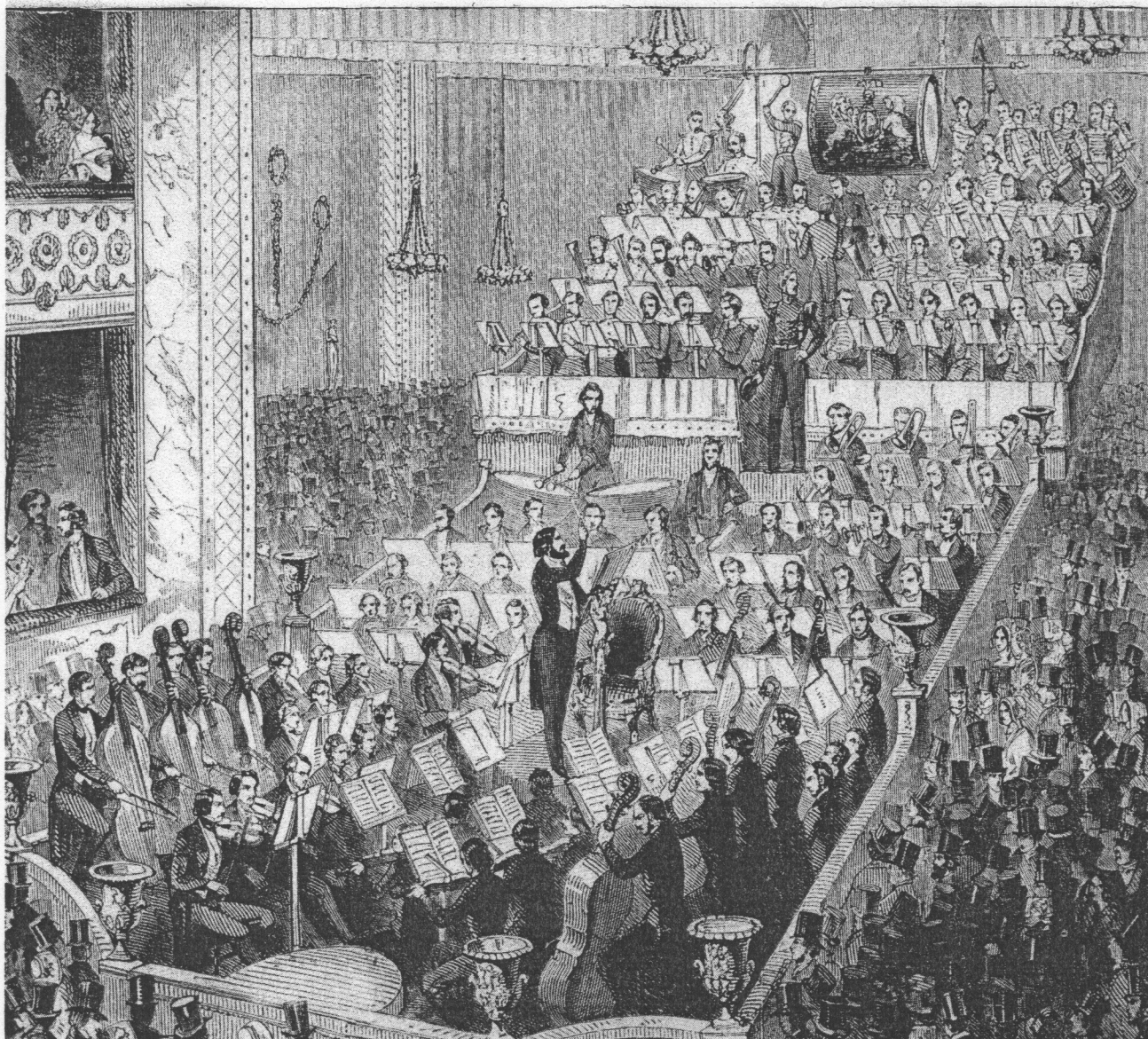


The Conductor

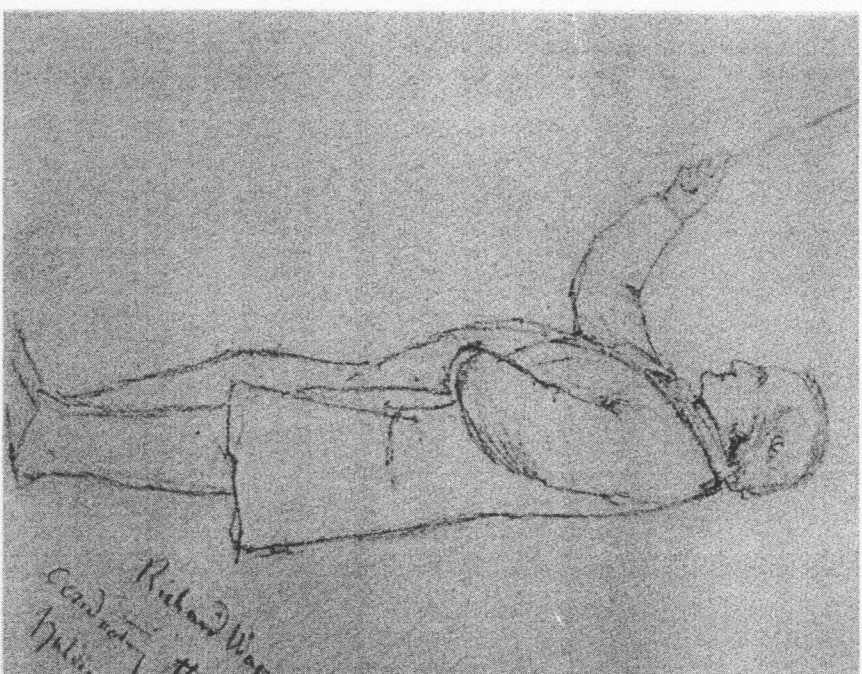
The enlarged orchestra, with its additional brass and percussion balanced by increasing number of strings and playing more and more frequently in large halls for the general public, created a variety of new problems. It played the symphonies of Beethoven and his successors, who had so expanded classical style that there were problems of formal co-ordination to be answered if the players were to follow a clear sense of direction from beginning to end of a movement. In addition, the enlarged orchestra was not easy to balance without some sort of overall, bar-by-bar control. Who was to decide the relationship of quicker and slower passages within the overall *tempo* of any movement; if the composer had marked *accelerando* or *ritardando*, to what speed was the music to gain or lose pace? If dynamic levels were to be altered by a *crescendo* or a *diminuendo*, what was the degree of loudness or softness at which the composer intended them to remain; are all passages marked *pp* or *fff* to achieve the same degree of quietness or noise, or is one to mark the actual climax? If so, who is to decide which passage it is and how much force, in the terms of the movement, is needed?

Ideally, perhaps, matters like these can be settled in discussion by the members of an orchestra, who are all highly skilled musicians with perfectly valid views about musical form and structure and about the intentions of any composer. But large scale discussion of this type is a time-exhausting business even if it never becomes acrimonious. If an orchestra can rehearse almost endlessly, without a time limit, it would be possible to achieve beautifully organized performances without the permanent gesticulations of a conductor. But rehearsal is an expensive business, which is why, in the early nineteenth century, rehearsals were neither extensive nor, it seems, particularly thorough before Berlioz and Wagner arrived to agitate orchestral players with their unappeasable perfectionism. The conductorless orchestra which functioned for some time experimentally in the U.S.S.R. came to an end despite its success in playing with no less sense of form and structure than an orchestra obedient to the dictates of a conductor.

