a youth orchestra in the community that they would like me to do a reading rehearsal with. I always try to meet with some of the Suzuki programs in the various cities just to let them know that as a professional musician I'm interested in what they're doing." This kind of dedication to musical education displays the foundation of the outreach movement; a commitment to providing artistic outlets even if not dictated by job demands. How effective these efforts are, according to a business model or strategic plan, can be extremely hard to chart. But Silverstein's enthusiasm is anchored firmly in the joy of sharing music rather than planning the exact effect that his attempts will have.

In the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Emmanuelle Boisvert commented excitedly about upcoming changes in their children's programs. With the recent arrival of Leonard Slatkin, she emphasized a significant turn in how youth concerts are programmed and performed.

One of the reasons I didn't play children's concerts is because they were always on pop's week. And when Slatkin gave a press conference to announce the season in late February or so, he mentioned some of his ideas, and I think this one is brilliant. You see, Young People's Concerts always have an education series, [but] instead of doing them on a Pop's week, he's going to invite the regular soloist of that week. So instead of hiring a different group during a Pop's week, he's going to ask the regular soloist of that week to participate in the Saturday afternoon kid's concert. In this case then, we, the principal players that usually get off that week for those kinds of concerts, will participate... and Slatkin will conduct.

The incorporation of the entire orchestra into a children's concert will certainly change the atmosphere of the educational concerts in Detroit. Boisvert agrees completely with Slatkin's plan to involve the parents to a greater extent through using the

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159 Joseph Silverstein, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 26, 2008.
subscription soloist. Turning the concerts into a family event could be a defining moment for Detroit’s audiences. Already in possession of a thriving youth symphony, the Detroit Civic Orchestras, the student base has shown its obvious support for the arts in an economy that has recently struggled with Michigan’s automotive corporation woes. According to Boisvert, “for Slatkin there is nothing more important than music education.” This means that educational concerts are about to play a larger role in her musical life as well.

One of the most challenging political dilemmas that concertmasters face today revolves around their perceived role with the union and orchestral committees. As the musician’s union has progressed through the last few decades, committee work has changed to echo the more democratic spirit of the American orchestra. However, this vocation among concertmasters seems to be divided according to each orchestra’s personal policies. Aside from audition committees, none of the interviewees presently sit on any other formal orchestral committees.

For some this is a conscious choice. For others, there are simply not enough hours in the day to add committee work into their tight schedules. For Juliana Athayde, her perspective on concertmaster committee work has noticeably changed in the last few years.

I was on the artistic advisory committee for a while, although I find that as a concertmaster, you are consulted about a lot of issues anyway, in your position. ... You already have a forum in which to share your views. ... If you look at it as a business model, the concertmaster is usually viewed as being on the side of the management instead of on the side of the average orchestral player. [Now] I try to kind of lay low in that respect. That is definitely something that I learned on the job that I never would have considered beforehand.\(^1\)

\(^{1}\) Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.

Andrés Cárdenes has served on the artistic committee several times, but attempts to remove himself from such organizational work because of the workload that he does behind the scenes as concertmaster. He says that

being on a committee is always difficult because the concertmaster position is sort of like having one foot in management and one foot in the orchestra. It’s always kind of balancing between the two. So, on the one hand I am the only untenured player in the orchestra, which I demanded— I didn’t want to be tenured- and on the other hand I am a member of the union. It’s kind of crazy, you know. It’s a real high-wire act.\textsuperscript{163}

In similar fashion, Emmanuelle Boisvert explains that she has never been a member of a committee that she considered to be particularly important.

I’ve never been on the orchestra committee or the negotiation committee. That’s like a career. For example, [for] the negotiation committee, which is every four years or so, you have to donate two years of your life, you know, thousands of hours. Retirement committee is, again, thousands of pages of documents coming your way that you really have to learn how to decipher. We’re in very good hands here, so the important committees like orchestra committee and the negotiations—never. I’ve done some smaller committees, but again, it’s hard to try to find the time.\textsuperscript{164}

With the large number of unofficial, non-contractual duties assigned to the concertmaster, it is no small wonder that the weight of committee work can sometimes be a burden too large to bear. Add to that the fact that the sheer number of committees has broadened considerably in the past decades. Boisvert comments that one of the most noteworthy ways her job has changed is that, “It’s quite a bit more democratic, even since the last twenty-five years that I’ve seen it.”\textsuperscript{165} Democracy of this sort usually requires volunteer members to donate multiple hours a week to the cause of many. A number of concertmasters conveyed their admiration for those persons who dedicated their time to committee work. At the same time, they each admitted that the wealth of smaller details

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\textsuperscript{163} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
\textsuperscript{164} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
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for which they are ‘consulted’ quickly add up to the rough equivalent of most democratic group efforts.

Norman Carol, the former concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra, personally observed that the contemporary concertmaster’s duties do not include the extreme political tightrope-walking to which his forerunners were subjected through the middle of the twentieth century.

