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(in december, 2000)

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BUSINESS LIFE SEMINAR
Session n° 58 : 9 December 1994

CREATING A MAJOR ORCHESTRA : ONE BATON AND AN OPEN EAR

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Summary of the meeting

Northern France is in the throes of recession. Shunned by the musicians of the capital, its budgets shrunk by the State, the musicians of the ORTF in Lille are desperate. A conductor, who has retained a child-like enthusiasm, decides to salvage the sinking ship. From village halls to the most sumptuously decorated concert halls in the world, the Orchestre National de Lille rediscovers the breath of life that its leader brings : the joy of sharing with others and the goal of artistic perfection.

I - PRESENTATION BY JEAN-CLAUDE CASADESUS

Getting into the swing of the profession

I was four years old when my grandfather, Henri Casadesus and his friend, Pierre Monteux, gave me my first music lesson. Bouncing me up and down on their knees, they told me that I'd become an orchestra conductor, and apparently I would tap my feet in time to the rhythm. However, at that age my freedom was more important to me than musical discipline, and I soon dropped my lessons. It was my grandmother who reintroduced me to concerts when I was about twelve. What magic! All those people who could conjure up thunder and great emotions by simply waving their arms! They really inspired me and I swore that I'd become a conductor one day.

This was a solemn oath that I took without knowing what challenges would be in store for me. I played the piano to myself, read music badly and played by ear what I heard at concerts. I was also very interested in jazz. When I was fifteen I formed my first orchestra, much to my parents' displeasure. However, this didn't put me off wanting to become a conductor, so my pianist cousin, Robert Casadesus, gave me this piece of advice: *"People who want to run a factory first have to know all its ins and outs. What you really need to do is learn to play a musical instrument so that you can be in an orchestra"*.

Bearing in mind that I was still a great foot-tapper, I was naturally drawn towards percussion. I won a first prize at the Paris Conservatory. Then I carried on with my musical analysis and composition studies. I went on to join Pierre Boulez' orchestra as a soloist and later became solo timpanist in the Colonne Concerts. I also did Variety work and played with Quincy Jones and Michel Legrand. In a nutshell, I was lucky enough to experience the whole range of music that is open to a music lover, from classical to jazz, from opera to contemporary music.

I was about thirty when I became a student again, this time devoting myself to orchestral conductor studies. After being taught by Pierre Dervaux and then Pierre Boulez, I was hired by the Théâtre du Châtelet. It was during my three years there that I learnt how to control my arm. In this profession, you have to think carefully if you want things to happen: analysing the music sharpens your instincts. Then you let your heart take over: great music never comes without feeling. Conductors are like good wine: they improve with age. You can be a nobody for years and then suddenly start to get noticed at the age of fifty or sixty. You need to have done twenty years hard work to prove yourself capable of staying the course. It can be a real grind, but you only find this out as you're going along.

During this first stage, I got into the swing of the profession by conducting both singers and instrumentalists, making sure that I didn't fall into a routine. There's a real danger of getting tired of it all when you conduct the same operetta every evening for 150 or even 200 performances. I used to imagine that I was conducting Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony" in Berlin or Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" in London with the world's most eminent musicologists in the audience. This was tough, but it forced me to stay on my toes and that way I ensured that the musicians always played with the same sensitivity as in the very first rehearsals. I conducted "La Périchole" almost 300 times, "L'Auberge du Cheval Blanc" 150 times and "Le Prince de Madrid" 175 times with Luis Mariano. After this, I was hired by the Opéra Comique, first of all to conduct a piece by Schoenberg which changed me in a way, and then Strauss' "Die Fledermaus". Later I became the house conductor, before being asked by Pierre Dervaux to help him form the Orchestre Philharmonique des Pays de Loire.

Prova d'Orchestra

I arrived in Lille on 16 April 1975 at the request of Michel Guy, the Minister of Culture. He said, "*This might seem like a cruel gift, but one of the ORTF's orchestras in Lille needs to be saved.*" At the time, the ORTF was starting what is now the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio-France in Paris. The Orchestre National de France was also based in Paris, while the decentralisation policy meant that the provincial orchestras were packing up.

Only 33 of the orchestra's 57 musicians were left, and they were on strike and desperate. When I met the orchestra for the first time in April, it was like one of the worst scenes from Fellini's film "*Prova d'Orchestra*". Musicians tend to prefer their conductor to be an old hand, and since I didn't look my age, they must all have thought, "*Just who does he think he is, this kid from Paris, coming to tell us how to play?*" We were in an area which was struggling after the collapse of some of its main industries: steel, textiles and coal. The only thing that seemed to be waiting for this dying orchestra was the drastic prospect of unemployment. The result was that all they wanted was to send this little man and his precious studies back to where he'd come from. Unfortunately, nobody at the Conservatory had ever taught me how to negotiate with angry trade unionists.

Nevertheless, it was a question of "sink or swim" and having been thrown in at the deep end I could understand how desperate the musicians must have been feeling. Finally, after two months of serious talks, I arranged for us to perform our first concert in June, with the 33 official musicians and an extra 27 carefully chosen for the occasion. We played at the Théâtre Sébastopol in Lille, and there were more people on the stage than in the audience. I felt as though I was stuck on the edge of a cliff with no way back. This encouraged me to go and meet some of the officials from the Conseil Régional, the regional council headed by Pierre Mauroy. I told them that I wanted to help draw up a major cultural plan for the region, which had 4 million inhabitants and the youngest population in France, as well as the highest rate of unemployment. I must pay tribute to Pierre Mauroy for having understood that culture shouldn't be neglected during a period of recession and investment in intensive technology.