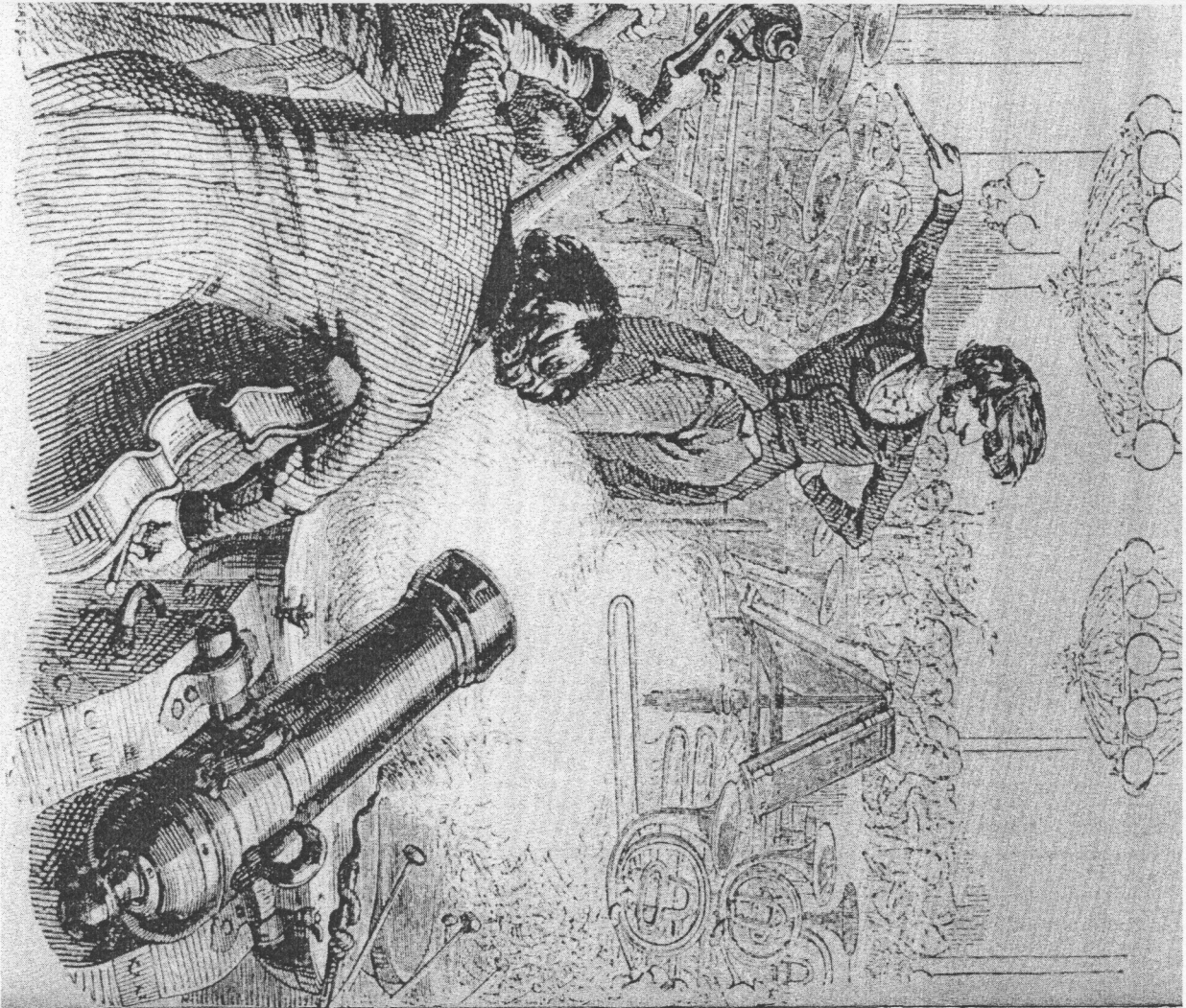
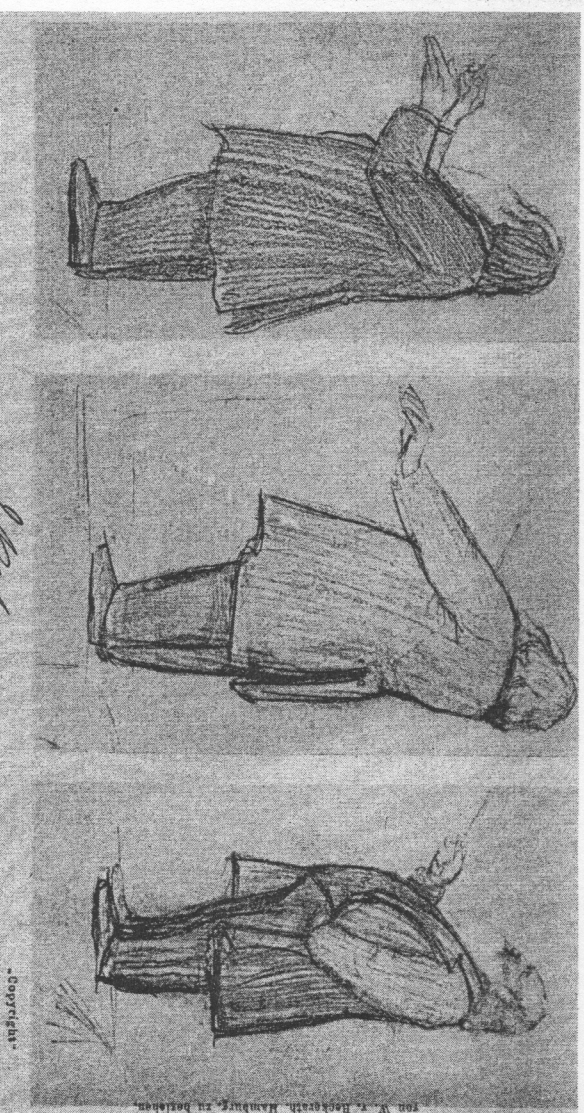
Jullien conducting a Promenade Concert
Covent Garden Theatre
in 1846