The orchestral setup has changed drastically over the years. ... We have several committees and sub-committees devoted to all aspects of our activities. For example, our artistic policy committee, which is comprised of five members (four elected players and the concertmaster), discusses musical and artistic problems with the conductor. In fact, Mr. Muti [the conductor at the time of interview] insisted on having this committee when he came because he finds the musicians' feedback so valuable.\textsuperscript{166}

Such organizations within the political arena of the orchestra are now common in today’s workplace. They signify the cooperative spirit between management and musician, each seeking, in their own approach, a way to protect our collective musical heritage and create a sustainable musical future for the musicians to follow. The fact that the concertmaster is frequently included in such committees automatically is a striking statement about the strength and value of the position. It also makes clear the tremendous influence which the position can exert on the personality of the orchestra.

Their influence extends well beyond the boundaries of the orchestra into the wider artistic and public community. While concertmasters may not be consulted about financial details in the yearly budget or specific salary negotiations, they do play a pivotal role in the fund-raising efforts of their organization. Several of the concertmasters referred to themselves as a “figureheads” for their orchestras, adding that the position has

\textsuperscript{166} Sturm, “Norman Carol.”
become more publicly valued for its potential community involvement. In the twenty-first century, that can incorporate everything from attending soirées with underwriters, to performing in special fund-raising concerts, to helping guest conductors feel comfortable while visiting a new town.

Cárdenes deems the extraordinary fundraising expectations of current American concertmasters to be the number one change in the position’s duties over the past half-century. He affirms

I think the role as spokesperson and, you know, the face of the orchestra and all this fundraising—it’s all rather new... The concertmaster usually is the prize recruit for fundraising. If he can have dinner with the concertmaster then that’s a big thing for the donor. So that has changed. In Mr. Gingold’s day, over fifty years ago, the principals had nothing to do with this thing. I mean the concertmaster didn’t play pops—there were no pops. The concertmaster didn’t do school concerts—there were no school concerts. There was no outreach. There was no fundraising to speak of. In the old days the Pittsburgh Symphony had the Heinz family; if there was a deficit at the end of the year, they wrote a check and it went away! And that was it. Nowadays it’s very different. ¹⁶⁷

Preucil comments on the current concertmaster’s logical social roles, acknowledging several political needs that he and his counterparts may fill during their careers:

And then there are other important things ... such as representing the orchestra well outside of the concert, working with the music director on personnel issues, or friendly conversation, in social situations, or public situations. There are times when you are called upon to say something and, you know, you don’t even have to say the right thing, but you want to be sure you don’t say the wrong thing. I guess you are diplomatic at times and honest at all others might describe it. But as far as being an actual first choice, then if one is comfortable being in society, going to after-concert parties, speaking to committees, as far as selling tickets, fund-raising, garnering interest toward what the orchestra is doing, the concertmaster can be a good figurehead for that. And the reason is that most music directors, being in town twelve, thirteen, fourteen, maybe as many as sixteen weeks, are doing as much of that as they can. But then

¹⁶⁷ Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
you have the concertmaster who is there thirty-plus weeks of the forty-two weeks that the orchestra is working, or something like that. When the music director is gone, it’s a natural thing to think of first asking the concertmaster to do that stuff, unless, of course, it’s something that the concertmaster is uncomfortable with, and then you find someone else.  

Other concertmasters joined Preucil with analogous thoughts, never condemning this more modern conductor/concertmaster arrangement, but acknowledging the fact that it created an obvious public role into which the concertmaster could step. Joseph Silverstein looks back over his years in orchestral life, and asserts that this is perhaps the biggest change in a concertmaster’s existence since he entered the field.

The music directors of most orchestras are not in place all the time. They are not as much of a community figure as they once were. When I came to the Boston Symphony we had twenty-four subscription pairs and Charles Munch conducted seventeen of them. And he was there a good deal of the time, whereas the current music directors conduct less than half of the subscription concerts, so the musical persona of the orchestra in the community becomes the concertmaster. The concertmasters [today] have to be busy in contact with the fundraising and in community outreach to a degree that they didn’t have to be forty years ago.

The general consensus is that this aspect of a concertmaster’s duties, while not a written line item in a contract, is becoming one of the most influential roles a musician can play. As Bill Preucil jokes, it’s fine if a concertmaster is not a good personality fit to fulfill these expectations, “but somebody has to mind the store.” The combination of spokesperson, prometer, and social diplomat is enlarging the leadership chair even as other historical details (sectionals, etc.) are disappearing from the arena. Preucil adds, “Somebody has to have a presence, keeping the standard. It’s great if it’s happening there, I think that’s part of the job.”

