



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Poetics

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/poetic](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/poetic)



# Getting in tune: A qualitative analysis of guest conductor–musicians relationships in symphony orchestras



Dmitry Khodyakov

RAND Corporation, 1776 Main Street, PO Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Available online 24 May 2014

#### Keywords:

Authority  
Guest conductors  
Legitimacy  
Musicians  
Symphony orchestras  
Trust

### ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative approach, I analyze the phenomenon of guest conductors in professional symphony orchestras to explain how they establish the legitimacy of their authority in a short period of time. I argue that guest conductors and musicians are two interdependent centers of power in orchestras: conductors try to affect musicians' perception of their legitimacy, and players try to influence the behavior of their guest conductors. In situations where typical sources of a conductor's legitimacy may not exist and where musicians possess power simply by virtue of their knowledge of the orchestra and their experience of performing together, guest conductors and musicians may need to negotiate the domains and levels of power in every encounter. Although this negotiation is facilitated by the existing structure of the music field, the symphony orchestra, and the music score, relationships between musicians and guest conductors are modified in each encounter. Because of the temporary nature of guest conductor–musicians relationships, the success of this negotiation depends on the extent to which guest conductors can signal their readiness to build trustworthy and respectful relationships with musicians and invest in impression management.

© 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

E-mail address: [Dmitry\\_Khodyakov@rand.org](mailto:Dmitry_Khodyakov@rand.org).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2014.04.004>  
0304-422X/© 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

A professional symphony orchestra is a complex organization comprised of highly trained musicians, conductors, managerial staff, and board members, all of whom have complementary skills that help the group perform (Hunt et al., 2004). The vast majority of large symphony orchestras have principal conductors, also known as “music directors,”<sup>1</sup> who have responsibility for both artistic and managerial decision-making (Glynn, 2006). Principal conductors are the most powerful members of the orchestra. They make long-term and short-term artistic decisions by choosing repertoire; by hiring, promoting, and firing instrumentalists; and by inviting soloists. They are also responsible for the public image and financial stability of their orchestras. In their role as principal conductors, the music directors’ responsibility is to help players give well-balanced performances and to increase the efficiency of both rehearsals and performances (Young, 2004).

Music directors, however, often provide leadership to more than one orchestra and perform with different orchestras around the world (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2003). Hiring guest conductors has become a routine practice in contemporary orchestras, some of which perform more often with guest conductors than with their music directors because guest conductors help orchestras give more performances than they could have if they performed only with their music directors. This routine practice among orchestras also helps them hire popular music directors who otherwise may be reluctant to spend all their time in a particular location; helps boost their revenues by inviting famous guest conductors; and helps expose their musicians to various interpretations of the same music.

Although guest conductors have rather senior positions in orchestras, their jurisdiction is limited: they are invited to lead an orchestra for a series of three to five concerts; they usually perform music that they feel strongly about or claim specific knowledge of; and they direct the activities of each musician on stage to ensure that players execute the guest conductors’ particular vision of a musical piece (Atik, 1994). However, unlike music directors, guest conductors do not choose the repertoire; do not hire, fire or promote musicians; or do not select soloists. They make important artistic decisions and can influence the sound of the orchestra when it is rehearsing or performing on stage, but the scope of their authority is limited to the musical pieces that they are invited to conduct. Although guest conductors do not have many formal control mechanisms at their disposal and do not have much time to develop personal relationships with musicians, they are still expected to ensure that orchestras give stellar performances. How exactly guest conductors elicit musicians’ cooperation is the focus of this article.

To do so, I use power, authority, and legitimacy as core theoretical concepts. For the purposes of describing guest conductor–musicians relationships, I use a Weberian approach (Weber, 1978) to power and define it as “the ability to achieve objectives despite the resistance of others.” I view power as a relationship that depends on the characteristics of an individual and the circumstances in which this individual is placed. I treat *authority* as a special type of power defined as “the probability that a command with a specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons, despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which that probability rests.” As such, authority requires a degree of voluntary submission from those subjected to authority (Blau, 1963). Finally, when I refer to *legitimacy*, I emphasize the perceptions and convictions of those subject to authority that this authority is right and proper and, therefore, should be obeyed regardless of the bases of such beliefs (Uphoff, 1989).

By focusing on a relatively understudied phenomenon of guest conductors, which I treat as “a special case” of conductors, I explore the process of legitimation in contemporary symphony orchestras. Although the guest conductor’s legitimation process may be somewhat similar to that which any new principal conductor is likely to experience in an orchestra during the first couple of days of his or her relationship with musicians, guest conductors are faced with compressed timelines and typically do not know whether they would be invited to lead the same orchestra in the future. The fast pace and uncertainty of guest conductor–musicians relationships make this legitimation work particularly interesting because they both further reinforce the importance of reliance on mutual trust and respect—which are coordination mechanisms particularly appropriate for creative organizations

<sup>1</sup> For an example of an orchestra that does not have a conductor, see Khodyakov (2007, 2008).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1128309>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1128309>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)