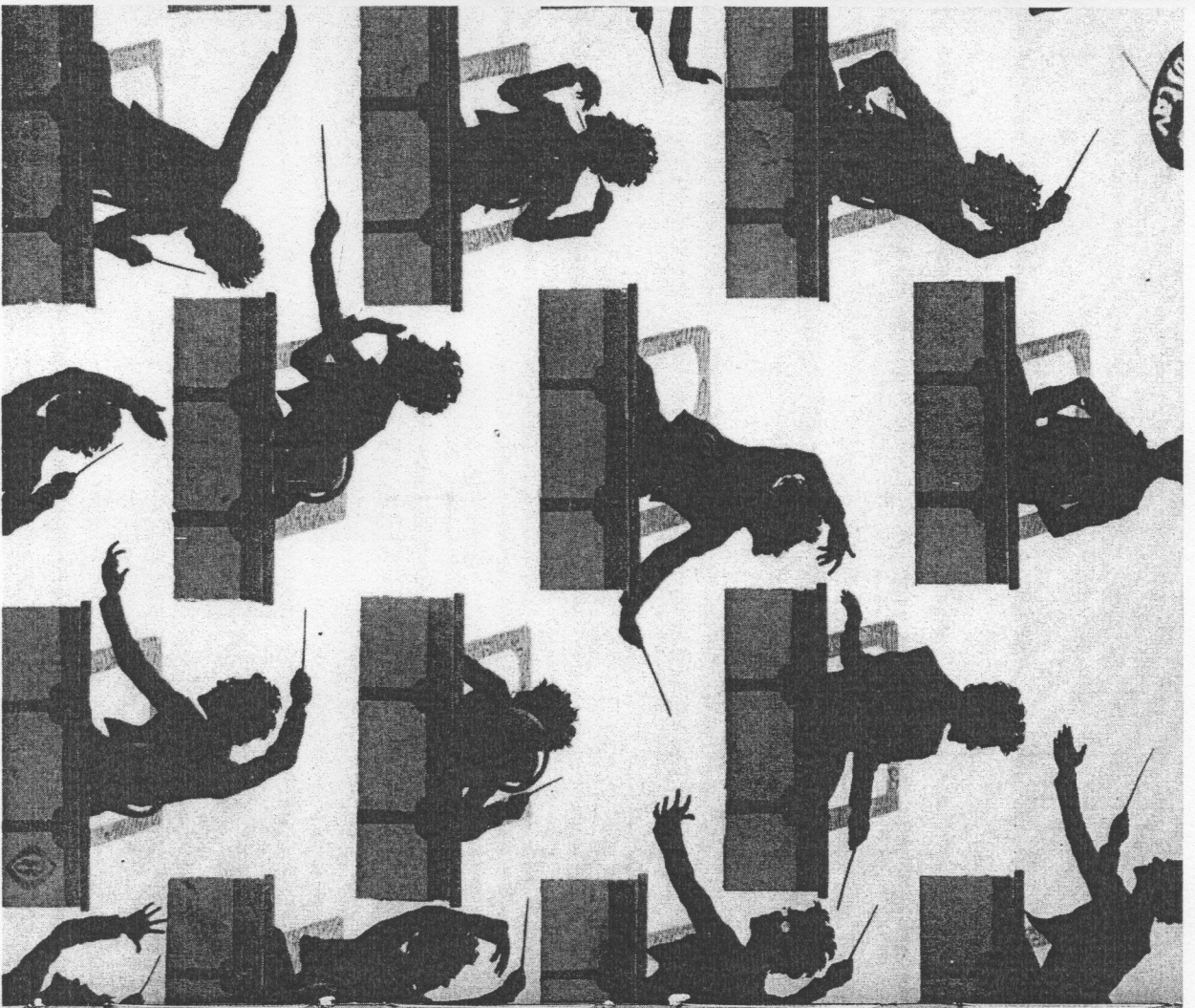
Richard Wagner
conducting



Brahms as conductor;
drawings by Willi von
Beckerath



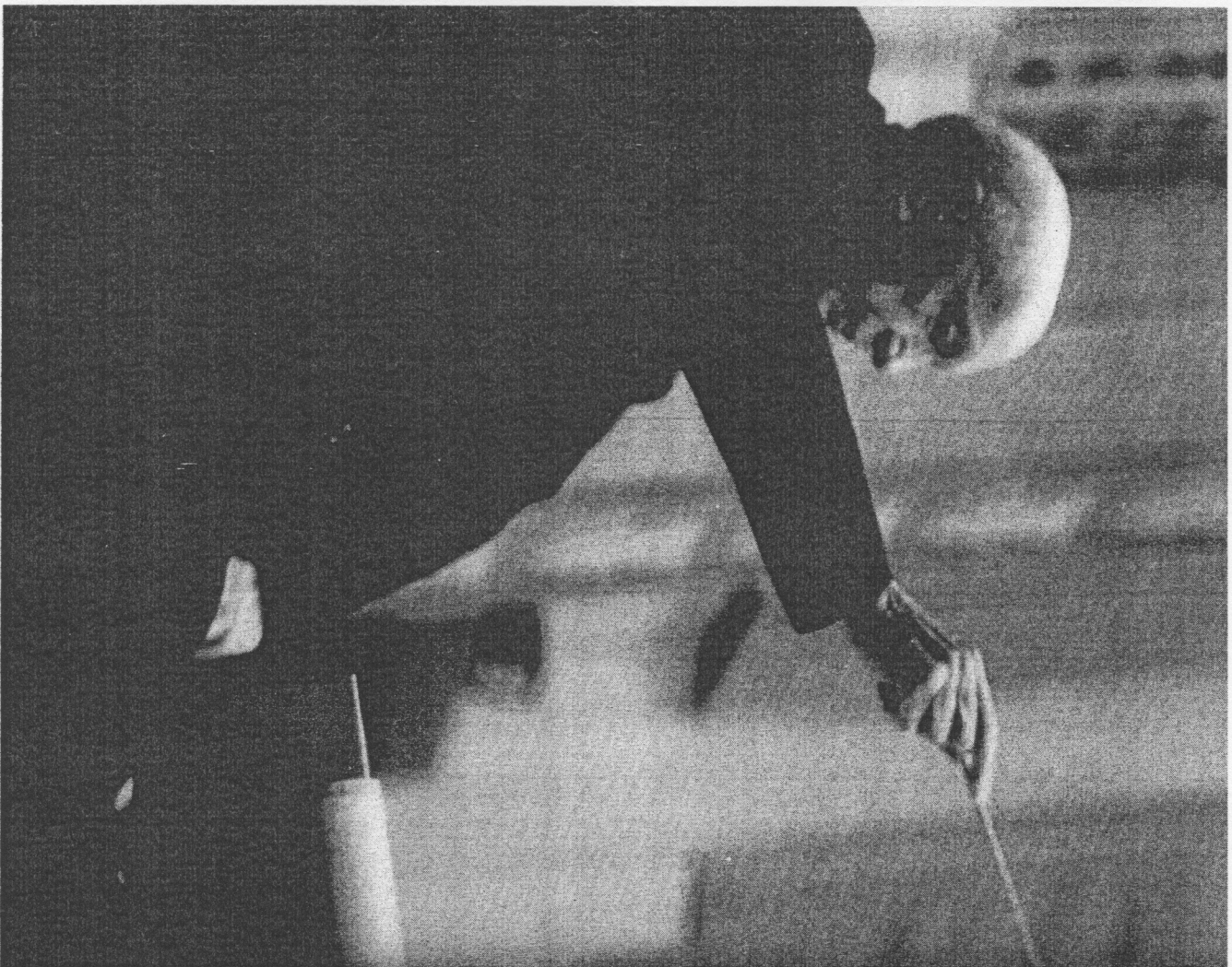
Berlioz conducting in 1847. A caricature by Grandville



Mahler conducting; silhouettes by Otto Böhler



Beecham in action; drawn in 1936 by E. Fairhurst



Richard Strauss conducting



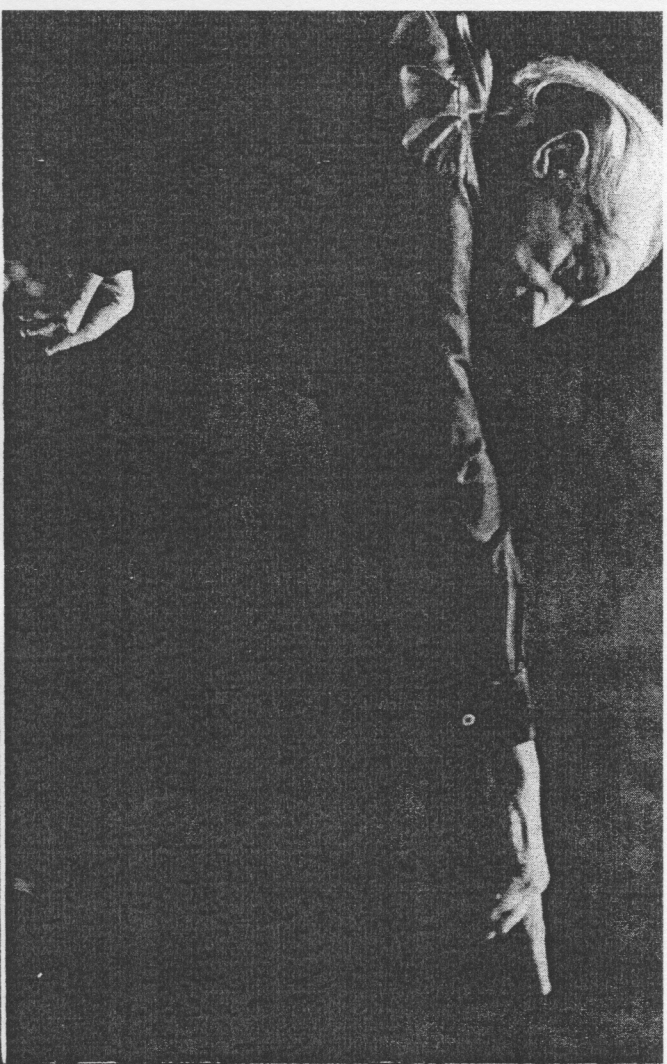
Stravinsky rehearsing

In addition to such considerations, players in an orchestra are positioned over too large an area to achieve complete unanimity of attack throughout a work, and can never hear everything that is happening in an orchestra with as much clarity as the audience and be able to control momentary defects of balance or control simply by listening to what is going on all round them; for most of the time they hear their neighbours and any specially penetrating voice raising itself over the mass of players. Thus the orchestral conductor came into being because the balance and co-ordination of any music on a large scale was impossible without his assistance.

Techniques of time-beating had been familiar since the Middle Ages for any music in which a large number of musicians had been involved, or in which, during the Baroque period, divided forces had performed in different quarters of a cathedral or large church; it is impossible to envisage the performance of elaborate Venetian choral works, for example, without some overall direction and control. It was, perhaps, possible for Handel to direct performances of his operas and oratorios from the keyboard of a harpsichord, with occasional gestures to guide the performers through tricky passages, but it seems from early eighteenth-century references and pictures that Lutheran cantata performances, with the players relatively close together and few in numbers in a church organ-gallery were often conducted by a time-beater who controlled them by his gestures. In the eighteenth century, apart from the composer-conductor directing a performance from the harpsichord (as Haydn is shown to be doing in a picture of an opera performance at Esterhaza) the 'leader' or *Konzertmeister* could conduct a small orchestra as he played his own part; for the sake of unanimity of approach, many pianists and violinists in modern times have proved that the method is perfectly satisfactory.

French conductors, in the opera-house or church, were often literally time-beaters in performances of large works with a multitude of performers; they beat out the music with a ruler or short-stick on a desk, quite audibly or, like Lully, with a heavy staff on the floor in front of them, a method which must have been extremely irritating to the listeners. They had their revenge, however, when Lully, beating time in his accustomed way with his long, heavy staff, struck and hurt his foot instead of the floor; the wound developed blood poisoning and was responsible for the composer's death.

Mozart, or any pianist playing a concerto, would beat time for the orchestra before his entry and during passages in which his instrument was silent; if problems of ensemble arose whilst his hands were occupied, or at the beginning of a slow movement



Bernstein rehearsing



Leonard Bernstein rehearsing

where both soloist and orchestra were often engaged from the opening bars together, he could conduct with his head. In a purely orchestral work, the task of ensuring a unanimous attack and maintaining co-ordination was that of the leader.