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171 Ibid.
In his own words, Cárdenes observes that

A lot of behind-the-scenes things are going on with concertmasters. I think the role as spokesperson and the face of the orchestra and all this fundraising—it’s all rather new. When in the old days, you know, the face of the orchestra was George Szell. The conductors now are transient. Sometimes they have three orchestras and they’re there for eight weeks, so they know they’re music directors, but they’re not necessarily the face of the orchestra.\textsuperscript{172}

The extra responsibility that falls to the concertmasters can consist of meetings and meals with big donors, spending social time with guest conductors during their many collective weeks with the orchestra, representing the orchestra at board meetings, cooperating with fund-raising efforts, performing extra concerts on behalf of the entire organization, and other tasks. Every concertmaster that I interviewed accepted this political and practical shift to his/her job description, voicing their opinion that this trend is likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

This is the one part of her job for which Juliana Athayde says she did not need specific education. A natural raconteur, she gladly describes the dinner parties and interesting people that she meets during her social time as an artistic face of the orchestra. She says that her fund-raising duties can easily entail dinner or a wonderful conversation with a subscriber instead of a specific fund-raising activity.

People love to feel [they are] a part of something and they love to feel that they are getting the behind-the-scenes private, off-the-record story. It means the world to them. It’s definitely part of my job. I really like that part. I didn’t need any training for that part. I love the talking and spending time with people. I appreciate that they know who we are and they are interested in what we are doing, I think that’s great.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{172} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
\textsuperscript{173} Juliana Athayde, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 17, 2008.
At one recent event, the guests were entertained by the U.S. Olympic synchronized swimming team, while enjoying hors d’oeuvres and drinks. The evening eventually ended with a 1:00 am concert before calling it a night. Athayde comments that these invitations and expectations occur more frequently when the music director is out of town or occupied with other engagements.

Emmanuelle Boisvert describes the modification as an acceleration in a direction that she finds unsettling. In terms of a concertmaster’s fund-raising and social efforts, “More and more is expected every year. I think the business has changed tremendously in the last twenty years, [and] more is expected of us. And I do find it appalling sometimes. I know it’s important, and I know the audience likes it, and eventually when I get to doing these events that I am supposed [go] to, I eventually end up enjoying it.” With a laugh, she comments that it seems to be a necessary part of the role. “You know I always whine and groan and complain at having to do these things but once I do them, I do find them enjoyable and I understand why they’re needed.”

Boisvert adds that the job description for a music director has also adjusted to fit the new direction of orchestral politics. Even though conductors are not present for the same high percentage of season concerts as in decades past, they are still personally responsible for delivering donations and support in the private sector. The expectations placed upon both parties are enormously high in today’s financial and competitive environment.

Chapter Ten - The Pressures and the Triumphs

The concertmaster’s life revolves around pressure. There exists the pressure to perform consistently without flaw, the pressure to communicate clearly with the conductor, the pressure to be diplomatic to everyone in an organization, the pressure to participate as an orchestral figurehead socially and professionally, and the pressure to find personal inspiration in the midst of so many expectations. Fortunately, the successes in the classical musical industry carry impressive weight to those who love what they do for a living. The sense of accomplishment after a fantastic concert, the pride from a job well done or a solo well played, the joy one feels when in the midst of the beauty, grandeur, or elegance of orchestral masterworks—these factors continue to positively balance the difficulties of the job. Each concertmaster that I interviewed shares a profound love for the life of a professional musician, despite its flaws. Many basic factors of the profession have evolved over time, but the stresses and the thrills remain constant.

With regard to job security, it is only fair to give due credit to the unions, who have played an enormously crucial role in this achievement of due process and a fair dismissal procedure. In past decades, concertmasters were subject to the whim of their conductors as were every musician in the orchestra. Forced resignations or sudden termination of contracts were the normal state of affairs, and concertmasters often played hopscotch within the major orchestras until finding a place, and conductor, that fit their personalities and talents. The dismissal of concertmasters, as well as other members of
the orchestra, also must now be dealt with according to specific guidelines and protocol. The mental stress levels that accompany such a harrowing and pressure-filled job, compounded with the technical duties associated with the chair, can be credited as the source of many changes in personnel and positions through the years.

A recent interim concertmaster describes how this pressure is inherent in the concertmaster title, admitting, "When you sit six inches to the left of that [the concertmaster's] chair, the stress level and preparedness level drops quite a bit."\textsuperscript{175} With the high levels of constant tension and possibility of dismissal combining into a minute-to-minute job evaluation, it is no wonder that concertmasters have nurtured and sought to develop the crucial characteristic of calmness under pressure. Every day a concertmaster must execute a flawless technique, lead the orchestra according to the conductor's spoken and gestural vision, maintain a bond with colleagues in the orchestra, and present a persona to the community as a primary leader of the ensemble. This is not a career for the weak of spirit.

Andrés Cárdenes recognizes that a concertmaster's stress levels and musical expectations are higher than those of a section player, although he attributes his concertmaster success to his complete commitment to music as a lifestyle, and not just as a job.

