

Help Wanted: Person Capable Of Holding White Stick

TODAY WE ASK WHAT IT TAKES TO CONDUCT AN ORCHESTRA

If you walk into your local music store and buy one of those thin white sticks that orchestra musicians recognize as a conductor's baton, how much practice must you dedicate yourself to before you learn how to wave it around?

I tried this experiment and (believe it or not) I'm actually able to wave the tiny white stick around reasonably well after just ten seconds.

Step number two! Holding the baton in one hand (experts recommend the right hand), see if you can step up on a podium. Take your time with this. You might want to work with a net as some of the raised platforms conductors stand on in order to be seen by the entire orchestra are at least one foot high. If you are as talented as most conductors you might well accomplish this feat of presti-levitation within one or two months. Gifted individuals have been reputed to lift themselves to the required one-foot height level within one or two seconds.

Step number three in your training to become a world renowned conductor is to rap the baton on the music stand. Three times seems to be an acceptable number for irritating everyone in the ensemble. Any more and you might consider going back to step two to work more on ascending the podium. Any less and you should be almost ready to conduct the Grand Teton Festival Orchestra in a self-propelled work by J.S. Bach such as the *St. Matthew Passion* — capable of going at least 400 miles on one tank of gas.

Moving right along, attempt (not in your own living room without expert supervision, we beg) to raise both arms. Assuming both arms can be successfully raised within a reasonable amount of time, you might then attempt to bring them down. The manner in which this latter is accomplished is not important just so there is general inability of others to tell what exactly you are doing. Confusing the ensemble with just such a vague lowering of arms (whilst holding the white stick) is known as the "downbeat."

Next (we recommend standing in front of an expert ensemble for this,

as they are capable of playing well despite anything you can do to stop them with your little white stick), keep raising and lowering your arms until the music stops. At this juncture turn approximately 180 degrees until you spy a collection of people applauding. At that point bend at the waist and prepare to descend the podium to the stage floor (even though there are musicians seated on this level, rest assured you will have to endure their proximity for mere moments).

Assuming you are successful in negotiating this procedure without undue injury to yourself or your little white stick, walk in the direction of the side of the stage — and back out to the podium where you again bend at the waist facing the people applauding. Be sure to ignore the musicians as any acknowledgement of their presence simply acts to agitate them to rising and imitating your bending at the waist — an extremely gratuitous and superfluous gesture.

Repeat the last step as many times as it takes to quiet the applauding crowd.

Okay, if you have managed to stay with the program thus far, you are ready to go down to your local symphony offices and apply for any open position of "conductor." Don't worry about openings as these occur quite often given the lack of talent in the field.

And if you get the job be sure to remember your roots of incompetence — the ones that bound you to that 9 to 5 job just yesterday, before you walked into the local music store to pick up the little white stick that changed your whole outlook on megalomania.

Given the position of conductor, you might in time consider learning to read music. I strongly recommend resisting this impulse by decorating your dressing room in authentic Persian carpet until this urge passes. Reading music is simply a phase the novice conductor goes through on his/her way to the more important business of immortality.

Remember always the conductor's creed, "Immortality follows Infallibility"

Next week we offer helpful hints for "Firing the Musician" as a catharsis for headache, neuritis and neuralgia. But enough for now. Time to go out and celebrate your new skills, time to recreate yourself as a legend in your own mind. Go get 'em, Maestro!!!