Beethoven, born into this system, seems to have abandoned it before 1805, when he played his fourth Piano Concerto for the first time with a conductor taking charge of the orchestra while he himself played the solo, and he continued to direct performances of his music long after increasing deafness had made it impossible for him to do so adequately. But what he understood by 'conducting' it is almost impossible for us to say. The great violinist Ludwig Spohr, who was born in 1784 and became a renowned composer and conductor, was appointed leader of the orchestra at the Theater und der Wien in 1813, so that when Beethoven's friends arranged a concert for him in the *Redoutensaal* on February 27, 1814, Spohr and his orchestra were invited to play in an orchestra which, Spohr mentioned in his *Autobiography*, involved every Viennese musician who could "blow, scrape or sing". The great attraction of the programme was the first performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, and Beethoven himself conducted it; apparently the sponsors of the concert thought it unwise to keep the hero of the occasion in the background. Spohr, a gifted but conventional musician and strait-laced personality, had already developed doubts about what he regarded as the violence and emotional extravagance of Beethoven's music, and was bewildered and pained by the composer's idea of conducting.

"Beethoven," he wrote, "had accustomed himself to give the signs of expression to his orchestra by all manner of extraordinary motions of his body. So as often as a *sforzando* occurred, he tore his arms, which he had previously crossed upon his breast, with great vehemence asunder. At a *piano*, he bent himself down, and the lower the softer he wished to have it. Then when a *crescendo* came, he raised himself by degrees, and upon the commencement of the *forte*, sprang bolt upright. To increase the *forte* yet more, he would sometimes, also, join in with a shout to the orchestra without being aware of it." As early as 1805, at the first performance of the fourth Concerto, with a conductor sharing the responsibility of the performance, Beethoven had not been able to remember, as he played the opening of the Concerto from the score, with two boys from the choir holding candles to give him light, that it was not his responsibility to bring in the orchestra and did with a wide sweep of his right arm, hitting the boy who stood by the keyboard at that side of the piano in the mouth and causing him to drop his candle; all this delighted the audience and infuriated Beethoven. Obviously what Beethoven understood by the idea

of conducting was not involved with maintaining a steady beat and had little to do with what is nowadays regarded as a conductor's principal duty.

In January, 1809, with his first six symphonies and all his concertos already composed and performed, three weeks after the concert at which he had conducted the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies in spite of his deafness, Beethoven wrote a letter to the publishers Breitkopf and Härtel in which he complained about the musical situation in Vienna: "We have *Kapellmeisters* who not only do not know how to conduct," he wrote, "but can hardly read a score." But what sort of technique Beethoven believed the conductors of his day to be deficient in, it cannot have been the careful precise beating of time; Spohr pictures him standing with his "arms across his breast".

Some sort of technique seems to have evolved, by this time, for the conductor of large scale choral and orchestral music in church and for the conductor in the opera-house, but such techniques seem to have been entirely rudimentary, and Beethoven himself was known to get ahead of his orchestra, which apparently kept its head, refusing to be thrown into confusion by demands for effects the players had not yet reached, and remained as much together as they had been at the beginning. Spohr's account suggests that Beethoven, as a conductor, left the orchestra alone to maintain the tempo and was concerned only with vividness of expression.

The conductor in the opera-house took a position with his desk immediately in front of, and facing, the stage, with the orchestra behind him, so that he concentrated entirely upon the singers while the orchestra did its best to follow his beat. This was a method generally adopted in theatres and it persisted in, for example, the Imperial Opera in Vienna until Mahler became conductor there in 1897; it was Mahler who moved the podium and desk to the back of the orchestra pit so that he had everyone, orchestra, chorus and singers, under his direct control; his predecessors, who included Wagner's greatest disciple and musical heir, Hans Richter, had been content to work from the middle of the orchestra pit with their eyes towards the stage. Portraits of Weber show him conducting at Covent Garden with a roll of paper but do not place him in any relationship to the stage and the orchestra. In Germany, however, Weber used a baton when he was appointed *Kapellmeister* of the German Opera in Dresden in 1817, as did Spohr, who became director of the Frankfurt Opera in the same year.

As there was no accepted technique of conducting, and therefore no method of training for the would-be conductor, whoever had the task of controlling and directing the performance worked out his own method for himself. Spohr, visiting London for the

first time in 1820 to play at a Philharmonic Society Concert and to 'lead' the orchestra, claims to have been the first musician to conduct a Philharmonic concert in the modern way and rather proudly tells the story of how he did so in his *Autobiography*. He had played two concertos at his first concert, and been allowed to leave the rest of the performance to the regular leader and pianist, the latter being one of the directors of the Society who sat at the keyboard with the score, filled in for any missing instrumentalist and joined in with the piano to correct anything that had gone wrong. At his second concert, where he was not involved as a soloist but as 'leader', Spohr decided to change things.

My turn came [he writes], to direct at one of the Philharmonic Concerts, and I created no less a sensation than with my solo playing. It was still at that time the custom that when symphonies and overtures were performed, the pianist had the score before him, not exactly to conduct from, but only to read after and play in with the orchestra at pleasure, which, when it was heard, had a very bad effect. The real conductor was the first violin, who gave the *tempi* and now and then, when the orchestra began to falter, gave the beat with the bow of his violin. So numerous an orchestra, standing so far apart from each other as that of the Philharmonic, could not possibly go together, and, despite the excellence of the individual members, the ensemble was much worse than we are accustomed to in Germany. I had therefore resolved, when my turn came, direct, to make an attempt to remedy this defective system. Fortunately at the morning rehearsal on the day on which I was to conduct, Mr Ries took the place at the piano, and he easily assented to give up the score to me and to remain wholly excluded from all participation in the performance. I then took my stand with the score at a separate music desk in front of the orchestra, drew my conducting stick from my pocket and gave the signal to begin. Quite alarmed at such a novel procedure, some of the directors would have protested against it; but when I besought them to grant me at least one trial, they became pacified. The symphonies and overtures that were to be rehearsed were well known to me, and in Germany I had already directed at their performance. I could therefore not only give the *tempi* in a very decisive manner, but also indicated to them a confidence such as hitherto they had not known there. I also took the liberty, when the execution did not satisfy me, to stop, and in a very polite but earnest manner to remark upon the manner of execution, which remarks Mr Ries at my request interpreted to the orchestra. Incited thereby to more than usual attention, and conducted with certainty by the visible means of giving the time, they played with a spirit and correctness such as till then they had never been heard to play with. Surprised and inspired by this result the orchestra immediately after the first part of the symphony, expressed aloud its

collective assent to the new mode of conducting, and thereby over-ruled all further opposition on the part of the directors.

From then onwards the Philharmonic Society concerts invariably announced a "conductor", but the title seems to have meant many things. When Mendelssohn came to London in 1829 and conducted his C minor Symphony at a Philharmonic Concert, he did so from the piano and, in a letter to his sister Fanny, explained how he was escorted to the keyboard "like a young lady".

Beethoven's condemnation of Viennese conductors who could hardly read a score should not be dismissed as the censoriousness of a composer who found it impossible to believe that anyone else could do justice to his work. Conducting was a new technique, and the qualities necessary to success as a conductor were not clearly understood. The Orchestra of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in Paris was conducted for more than the first twenty years of its life by François-Antoine Habeneck, who conducted the orchestra at the Opéra. Wagner, during his first miserable stay in Paris between 1839 and 1842, and whose failure to make any impression on Parisian music rapidly taught him to detest all things French, was forced to admit that he had never heard performances of the Beethoven symphonies to equal those given by the Conservatoire Orchestra under Habeneck. Wagner's first hearing of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in Leipzig in 1830, had caused him to doubt not only his high estimate of the work, which he had studied and of which he had made a pianoforte transcription, but also the value of the music, its coherence and logic. The first three movements had been conducted by the leader from his desk at the head of the violins, and it had been incoherently played and badly co-ordinated. After the slow movement a conductor, August Pohlentz, arrived to conduct the choral finale, because at the *Gewandhaus* it was the custom to employ a new-style conductor only for choral works; but even Pohlentz's efforts did not succeed in giving a coherent, eloquent account of the music; the orchestra struggled through the score as best it could. Pohlentz had set a pitifully slow *tempo* for the movement to give the players a chance to play the notes at all. Habeneck's conducting of the work, the result of long, detailed and thorough rehearsal, came like a revelation to young Wagner.