I play in two trios, I play a lot of solos, make recordings, play viola and conduct, and those opportunities really require that I be extremely committed, well organized and prepared. I have to work extremely hard all the time. You know, the level of commitment I have in my career is tremendously high. And I think that is the hardest part of the job, is to

constantly remind myself that my interpretation of my definition of commitment—I think it’s quite different than a lot of other people’s.\textsuperscript{176}

His expectations were shaped at an early age, when he was a student at the Interlochen Arts Camp and the year-round Interlochen Arts Academy. There, at the age of fifteen, he played in the orchestra under Thor Johnson, the former music director of the Cincinnati Orchestra. A decisive and demanding conductor, Johnson was also to be a source of inspiration to Bill Preucil. Cárdenes ruefully recalls:

We were playing Mahler Second [Symphony], and I got lost in the last, no, in the fourth movement. I wasn’t sure where we were—and I missed the solo entrance because I didn’t know where we were. And he stopped the orchestra and he said, “Do you know where we are now?” and I said “Yes sir, Yeah.” And then I was so nervous I missed it again! And he stopped and he said “If you can’t handle sitting in that chair get out and we’ll find somebody that can.” That was to a fifteen year old. So, of course, I was a rat. But, he gave me what I needed. If you’re going to sit in that chair, you can’t fool around. It’s serious business.\textsuperscript{177}

Cárdenes credits Johnson with placing him on the proper path to become a thriving and respected concertmaster. The violinist later visited with Johnson and asked him what the requirements were to be a solid concertmaster. Cárdenes recites his words:

He [Thor Johnson] said, “The concertmaster never misses an entrance. A concertmaster plays with tremendous poise. A concertmaster leads his section. He doesn’t make mistakes. He is the best player in the orchestra. The concertmaster never comes in wrong. The concertmaster always does what the conductor asks to do, offers suggestions only if it enhances what the conductor asks.” So it was very tough. Very tough. And I learned that from him. Subsequently, after that it was very funny, I never really needed any guidance or any influence from any other conductor because this man set me straight right from the very beginning when I was fifteen.\textsuperscript{178}

Cárdenes obviously thrived on the burdens intrinsically built into the position and felt compelled to accept this path when it was offered to him. Of his later career, he

\textsuperscript{176} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
charged Lorin Maazel with continuing the demand for excellence. “Lorin Maazel kind of reiterated what Thor Johnson said. He expected a lot from me. He demanded a lot from me and I was always happy to give him a 110% at every rehearsal and every concert... it was just a thrill to work for him. He had such exacting standards and such tough demands and I just enjoyed that kind of work. In a lot of ways, the tougher the better.”

Thankfully, a profession with such intensity and strain also offers sensational and emotional high points. With difficulty, Cárdenes singles out a few pinnacles from his musical existence. Clearly there are many to choose from and he momentarily relives them all as he is describing them. The passion in his voice makes it clear that the struggles and burdens of a concertmaster are worthwhile in exchange for the rapturous artistic moments that come with the territory. One description stands out from the rest:

“Siegfried’s Funeral Music” [from Wagner’s Götterdämmerung], when we did that with Lorin Maazel, that was just hair-raising and I just remember that—well, I thought about several things, I just thought what a gift this is just to be able to play these things, you know. I mean it sure beats being an auto mechanic. I just thought what a tremendous feeling it is to play this incredible music with an incredible conductor and an incredible orchestra and to feel that energy and that incredible passion and that incredible, incredible feeling, you know, when you’re in that zone and it’s just so incredible.

These are the words of a human being who will gladly wade through the necessary mundane and arduous tasks in order to pursue his love for artistic musical experiences.

To Emmanuelle Boisvert, the path of a concertmaster was not apparent until she reached her twenties. She decided upon an orchestral career while attending a summer camp in Ontario.

And I knew then, playing a Beethoven symphony, thinking, you know, “This is it.” I think what’s hard in this business, then, is to keep — you

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179 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
180 Ibid.
know, every time I keep seeing the repertoire like Beethoven Eight, I’m thinking, “Well, that’s why I became a musician, but how does it feel like now that I’m forty-five?” I wanted to do this when I was fifteen…but nobody tells a fifteen-year-old, “Yeah, this may be the most beautiful thing you’ve ever heard, but are you going to want to do this again when you’re forty-five or when you’re fifty?” And what’s important is to keep that love and to keep that freshness.  

Boisvert confesses that it is a constant challenge to stay focused and enthused about her work. Since musicians choose their field at such a young age and focus all their energies on their instrument, there can be little room to explore other career possibilities. As an adult, she deals with the weight of that decision, contemplating ways to keep it appealing.

I think it’s important to try to keep the freshness, for us to be inspired by a conductor, maestro, music director. Sometimes if it’s too much of, you know, the “same old”, we force ourselves to look up in the audience and see who might be there. We always have friends and regular subscription-goers (some for twenty years) that do inspire us because they come to concerts and they still cry. We may not cry anymore when we play Beethoven Eight, but we still see an emotional response from somebody in the audience. … How do they feel seated where they are? Why are they coming? They’re coming because they want to be entertained. What they want to see is the color and the mood. So, when I feel that I’m slipping away, I’m focusing on color. … Or for us, keeping the freshness is to get involved with a civic orchestra here and see how much they love it.  