But Habeneck used neither score nor baton. He conducted with a violin bow from the first violin part; we do not know whether or not he had cued into it the important events in the rest of the orchestra, but after the amount of rehearsal the orchestra had undertaken, the first violin part was probably enough to activate his memory. Habeneck set the *tempo* and, when the music was

running satisfactorily, would cease to conduct until his efforts were again necessary to vary the *tempo*, to control a *crescendo* or *diminuendo* or to pull the orchestra together if the performance seemed to be growing ragged. Thus it is easy to believe the story Berlioz told of the first performance of his *Requiem*, in 1837.

The *Requiem* was composed for a state occasion, which meant that Habeneck was *ex officio* its conductor. In the second movement, the *Dies Irae*, the Latin hymn for the dead, Berlioz scored the verse dealing with the last trumpet for the four separate brass groups he had placed away from the orchestra and choir to their north, south, east and west, with sixteen timpani rolling out great chords. The third verse which describes the sound of the last trumpet is begun by a long fanfare for the four brass groups, entering one after the other and filling the church of Les Invalides (where the work was first performed) with a great harmonious tumult; the movement is designed so that the huge, resonant building would seem to come alive with sound.

Habeneck, at the first performance, noting that the first two verses were going well and that he could relax his control for a moment, put down his violin bow and took out his snuff box for a little refreshment just at the moment where the tempo broadens out expansively for the fanfare: disaster threatened. It was, however, averted by the composer himself. The history of the *Requiem* before its first performance had been anything but happy, and Berlioz saw in Habeneck's decision to take snuff a deliberate attempt to reduce one of his grandest passages to chaos; he leapt to his feet and gave the beat, guiding the orchestra and choir through the transition, and saved the day. Though this story, as Berlioz tells it in his *Memoirs*, has been dismissed as a romantic fabrication invented by a disappointed failure to show that the world was against him; Carl Halle, the pianist who settled in Manchester and became a blessing to English music, was at the performance, however, and in his *Autobiography* he too mentioned Habeneck's lapse and Berlioz's swift seizing of control.

Had there been a full score on Habeneck's desk, it is unlikely that he would have failed to notice the approach of the crisis for which he had to prepare his huge forces. As the situation was, when Berlioz wrote his *Treatise on Modern Instrumentation* he added to it a chapter on conducting in which he still found it necessary to point out that a conductor should be able to read a full score. Berlioz concentrated in his chapter not on problems of interpretation but on the essential techniques which effective conductors should acquire. Berlioz's *Memoirs*, and most of his critical writings, are witty, colourful, often grotesque and fantastic, openly emotional; the *Treatise on Instrumentation* and the short study of

conducting technique it contains are, apart from occasional lyrical remarks on effects he considers especially beautiful, severely practical in text-book style. They are meant to convey to the reader the methods by which the conductor could communicate with his orchestra through clear and decisive gestures however complex the rhythm of the music and however often the beat might be subdivided. He did not discuss the necessity of giving dramatic visual clues to the players at moments of special excitement, or mention the value of indicating instrumental entries as they arise in the score; apparently Berlioz trusted the instrumentalists to count their own rests. Berlioz was, according to reports, a superb conductor who relied on clarity of beat and not on extravagance of gesture; his habits of unrelenting rehearsal and his total response to the emotion of any music which seem to have been what he relied on ensure not only accurate and well-balanced performances but also a totally excited, responsive attitude in the orchestra. Berlioz was favourite figure for the French cartoonists of his day, but their accounts of his conducting suggest a calm imperiousness of demeanour rather than any frenzied attempt at expressing the music through movement.

Berlioz never held a long tenure of office with any orchestra, as Mendelssohn did with the *Gewandhaus* Orchestra. Mendelssohn's ideal as a conductor was natural fluency, neatness and elegance. Mendelssohn became conductor of the *Gewandhaus* in 1835, only five years after the players had shocked Wagner by their inept performance of Beethoven's Choral Symphony. Duties in Berlin and appearances as a guest conductor kept Mendelssohn from the platform of the *Gewandhaus* during the later years of his life, but he remained the orchestra's musical director until his death, and his various assistants were his ardent and devoted disciples. Mendelssohn seems to have preferred *tempi* on the fast side—both Berlioz and Wagner suggested that this was to drive the orchestra at speed through passages which, taken at a more measured pace, might have led them to disaster, and that he relied upon speed to get through passages which seemed dangerous, but he himself explained that he believed the *tempi* he adopted necessary to give a sense of determined forward movement to any music he conducted. His work in Leipzig not only developed the orchestra's sense of style; because he was interested in the music of the past he made the players more versatile and brought a broader musical appreciation to the audience. The *Gewandhaus*, and the city of Leipzig, gained musical authority from the fact that the most influential German musician of the age directed its musical life and virtually created the Leipzig Conservatoire. Mendelssohn was a conductor who avoided fuss, like Habeneck, when all was going smoothly and

modifications of *tempo* and dynamics were not needed, when the balance remained satisfactory, he would cease to conduct and simply listen until his efforts again became important.

Until the Dresden revolution of 1849, Wagner followed the conventional German path to eminence. Ten years younger than Berlioz, four years younger than Mendelssohn, he had climbed quickly up the musicians' ladder in spite of the weaknesses of his character which courted disaster in every post he held. From chorus master at the fifth-rate opera in Würzburg before he was twenty to the conductorship of the slightly less poor opera at Magdeburg in 1835, to a brief stay in a similar post in Königsburg a year later and then to the conductorship of the reasonably satisfactory opera in Riga in 1837, Wagner was obviously a man destined for an important post, which came with his appointment as *Kapellmeister* of the Royal Opera House in Dresden in 1842 after three years spent in utter failure in Paris. In Dresden, as in Riga, he endeavoured to involve the orchestra in the performance of regular concerts, but with only limited success; Berlioz had to collect an orchestra and instil into it a sense of style for almost every concert he gave; Wagner, endeavouring to change the musical establishment in a famous capital city, had an even harder task.

The Dresden Orchestra was overworked in the opera-house, with all its players demanded for every performance even if there was no part for their instruments; there were no musicians available to deputize for any instrumentalist who had fallen ill. They held their positions for life, so that there was no reason for them to attempt to conquer their boredom when playing uninteresting music and could not be retired even when they had grown too old to work efficiently; Berlioz, visiting Dresden to conduct a concert of his own music in 1842, wrote compassionately of the double-bass player who had grown too old to hold his instrument but who still took his place in the orchestra. Empty places, when they occurred, were filled by players chosen from a list of applicants according to the date of their application irrespective of their abilities; posts were not advertised and thus made open to the best available players. In addition, they were grotesquely underpaid.

Wagner, whose interests as a conductor comprehended all these things as well as the awkward seating arrangements in the orchestra pit and the bulky, inconvenient music desks in use there, drew up rational and practical schemes for enlarging the orchestra, allotting increased leisure through a more sensible schedule of work and the promotion of regular concerts which would augment the derisory salaries paid to the musicians (in all these respects, Wagner's plan could have been adopted to the benefit of music as well as

of musicians in any German theatre of the day). The rejection of his schemes for reform, more than any of the political theories he investigated when he found that his plans were not to succeed, drove Wagner into revolutionary politics and brought about his exile from Germany.

Settled in Zürich, Wagner conducted from time to time at the concerts of the Zürich Musical Society, which had a semi-professional orchestra with which he gave some memorable performances and a short festival of excerpts from his own operas, as *Tannhäuser* and to a lesser extent *Lohengrin* had been taken up by German management and were proving enormously successful. But true to his character, Wagner saw the deficiencies of music in Zürich and set out, unasked, to reform them; part of his scheme was the amalgamation of the orchestra of the Musical Society with that of the Zürich Opera, and the failure of his plan, which cut across personal loyalties and made nothing of personal status among the authorities either of the Musical Society or of the theatre was due not to any impracticability but to Wagner's conviction that music was more important than personalities and their pride. The amateurs who augmented the orchestra of the Music Society supported Wagner's plan for a livelier musical life in Zürich only to the extent of playing for those concerts which he himself conducted. As Wagner was constitutionally incapable of accepting a compromise, the scheme came to nothing and the conductor Wagner—who is inseparable from Wagner the orchestral and musical organizer—took less and less of a part in Zürich music-making.

Though the Zürich musicians were ready to add to their musical commitments to play under Wagner, London musicians found him difficult to play for and personally less pleasant than they expected a conductor to be. In the first half of 1855 Wagner conducted the concerts of the Philharmonic Society; he barely knew but bitterly disliked London, where his early works, by that time successful in Germany—were still unknown and his reputation was simply that of a musical and political revolutionary of the most dangerous sort. The Philharmonic Orchestra was reasonably good, he said, but it seemed to know nothing about any dynamic shadings beyond *mezzopiano* and *mezzo-forte*, and was incapable of any subtlety. Many of the critics were impressed by the excerpts from his own operas which he put into his programmes, each of which included a Beethoven symphony. The critics said that he played slow movements too slowly and the fast movements too quickly. The musicians themselves found his beat uncertain and were baffled by the rhythmic flexibility at which he aimed, relaxing the *tempo*, for example, for Beethoven's lyrical second subjects in the symphonies, drawing out

rallentandos and whipping up *accelerandos*. Wagner conducted with a sense of rhythmic give and take, of *tempo rubato*, which was new to English players, and his interpretations were always extremely personal.

Fourteen years later, in 1869, Wagner published his essay *On Conducting*. Unlike Berlioz, he was not concerned with the ABC of technique, the way to beat time and to subdivide the beat, or the necessity of score reading and a capacity for tireless physical effort, all of which are topics to which Berlioz devoted attention. His concern was interpretation; if the conductor found the right *tempo*—a matter of basic musical sensitivity and a sense of musical clarity—everything else would, he said, fall into place even if variations of *tempo* were needed; Wagner seems to have felt music dramatically and emotionally, rather than structurally, but he took care to suggest the means by which his dramatic instincts, or any other conductor's, would be controlled by a sense of form and structure. Berlioz's essay is a text book for beginners, but Wagner's is a treatise for advanced students.

The two between them make clear that there are two different types of conductor among those who have really studied the art and thought out their interpretative position. Musicians who studied the methods of Berlioz noted the strictness of his beat, his fidelity to the letter of the composer's law and the intense excitement he achieved simply by ensuring that everything was played and heard as the score set it out. The conductor Felix Weingartner, when he wrote his book on conducting in 1895, quoted a musician who had played in the Dresden Opera Orchestra under Wagner as saying that when Wagner conducted, the players had no sense of being driven or led but felt themselves free to play naturally; this is to suggest that Wagner had found the *tempo* at which each work moved naturally and therefore in a way totally satisfying to the instrumentalists. While Berlioz saw no need for any interpretative licence to be granted to the conductor and accepted the composer's text as the law it was his duty to observe, Wagner had a Romantic musician's belief in the necessity of such licence because there must always be a great deal in any work which cannot be written down and because even the simplest musical directions need to be understood in their context; they are not objective directions but only indications which must necessarily remain vague. It seems to be obvious to anyone sitting, say, at the piano, that 'allegro' at the head of a score by Mendelssohn means something different from 'allegro' on a score by Brahms or Bruckner.

This division of conductors into two types of which Berlioz and Wagner were the prototypes can be heard and probably seen, at least among 'great' conductors at any time. Gramophone records

of the two most admired Beethoven conductors of the 1930s (though both continued their work beyond that decade), Toscanini and Furtwängler, show that Toscanini's *tempi* never relented except when the score demanded relaxation or increase of speed, while Furtwängler, accepting a degree of interpretative freedom, sensed relaxations and intensifications not marked in the score and perhaps too slight to be annotated without exaggerating their effect. Many of Wagner's fluctuations of *tempo*, and many of those of Mahler at the turn of the nineteenth century, seem to have been of this kind. Such freedom is, of course, disastrous unless it is controlled by a sense of the music's essential form; Furtwängler never dwelt on expressive details at the expense of the music's forward movement, and neither, so far as we can tell, did Wagner, whose beat might not have baffled London musicians trained by Michael Costa if his fluctuations and variations had been larger and more pronounced.

Costa, perhaps partly from his Italian inheritance and training, was inclined to find faster *tempi* than many of his hearers could justify, so that the composer Sterndale Bennett hoped that Costa was not going to conduct a performance of one of his overtures as a Philharmonic concert. The only advantage of Costa, Bennett suggested, was that before he retired he would have learned how to play all Beethoven's symphonies in one evening and still leave the audience time to have dinner.

Tempo, as Wagner realized (and many others must have realized before him) can never be an absolute. A composer can, for example, mark *tempi* exactly by giving them a metronome figure to guide the conductor, but Wagner himself pointed out that a conductor can beat time exactly to the dictation of a metronome and still get the *tempo* wrong; any auditorium, for example, can modify the effect of a *tempo*, for 'allegro' in St Paul's Cathedral is necessarily slower than 'allegro' in a less resonant building; the conductor who forgets this turns the music heard in St Paul's into an incoherent scramble.

In other words, a conductor has more than the mathematics of *tempo* to consider. The record collector can, for example, study the recordings of the great though sometimes undisciplined Sir Thomas Beecham: in Beecham's performance, the slow movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 101 ('The Clock'), marked *andante*, is extremely slow when timed by a stop watch, but no listener notices the slowness as a defect and is probably unaware of it until he compares Beecham's with another performance. In the same way, some of his enchanting performances of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* were accused of excessive speed until Beecham demolished the charge by pointing out that official stop watch timing of his performances act by act showed that he had actually conducted a

performance rather more leisurely than that of most Wagner conductors. The extreme slowness of Beecham's performances was justified, and the sense of speed in *Die Meistersinger* was caused by vitality of rhythm and phrasing, which made the performances seem more eventful, and therefore more hasty, than those of most other conductors. Actual *tempo*, even measured by a stop watch, is not an objective musical reality, for any sense of speed is affected by rhythmic eventfulness, vitality of phrasing and clarity of delivery; a performance in which events in rhythm, harmony and orchestration are given proportion, clarity and balanced emphasis seems quicker than a performance played at the same *tempo* but without these other virtues simply because it offers more to be listened to.

It was these considerations which Wagner studied in his essay and apparently conveyed by his conducting. To him, such a direction as 'allegro' was not an objective command to be answered by the application of some ascertainable rule because, he pointed out, 'allegro' at the top of a score by Mozart means a different sense of speed and different qualities both of rhythm and sound to the word 'allegro' at the top of a score by Beethoven. *Tempo* is governed by a wide variety of musical factors—the phrasing of the melodic line, the clarity and continuity of rhythm and the treatment of incidental events in the course of a work or movement, and the slowness or speed of one movement in relation to the others. To take a very familiar example, the stampede of cellos and double-basses in the Scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, played as a really quick 'allegro' (Beethoven's instruction for that passage), gives less sense of speed if the conductor's *tempo* reduces the double-basses to an indiscriminate scurry than it does at a speed which allows every note to be heard clearly but not dwelt upon. That was what Mahler meant when he told his wife (who reported his dictum in her *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*) that the correct speed for a 'prestissimo' (which can be translated as "as fast as possible") is simply the greatest speed at which every note can be clearly heard.

The conductors of the Mendelssohn-Berlioz-Wagner generation were, like traditional *Kapellmeisters*, composers exercising the composer's secondary function of directing performances. Later conductors, from Nicolai in Vienna, Lindpainter in Vienna and London, Mahler in Vienna, Richard Strauss in Munich, Vienna and Berlin, and even Costa in London, were composers whose creative abilities were the qualification as conductor. Mahler came to regard conducting as a purgatory through which his poverty compelled him to travel, forcing him to put all his creative work into his summer holidays and compelling him to accept debasing com-

promises whenever he felt himself to be responsible for performances which failed to come up to his standards of perfection. Berlioz and Wagner, more than anyone else, established conducting not only as a technique but as a musical specialization. Berlioz accepted his career as an international star conductor without repining; to Wagner as to Mahler, it became a detestable distraction from the real task of composition. In his later life, Richard Strauss, like Elgar and others, restricted his conducting to his own works, although gramophone records exist which show Strauss to have been a splendid conductor of the 'standard repertoire', especially of music by Mozart.

With Berlioz and Wagner, however, the old *Kapellmeister* tradition really came to an end and the specialist conductor emerged. Hans Richter and Hermann Levy, who conducted Wagner's operas in his theatre at Bayreuth, worked at first under his supervision; they were professional conductors, not composers with a useful secondary skill. Charles Hallé, who became a conductor in Manchester in 1848, founded an orchestra there and continued to conduct until his death in 1895 at the age of seventy-six, was a concert pianist with a wide international reputation. Like Hans von Bülow, who conducted the first performances of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (probably the most daunting first performance any conductor has ever undertaken) and *Die Meistersinger*, Hallé continued his career as a pianist in double harness with his work as a conductor. The technique of conducting differs from that of any instrument because, while any player is obviously, perhaps disastrously, hampered by uncertain technique, any conductor who can bring an orchestra effectively into action on a down beat can substitute whatever musical understanding he has for baton technique. Many conductors, who have been accepted as masters have begun by evolving a technique of their own. As a young man, Mahler began his career as a conductor with no training of any sort, and won remarkable results, as did Richard Strauss, almost exactly Mahler's contemporary, through almost wildly extravagant gestures. Mahler, a year before his death, conducted his Eighth Symphony, controlling nearly a thousand players and singers, standing almost motionless and with hardly any use of his left hand for nuance and emphasis. Strauss followed a similar path, and later photographs of him in action as a conductor in the 1920s and 1930s show the stillness and calmness with which he achieved control of vivid performances by largely expanded orchestras. In *Notes for Conductors*, Strauss advised the conductor "to put his left thumb in the armpit of his waistcoat and follow the orchestra with his right hand". "It is the audience who should sweat," he declared, "not the conductor."