Passing her musical expertise on to others in both the concert hall and in the classroom is one way Boisvert celebrates her accomplishments and rejuvenates her musical soul.

The subject of continued inspiration is one with which Boisvert is intimately familiar, as she has given it a great deal of thought. Through the internal process of defining and celebrating her own triumphs, she is curious about how other artists discover their motivation while on stage. She revealed her thoughts:

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182 Ibid.
I have a project I want to do, not to write a book, but just for my own sanity. I want to find out ... what inspires them and what they think about while they perform. For example, when I played the Beethoven [Concerto], it's four nights in a row. It's a challenge to get your stuff on stage every four nights, even though it went very well. I got lucky. The response was fantastic. Everything went great. Yet, even though, you know the response was fine, it's still a challenge to get out there and to find inspiration. So, I want to find out from other living artists what inspires them and what they think about while they perform.\textsuperscript{183}

Bill Preucil has lived in the concertmaster chair in enough orchestras to feel at home in the "hot seat". But he also admits that the pressure in the front row can be petrifying. He finds that there is

a special kind of nerve that it takes. And I've seen it on the occasions when I've sat with people on the first stand and they aren't used to sitting there and it freaks them out ... or things are going well, and I know how I feel, you know, it's like you have to make a split-second decision and your heart stops and you just hope you're right. And I'm not the first bald concertmaster and I won't be the last- I'm not saying that's why my hair fell out, it's probably more genetic than that- but there are some scary moments up there.\textsuperscript{184}

After performing as concertmaster in thousands of concerts through the years, Preucil does acknowledge that the pressure has lessened in some ways through experienced practice sitting in the leadership chair.

For instance, we are playing a piece that I haven't played in ten years, and there will be a note that I have to find. Whether it is a solo or a tutti passage, it really doesn't matter- I still don't want to miss it. And I can remember, the last time I played that, that I was nervous about finding that note. And now, I don't have a single doubt about where that note is. You know, I'm talking about like up in 7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, 11\textsuperscript{th} position, or something like that. I can't even count how high that position is, I just know where the note is. And so I think that with the proper ideal, you can conquer technique by playing in an orchestra. I mean, here comes a passage on the G string and, well yeah, if you don't care if it is a little out of tune, then the next time you play it, it will be a little more out of tune and that is going to continue. By the time you play in the orchestra twenty years, you don't have a chance. But if you care more and more about being in tune

\textsuperscript{183} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{184} Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
every time you play it, [then] I think it's like playing études, it's like practicing, you want to get better and better.\textsuperscript{185}

Juliana Athayde addresses the pressures felt as she approached the end of her graduate degree. Like hundreds of other musicians, she was actively in the job market, even winning a section violin appointment with the San Francisco Symphony before fully finishing her master's degree. She perceives a backlash in the attitude of music schools, which she finds to be

treating students and the pursuit of their art as a bohemian thing. Music school should have an aspect of a trade school. If you graduate from music school and you are not employable, what has that done for you? I do feel like there should be more emphasis on figuring out what you want to do with these skills. Music for the pursuit of music is fine if you are a trust fund baby, but not for a career!\textsuperscript{186}

Like Cárdenes, Athayde would prefer that music schools hone a student's skills very specifically, preparing them without a doubt for a professional and identifiable musical career. As a violinist who worked all her adult life to win an orchestral position, she is amazed at the number of music students who suddenly decide to pursue an orchestral career only because they do not know what else to do. The pressure this places on them is severe, and often they are unprepared for the competitive nature of the audition process and the dedication that it takes to win a job.

A consummate musician and elegant leader, Boisvert elaborates further on her perception of the performance anxieties.

The pressure is killing - of course when I come out of a Beethoven Concerto week, the pressure is deadly. It can absolutely kill you. And I don't know why. You have to look out at the audience. You have two thousand people every night. This isn't brain surgery, you're not as we all

\textsuperscript{185} Bill Preucil, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 17, 2008.
\textsuperscript{186} Juliana Athayde, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 17, 2008.
say, you’re not manning a spaceship to the moon; nobody’s going to die, yet the pressure can just kill you and I don’t know why.\textsuperscript{187}

Interestingly, Boisvert addressed not only the pressure of the concertmaster job, but the insulation that many concertmasters feel. When reading Anne Mischakoff Heiles’ recent book, \textit{America’s Concertmasters}, Boisvert took comfort in the feelings of other concertmasters and their predecessors.