The great development of conducting technique came, in the 1880s, with the work of Artur Nikisch, who in his early teens showed brilliant promise as a violinist and in 1874, at the age of nineteen, became a member of the Vienna Court Orchestra. Three years later he became coach of the chorus at the Leipzig Opera, and in 1879 conductor of the orchestra there. He almost immediately found himself in demand as a concert conductor and rapidly became famous for his revival of important works which had not really been accepted into the standard repertoire, like the symphonies of Schumann.

Nikisch was a conductor who allowed the baton to do the work and to make all the necessary effort; its bulb grip rested against the palm of his hand and its shaft balanced between thumb and forefinger; conducting from his wrist, not from elbow or shoulder, Nikisch used the baton, especially its point, to convey beat, phrasing and everything that gesture could convey; he used his left arm sparingly and moved so little that any movement of the baton which originated above his wrist could prompt a 'fortissimo' almost cataclysmic in its ferocity. He never distracted either players or audience by elaborate gestures designed to stimulate the players' emotion or excitement. Conducting of this sort did not preclude performances of great power and emotional tension, as modern listeners in Britain know from the conducting of Sir Adrian Boult, a disciple of Nikisch in matters of technique. Among Nikisch's disciples there have been some who seem to have taken delight in conducting with the minimum of gesture and creating performances of extraordinary power by doing so. Fritz Reiner, the Hungarian conductor who was born in 1888, conducted in minor German theatres at Bucharest and Dresden, and then moved to America, where he conducted the orchestra of Cincinnati and Pittsburgh before reaching New York. Reiner combined the minimum of physical effort with intense concentration and clarity. He was by temperament tyrannical at rehearsals and never on easy terms with any orchestra, so that one day his deliberately tiny beat led a double-bass player to attend a rehearsal with a telescope, which, he told the *maestro*, he was using in order to see the beat.

Sobriety of action, as practised by such masters as Felix Weingartner, Sir Henry Wood and Sir Adrian Boult has never inhibited orchestras from playing that is brilliant, powerful and intensely responsive, while others, whose technique seems at best eccentric have often given to the music they have played no less intensity, power and clarity. Thomas Beecham, whose records as well as his legend indicate his enormous range of interest and accomplishment, can hardly have been said to have had a technique at all; his baton and his left hand did whatever the music, and the state of the

performance prompted him to do. The critic Neville Cardus claimed to see him once get his baton mixed up with the tails of his jacket and players declare that, as he conducted from memory, his memory sometimes failed and the failure could be noted from the wide circles in which his right arm swept until he heard a definite landmark which enabled him to find his way again. Beecham apparently disdained to beat anything less complex than phrase lengths; this he did with total precision and great eloquence; one musician, however, watching him guide the London Philharmonic Orchestra in its magnificent early days through a rhythmically complex passage suggested that while his baton was phrasing the melody and his left hand marking accentuations he was at the same time beating time by opening and closing the fingers of his left hand.

Wilhelm Furtwängler, a conductor at the antipodes from any literal and inelastic treatment of a score, who conducted like Wagner or Mahler to achieve unwritable but convincing fluctuations of *tempo*, seemed incapable of giving precise instructions with his baton. As an interpretative artist, he seemed incapable of giving a routine performance, as though he were thinking out the most familiar work for the first time whenever he conducted it. At times Furtwängler seemed to experience appalling difficulties in beginning a work and would stand, right hand and baton raised but fluttering indecisively, and though, at the fifty-ninth minute of the eleventh hour, he was making a last determined effort to secure the final, definitive performance of music he had conducted all his life; the indecisiveness seemed to have little effect on any orchestra familiar with his methods, and a member of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, expert in all Furtwängler's idiosyncrasies, when asked how the orchestra could decide and play to the conductor's first beat, said: "We don't; we simply come in on the ninth preliminary wobble." But however odd and unconvincing Furtwängler's beat could be, his performances of great music by Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner and Bruckner seemed always to rise to the height on which the work itself existed.

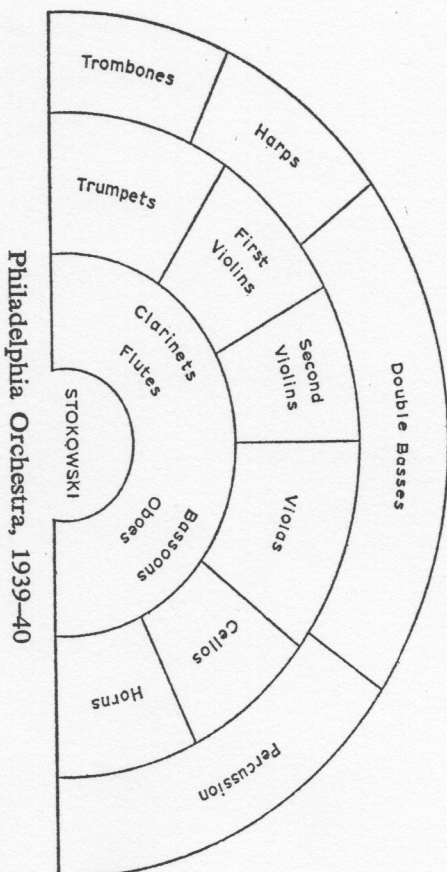
Furtwängler and Beecham always left an audience feeling that much of the performance they had heard had been almost extemporized, fresh and moving and apparently spontaneous. They conducted the sounds the orchestra made and not a performance worked out in every detail at rehearsal. Everything in their performances seems to have been thought out afresh, with new excitement, as the music came to life. Otto Klemperer, on the other hand, seemed to be reading from scores carved in stone somewhere on the upper slopes of Mount Sinai, and to raise personal preferences in such matters into matters of doctrine is, perhaps, foolishly

narrow-minded. Klemperer brought a complete and long predetermined conception of a work to life, but neither Beecham nor Furtwängler seemed to have a Klempererian final conception of any great work, as though, perhaps, the work was too great to allow them any final decision. Asked how he achieved such magnificent results, Beecham is said to have replied, "I simply find the best musicians and then leave them to play", and musicians who played for him bear witness to the amount of freedom he gave to instrumentalists to play their own parts as they themselves felt them; it was these often beautiful personal approaches to a work which he could mould together into a complete whole and from which he achieved not only delightful performances of the light music—his "lollipops" as he liked to call them—which provided him with encores, or simply of works by Mozart and Haydn who brought out the best in his often wayward genius, but also by Beethoven and by Wagner, whose music he often professed to dislike. Wagner, to Beecham, was a composer whose music has not only power and colour but also grace and ease of movement and, above all, an irresistible lyrical appeal.

The quality of conducting does not therefore depend upon technical finesse. When Spohr, in 1820, took his baton from his pocket to confront the orchestra of the London Philharmonic Society with modern conducting, the baton seemed completely essential as a means of securing the utmost precision and unanimity. Its point was the focus of the orchestra's attention, and even if the players did not follow its travels through every beat of every bar (a dedication greater than is really necessary) at least they remained in sufficient contact with the conductor's gestures to produce the performance they had rehearsed. Conductors in the tradition which Nikisch brought to its culmination over seventy years ago, expressing everything they wish from the orchestra with the baton alone, are not the only conductors who can claim both complete absorption in the music and the power of communicating its grandeur and excitement.

In 1912, Leopold Stokowski (despite his name a London-born organist with a Polish father and an Irish mother) who had settled in the United States four years before, was appointed conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra. He had previously conducted the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra since 1909. In 1912, Stokowski was thirty years old, tall, fair-haired, slim and handsome, with the quality of personality which the late twentieth century has decided to call 'charisma'; he made the Philadelphia Orchestra into one of the world's great virtuoso ensembles. He also made it one of the world's best known, taking it into film studios and giving with it the first concert to be seen on television in the United States. His

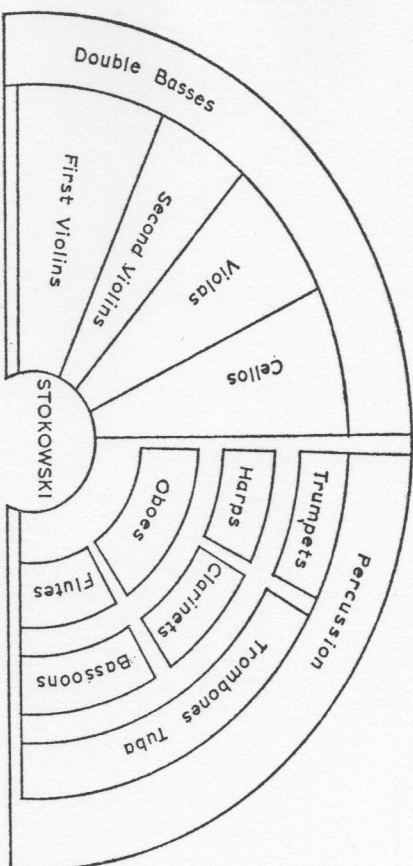
programmes were remarkably adventurous, and he was prepared to tell adoring audiences that it was their duty to listen to difficult modern music and to insist that they did so. At the same time, he was a specialist in orchestral sonorities and balance, experimenting for a long time with varied methods of seating the orchestra and even, for a time, putting the woodwind into the front of the orchestra and placing the strings behind them. His actual conducting technique was, to say the least, flamboyant, and he used his natural flamboyance as he used his remarkable sensitivity of ear to serve the orchestra and the music it played.



Stokowski was one of the first conductors to grow disillusioned with the baton; he decided that more precise and flexible indications of what was needed than a rigid baton could supply. Stokowski's hands, beautifully shapely and extremely expressive, moulded phrases with great subtlety and stylishness, and it was typical of his panache that his next decision was that audiences would concentrate more thoroughly on the music if the lights were lowered; naturally, for the sake of the orchestra spotlights had to follow his hands as they worked.

Batonless conducting has become an accustomed method which a large number of extremely skilful musicians have used, among them the highly theoretical Hermann Scherchen and Pierre Boulez, whose reputation as a conductor has come to stand as high as his renown as a difficult, uncompromising composer. To what extent results would be different if batonless conductors used a baton it is hard to say; the quest, in the case of some of their number, is not for a greater flexibility and elasticity of musical style that can

be achieved with a baton; Boulez, whose repertoire contains much highly complex and hugely scored music, like Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* and Mahler's Sixth and Eighth Symphonies, conducts work like this from the shoulder, so to speak, with a right arm which rarely bends and takes little notice of subtleties of nuance. Like all other aspects of the peculiar art of the conductor, the use or abandonment of the baton seems to be of less importance than the personality of the conductor, his musical responsiveness and sensitivity and his attitude to the players who sit in front of him.



Stokowski's seating plan, 1960s and 1970s

Any mention of Stokowski, of course, leads to reflections about the showman-conductor. A conductor, unless he chooses to work behind a curtain, is naturally the focus of the audience's attention and his gestures indicate their approach to the music as much as they dictate the orchestra's. Boult, the least showy of conductors, imposes a quality of concentration on listeners as on the orchestra; Reiner's immobility and Beecham's almost gymnastic, balletic movements ("The performance was good," said a member of one of his audiences at the conclusion of a concert, "and the choreography was superb") both impress, and perhaps are ways of impressing, the audience; a retiring introvert conductor may not be a contradiction in terms but is at least a paradox.

So far as portraits can be trusted, Berlioz conducted with a sort of imperial, Napoleonic calm, and without any choreography; musicians who played in his orchestras spoke of his calmness, his clarity and decisiveness and his courtesy to them. Wagner, too, was not a very demonstrative conductor; his search for rhythmic subtleties seems to have been entrusted entirely to his baton. His

disciples, Hans von Bülow and Hans Richter, do not seem to have set out to give the audience an interesting display.

The first showman conductor to endear himself to Britain and America seems to have been Louise-Antoine Jullien, who conducted Promenade Concerts (originally concerts given in a theatre, not a concert-hall, in informal circumstances and containing a fair amount of light music) in London. Jullien obviously had great musical abilities; his orchestras were finely rehearsed and extremely disciplined. His concerts themselves, when he made London the centre of his activities after 1840, when he was twenty-eight, included quadrilles of his own composition or compilation, often involving the addition of military bands to the orchestra. Portraits suggest that whatever was happening, from a quadrille or a cornet solo to a symphony, his style remained dignified and authoritative. But behind his desk was a deep and throne-like armchair into which he sank in exhaustion after the climax of a piece in which he would add to the orchestral sonority by seizing a piccolo or a violin and joining in the final 'fortissimo'. Jullien was a serious musician as well as a showman, and it is quite probable that his performances of the Beethoven symphonies (which he persuaded his audiences to enjoy) were better played than those of the Philharmonic Society during this period. But to demonstrate that Beethoven's music is specially great, he conducted it wearing clean white kid gloves, brought to him on a silver salver, and with a jewelled baton. Whatever else he was—and we have no way of knowing the real quality of his interpretative abilities—Jullien was a fine orchestral trainer and a splendid popularizer of music; his audiences would have never listened to symphonies if he had not conducted them.

Jullien seems to have been more responsible than anybody else for the legend of the conductor as a sort of Svengali, hypnotizing orchestras into slavish obedience to his commands; at least, he knew that it was he who would draw the eyes of the audience, and what he seems to have wanted them to see was a calmly impassioned, authoritative commander-in-chief. Audiences still like visible proof that the conductor is in control and dictating his terms to the orchestra although orchestras can normally be trusted to grow hilarious over exaggerated conductorial antics and are usually ready to deflate the pretensions of any conductor. There was one who insisted on repeating a phrase over and over again in rehearsal, using it as a text for lectures in metaphysics but not, to the players' minds, making his wishes sufficiently clear. At last, as they ached with boredom, he seemed satisfied. "That's it," he said. "Let's just do it once again and see what it sounds like." "No," said the players, "you do it again and we'll see what you sound like."

Nevertheless, an orchestra delights in the work of a conductor who, whatever his way of working, achieves exciting, consistent results. Orchestras as well as audiences are among the admirers of the emotionally extravagant Bernstein, and orchestras usually loved (with intervals for hatred) the exigent, humorous, witty, impish but often possessed Beecham. The great conductors' qualities—insight, communication and musicianship—are immediately recognizable though they defy analysis.

Their relationships with orchestras are equally mysterious. Toscanini, Mahler and Georg Szell (who rapidly turned the Cleveland Orchestra from a respectable provincial ensemble into an instrument of immense precision and polish) were remorseless tyrants. Barbirolli, a slave of music, expected his orchestra to share his slavery and usually found it willing to do so. Beecham, an eccentric wit in public, provided the orchestras he rehearsed with a dazzling display of wit, eccentricity and 'temperament' in the most romantic sense of that word. Bruno Walter seemed, in his later years, to regard any orchestra as a favourite collection of nephews and nieces. There is, perhaps, a style and an approach for every conductor. There are those who regard the essential skills as those concerned with handling men, but there are those who are convinced that anybody who knows how he wants to conduct a work, however simple or however complex, and how to demonstrate the effects he wants to achieve without too much talk or waste of time, will find any orchestra eager, co-operative and enthusiastic.

NINE

Consolidation and Expansion

It was hardly necessary, by the time Wagner's works were written, to think of expanding the orchestra any further, except perhaps for the sake of dramatic effect in the opera-house, though such expansions would provide inevitable additions to the vocabulary of the concert hall. The power, range and mass of orchestral tone had reached, it seemed, the point at which additions were not needed. Even Wagner tubas, which gave the brass section the homogeneity of tone which composers had desired for a century, did not become a permanent feature of the orchestra. The composer's colour palette had achieved almost its complete range without Wagner's invention, and as composers began to be concerned with blending and contrasting their colour rather than with massiveness and weight of tone, they seemed to be hardly necessary.

Massive as Bruckner's music is, from his First Symphony composed in 1865 and 1866 to his Ninth, left unfinished at his death in 1896, its massiveness comes from its time-scale and its harmonic processes rather than from an expanded orchestra. Despite Bruckner's adoration of Wagner, only the slow movement of the Seventh Symphony, written as an elegy to Wagner after the news of the composer's death had reached Austria, uses Wagner tubas. Though Bruckner's orchestral style owes more to Wagner's than to any other composer's, as does his harmonic scale and time-scheme, and, although well-meaning friends insisted that Bruckner should revise his music to make its orchestration still more Wagnerian, Bruckner was content with Beethoven's instruments balanced as Wagner wanted them balanced in performance, with the tuba, which had become obligatory in the 1860s. The climax of the Seventh Symphony is a single cymbal clash, the only cymbal clash in Bruckner's work, and this was an addition suggested by friends who did not realize the true nature of Bruckner's work or recognize that he was too independent in outlook to need additional Wagnerisms.

In many respects, Bruckner abandoned a great deal of Wagnerian colour. His oboes or trumpets, for example, will send a line of