To me it was inspiring that a lot of people do complain about it. … Personnel managers go to a conference once a year they all get together — personnel mangers all do the same thing — orchestra committees do the same thing. You know they have their clubs. I find that concertmasters should get together once a year and because … sometimes you feel like you’d like to talk to someone but you don’t have anyone to talk to. … Why the pressure is so big, or sometimes I have a question and there is no one that I can ask. It would be nice to have some camaraderie with some other people that understand.\textsuperscript{188}

The unrelenting need for absolute focus, concentrated execution of notes on a page, and mental creation of a three-dimensional abstract sound world are all reasons why the pressure is so intensive. Nevertheless, those who enjoy the thrill and precision of the concertmaster’s seat flourish with their victories.

\textsuperscript{187} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
Part Three - The Past and Future of the

Concertmaster in the United States
Chapter Eleven- Concertmaster Lineage and the Contemporary
Education of a Concertmaster

A concertmaster’s education in contemporary America is vastly dissimilar from
the education of the personalities profiled for this document. That does not, in any way,
indicate that the interviewed concertmasters suffered from a lack of instruction, but
simply clarifies that the manner of orchestral and musical education has changed over the
years. The idea of specialized training for the concertmaster position is coming to the
forefront of educational awareness in approaches that are revolutionary in concept and
execution.

Opinions are divided about how and when concertmasters decide to become
concertmasters. Andrés Cárdenes knew from an early age that he was inevitably going to
be a leader in some form or profession. As he grew older, the choice of direction became
quite clear to him.

The only thing I can tell you is that—not to sound immodest or anything,
but I think a leader is sort of born, you know. I always felt like I had an
innate leadership capacity. I always felt like I was never a good follower.
I always wanted to be a leader in whatever I did I always wanted to be the
leader, you know. Whether it was playing baseball I wanted to be the
homerun hitter. If I was playing chamber music as a kid I wanted to be
first violin I always wanted to be concertmaster. Even ridiculous things
like, stopping at a stoplight when I was younger, I always wanted to be the
first car at the crosswalk I didn’t want to be the fourth car or fifth car. I
mean it’s sort of a—I don’t want to say it’s an obsession, but it’s a very
deep awareness that I like to be a leader and I enjoy being a leader and in
many ways it’s my calling and it’s nothing necessarily [that] you decide to
do.189

189 Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
Juliana Athayde also connected with the idea of a professional existence as a concertmaster when in a youthful part of her life. Bill Preucil shared this dream in conjunction with that of being a quartet player, and was able to fulfill both aspirations. Joseph Silverstein began as a section player in several orchestras before working his way to the top of the Boston Symphony, the goal set by his mother when he was a child. Emmanuelle Boisvert, while not actively aspiring to a concertmaster position at first, naturally claimed that title with a major orchestra at the young age of twenty-five.

Each individual personality arrived at his or her current station with tremendous family and teacher support along the way. Every interviewed concertmaster had direct contact with a historically great concertmaster along their educational path. They each studied, in some way, with a master of the art. These influences included such names as Josef Gingold, Mischa Mischakoff, Norman Carol, Richard Burgin, and many other fine violinists. They were influenced by conductors and soloists, teachers and students. They became great concertmasters.

With amazement, I noted that every concertmaster I interviewed is also currently involved in teaching orchestral excerpts, concertmaster solos, and/or solo literature. They teach on an individual basis and in group settings, sonatas, concerti, and orchestral pieces. They are occupied with coaching youth orchestras and teaching high school students, outreach programs and private lessons, chamber music and solo performances. They occupy every professional teaching post imaginable in today’s musical field.

The eldest of the group, Joseph Silverstein remembers his pivotal decision to try his hand at the concertmaster role:

At the time I won the Naumberg [Competition], we had two small children; the idea of being on the road all the time was not appealing. And
the three strongest influences in my life up to that point had been concertmasters: Joe, Mischa, and Richard. I didn't see the concertmastership as a dead end. I saw the possibility of pursuing solo, chamber music, and teaching activities as part of my career. I didn't feel "stuck" in the job.190

Silverstein continues to promote the individual aspects of the concertmaster job, teaching at the Curtis Institute of Music, coaching chamber music, and giving master classes all across the country.

However connected these concertmasters may be to their educational legacy, the current instructive aspects of music education are far from perfect. Andrés Cárdenes is especially concerned with the state of music education in the public schools and at the college level.

Are music schools providing the ability for people studying music; to find a niche if they're interested in pursuing a music career? Have they prepared them business-wise or niche-wise? In other words, can they help students find their voices and find a way to make a living in music that isn't in the standard ordinary way that we've become accustomed to? You graduate from school, you audition for an orchestra, you get a job, you be there for forty years and then you retire. That was the old thinking. The new thinking is: can you play jazz? Can you play Baroque fiddle? Can you improvise? Can you play bluegrass? Can you teach? Can you play chamber music? If you can do all of that you can find little niches where you can be successful.191

Education at its most basic should equip students for a career and profession, believes Cárdenes, who teaches at Carnegie Mellon University. Colleges and conservatories are doing students a disservice if they are not educating them about the sometimes tough realities of musician life. He asserts that:

If music schools are willing and able to provide the necessary tools and education for the kids to get out of school and find a way to make a living in music, great. Doing business as usual is now a complete failure. A total failure. I know plenty of students out there running around with

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190 Heiles, America's Concertmasters, 58.
fantastic violins that don’t have a clue how to play in an orchestra. They’ll never get a job and don’t have that many skills outside of playing a solo piece. And they’re hinging their careers winning a competition, which also doesn’t mean anything anymore. So we’re swimming in very dangerous waters nowadays.\textsuperscript{192}

Cárdenes believes that the only tangible way to prevent further deterioration of our musical world is through education. His conviction is that “if you give a kid an instrument to play, he has to read music, and coordinate his hands, and play with others, and play with the piano, and listen, and communicate, and be poised in front of people, and learn how to behave, and how to stand properly. All these basic social skills of humanity.”\textsuperscript{193} This, he thinks, will have a positive effect on civilization as a whole and creatively inspire the musical world. This is the goal towards which he wishes more individuals were aiming. For his part, he will continue to strive towards educating his students as versatile, well-rounded musicians with a wide variety of gifts to offer their profession.

Boisvert has taught orchestral excerpt classes at Wayne State University and regularly teaches privately, mostly to aspiring violinists with an upcoming orchestra audition. When warranted, she will teach the standard concertmaster solos in addition to regular excerpts and major concerti. About her teaching style, she says that her approach to the solos has changed over the years. This has occurred “because a lot of it is my experience, my growth throughout the years. Like every five years when we go back to either Heldenleben or Scheherezade, I myself will change. So I pass along to the students what I’ve just discovered works that I didn’t know worked five years ago.”\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{192} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} Emmanuelle Boisvert, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, March 11, 2008.
She has a true appreciation for her work, as she jokingly claims: “I am thirsty to go to a concert ... I see people in the audiences and that’s what I want to do. I want to go out to dinner on a date and not worry about the concert. You know, stuff we never do, go to a concert. So, that will be a dream for another time. Another life.”

Perhaps one day she will attend that concert and see one of her students leading the orchestra, as comfortable in the concertmaster’s chair as she has been.

Concertmaster Bill Preucil is in a unique position among concertmaster, as he is the professor in charge of the Cleveland Institute of Music’s Concertmaster Academy. This program is amazingly focused in its curriculum; it was created to provide one violin student at a time with the details of a concertmaster’s career from a behind-the-scenes viewpoint. Through the course of the training, students study excerpts and concertmaster solos with Preucil, accompany him to selected rehearsals with the Cleveland Orchestra, lead imaginary orchestras with him as their violin section personnel, and discuss the pressures, expectations, and lineage that belong to today’s concertmaster. With two graduates and two employed concertmasters in a row, the program is evidently an enormous success.

The purpose of the program, as Juliana Athayde will attest, is to clarify the non-contractual obligations of a concertmaster, coach the participant in finding their individual leadership technique, and provide an intensive preparation for concertmaster auditions. She is quick to point out that the idea of the academy “is not to have a concertmaster factory, and churn them out, but to give pointers about the process.”

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She quotes Preucil, saying that he told her, “I can’t keep you from making mistakes, everybody does, but I can at least give you some shortcuts that I learned in the last twenty-five years.” Of his students, Preucil conveys pride in their accomplishments and, most of all, their successes before and after he worked with them. “In every case they all had another important influence in their life,” says Preucil. “Maybe somebody who was more important in their violinist development than their concertmaster development or maybe not. I am proud of all of them but I’m not taking all the credit.”

Finding an individual style that fits your communication level and a player’s personality is a triumph that each profiled concertmaster has clearly achieved. Preucil notes that this can be a defining step in a future concertmaster’s education.

One of the most important things, I think, about the concertmaster position is that there is not a leader’s book. It’s that everyone has their own way of doing this. And probably their own way has something to do with their own personality and it has to obviously encompass a few things like respect for colleagues and ability to communicate with conductors and other things like that. But there’s no one way to do it. It’s what’s right for your personality.

To date, Juliana Athayde and Jun Iwasaki have graduated from the Concertmaster Academy, moving on to prosperous concertmaster careers with the Rochester Symphony and the Oregon Symphony, respectively. Other students of Preucil’s have become concertmasters as well, but he remains firm in his belief that he is training musicians and personalities more than following a formula.

And I think, what I’m the most proud about my former students is that they find their own way, whether it be in a concertmaster job or to inspire their students or to do what they do in a section of an orchestra, [or] teach and play an inspiring tune at a concert a couple of times a year or something like that. That’s what art should be is an expression of

199 Ibid.
personality. Give them the information ... and then send them out and 
they do it ... and it's natural and it becomes themselves and hopefully they 
surpass their teacher in every way. 200

Athayde jokes that she "has way more questions now being on the job than I did when I 
was in school. Because I didn't know what I didn't know. [It is] Only when you're faced 
with the day-to-day decision-making and the demands of the job do you know what to 
ask." 201

Longtime concertmaster/violinist mentor Norman Carol has taught several 
generations of hopeful orchestral leaders. Emmanuelle Boisvert attended his excerpt 
classes every Saturday afternoon while at Curtis and he continued to teach through his 
years in Philadelphia. When counseling the up-and-coming young instrumentalists he 
sees, Carol never fails to encourage them to learn as much as they can, not only of the 
instrument but of the repertoire, not only of the concerto literature, but of chamber music 
and the orchestral repertory.

Unfortunately, too many of today's teachers have denigrated the role of the 
orchestral musician. I would like to see more of these teachers working 
with their students on orchestral music. I always suggest that young people 
learn the incidental solos or some of the trickier passages in the literature, 
and I remind them that this might one day make the difference between 
having a job and looking for one. 202

Auditions are the one and only way to win a concertmaster position in today's 
competitive market. Despite their considerable differences in the audition process, each 
interviewed concertmaster was required to pass some form of audition before being 
awarded their job. Joseph Silverstein, the man who has likely heard more auditions than 
two of the remaining concertmasters, shares his thoughts on the process:

202 Sturm, "Norman Carol."
I didn’t teach orchestral excerpts. I don’t like teaching orchestral excerpts. I object to that. Because that is like learning twelve lines out of a Shakespeare play. If you really don’t know how it belongs to the whole play there’s not much point to learning it. I did a lot of repertoire classes with the students, and the repertoire classes really involved themselves with familiarizing them with the whole work because when you go to play an audition for a symphony orchestra you’re going to be expected to play not just the little excerpt that you got the Xerox of, but you know they might want you to play a little more of the piece, just to find out if you’ve ever played it before. Everybody now knows the first pages of Schumann’s Second Symphony Scherzo. Everybody knows that well. What’s the point? The point is that if you can play beautifully the allegro at the beginning of the first movement and the lyricism is good and the dynamics are good, [then] that’s more important now, because you’re expected to know the scherzo. And the Scherzo to A Midsummer Night’s Dream, everybody knows that. And a few passages, the usual suspects, the first few pages of Don Juan—everybody knows that. But there are other things that are really more relevant in the long run of how well you’re going to play in the section. Michael Thomas now has applicants of the San Francisco orchestra play second violin parts with a quartet with three members of the San Francisco symphony. So the audition procedures are becoming much more sophisticated.203

Emmanuelle Boisvert reiterates the above stance, adding that the Detroit Symphony Orchestra has occasionally used chamber music and/or a trial period to help decide auditions that are too close to call under normal circumstances. These additions to the usual audition process are helping orchestras to find the best musicians for the job, instead of hiring the best trainers for the job. Playing in an orchestra is not akin to jumping through the correct hoops in a particular order, but a chance to contribute musically and psychologically to an imaginative, artistic endeavor. Not every musician understands this, expresses Cárdenes.

You know, one of the problems in the concertmaster field is that there are very very, few—very few real, really qualified concertmasters. Even in some of the major orchestras of our country, I feel [that] there are a lot of people there who are neither ready nor the caliber of concertmaster playing wise and experience-wise. And I say that because in fifty years we have seen a propagation, a proliferation of orchestras. And what

happens is [it creates] the expectation that if you get into the Dayton Symphony as concertmaster then eventually you will be concertmaster of the Cincinnati Orchestra and someday the Cleveland Orchestra. But it doesn’t quite work that way. It doesn’t quite work that way. Like I said, leaders are born, not just bred and subsumed into those roles.\textsuperscript{204}

Calling herself the “seasoned rookie,” and looking forward to the next tier of her professional life as a veteran concertmaster, Athayde agrees wholeheartedly with the belief that you either have leadership, or you don’t. That particular personality trait clearly links each of the interviewed concertmasters.

With leaders such as Bill Preucil, Emmanuelle Boisvert, Andrés Cárdenes, Juliana Athayde, and Joseph Silverstein in the musical universe, America is headed in the right direction. These concertmasters epitomize the intelligence, drive, and spirit of the modern musician. They are leaders in every sense of the word. They are deeply involved in the educational direction of future colleagues, committed to their own violinistic excellence, and strive to create beauty in a challenging environment. They can be called by many names: diplomat, guide, editor, teacher, performer, figurehead, collaborator, and artist.

While it may be difficult to generalize the concertmaster position from orchestra to orchestra, or from player to player, it is true that each successful concertmaster must actively create his/her job. Their relationships with their ensembles, conductors, and public are their top priority. They follow in the footsteps of the leaders who came before them and they leave their thumbprint on today’s violin students. To them, the pressures are manageable and the artistic rewards are worthwhile. The understanding and preservation of their traditions will be passed on to new leaders. The most significant

\textsuperscript{204} Andrés Cárdenes, phone interview by author, digital tape recording, February 21, 2008.
observation presented here is that in their hands, the lineage of America's concertmasters will remain strong for generations to come.
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