Five francs each

Pierre Mauroy told me, "*The orchestra must be saved*". This required backing at both a regional and national level, which is always slow in coming. My instinct told me to direct our efforts towards young people. The mining region had never had the time to discover a major artform and I was convinced that it was essential to make music available to everyone. My way of doing this was - and still is - to take our music as far and wide as possible. This was a nice idea, but it demanded an effort from the Region. If we were to ask the Region for a contribution of five francs per inhabitant, the results of our cultural plan had to be visible, i.e. we should aim to play for the whole population, whoever and wherever they were.

We urgently needed this support, so I spent three months phoning up various Mayors and representatives of the Minister of Culture to explain the benefits of music. Each time, I had to tailor my arguments so that they would strike a chord. Finally, we managed to persuade the Mayors to hire the orchestra at a tenth of the asking price, thanks to a grant which had just been given to us by the Conseil Régional. We then hired coaches for the musicians and a lorry for their instruments, and went setting up our stands in function rooms, sports halls and churches.

That's when it all started to come together. In the afternoon, we would give an educational concert for schools. This meant explaining some music theory, introducing the instruments, the musicians, and so on. The musicians were new to this type of work, and some of them were suspicious, while others were irritated at being taken away from the studio they had been working in for the last 25 years. However, everyone vaguely understood how the orchestra's sedentary approach had not helped it in the least. It wasn't long before the afternoon concerts had a very warm

atmosphere, with me sometimes explaining things as I conducted and the children asking questions. The music soon achieved its purpose.

On 3 January, 1976, we were accepted by the Conseil Régional and became a regional orchestra, financed 50% by the State. However, in no time at all the state managed pretty well to free itself from this obligation, leaving the Region to pick up the bill. The attitude of the centralisers in Paris was that they had nothing against letting the Northerners have their own little orchestra, but the 500,000 francs they were asking for could be used more usefully elsewhere. We found this out later.

In fact, this initial lack of funds caused a structural deficit which weighed on us for several years. The offhand way we had been treated was particularly annoying and no doubt pushed the orchestra into quickly assuming the role of ambassadors for the Region and the country.

It generally takes 20 years to build up an orchestra. My greatest moment was when after 4 years the musicians started to tell me, *"You know, we didn't use to have any faith in the orchestra, but now we see that we might just have a future."* I took this new confidence to be a small sign of victory, although further success would require a very professional set-up.

Admirable work, but...

With this in mind, I obtained permission from the Conseil Régional to register the orchestra as an Association. This way I would not have to fill in a mound of forms every time I needed to buy a tuning fork. With an Association, you have a lot of freedom to act as you please, but you also have to take responsibility for your actions and manage things very openly. I asked the Region to fire me if ever they disliked my work and to respect my freedom if by any chance they did like it. They agreed.

I refused to act as signatory because I didn't feel it was my job. As the director, I could delegate this task to someone else. This wasn't an attempt to shirk my duties but a demonstration of my concern for proper control and discipline : I made sure that the staff I chose for this would be strong enough to stand up to me if ever I were to have any crazy ideas. I employed both a chief accountant and an auditor, even though it was not a legal requirement at the time.

However, we were lacking in funds since the State had withdrawn its 500,000 francs. At first, the Region decided against raising our subsidy, and for the first time I had to defend our case before the Conseil économique et social. The head of the local bosses started by telling me, *"You're doing an admirable job, but I'm sure you'll understand that we're in a difficult situation at the moment with all the job losses in our factories. We have to reserve our funds for more serious matters that fit with our various goals."* I told myself, *"It's now or never"*, took a deep breath and started to plead my case, clumsily perhaps but straight from the heart all the same. I told them how I was convinced the recession was a good reason for a cultural project : we could give enjoyment to people who might be feeling rather low and this would help them to face new choices in a more positive frame of mind.

After 15 minutes, the director of the Institut Pasteur summed the meeting up very courteously: *"If I've understood correctly, Mr Casadesus had said that he will not be able to stay with us if we are unable to grant him the funds he needs. And in fact, our president has said that his work is very important, as we all agree. With this in mind, our failure to grant his request, will inevitably mean the end of a fine project."* I was asked to leave the room while they debated and held a vote. Twenty minutes later they offered me 2 million francs more than I had originally requested! I told myself that you should never say "die" : this was a great step forward for the orchestra.

Following this, Pierre Mauroy granted me 20 extra musicians, in spite of the state, which brought the numbers up to 68 musicians. After two years we were given two more, and then another

two, three years later. However, all this still only concerned funds and the structure. We now had to concentrate on hiring talented musicians, no easy task since nobody wanted to come to Lille. Each time I went back to Paris, people would say to me, *"So you're still up North then?"* I would answer back *"You know, it's really fascinating what we're doing"* and hear sympathetic comments like, *"Yes, I'm sure..."*

In 1979 we started to give concerts in hospitals and then in companies. People there said *"What a nice approach!...And look how they've improved...."* but in Paris nobody was interested in improvements: the orchestra was either good or bad and that was it. My ambition was for the orchestra to be complete, but the Parisians had trouble accepting that this could happen when we were not near the capital.

By 1980 the orchestra had built up a good reputation: we had made recordings for radio and television, played to an impressive number of children and had made a dynamic impression at the Aix en Provence festival. At my request, a fellow music-lover, Maurice Schumann, proposed a new name to Giscard d'Estaing, who was visiting the North. At the time, we were called the Orchestre Philharmonique de Lille but the name was no longer representative of our work and mobility: we were already travelling 4-5000 km every year to take our music to the Nord Pas-de-Calais and Belgium. President Giscard d'Estaing therefore granted us the title of Orchestre National, which led to a reevaluation of salaries, amongst other things. This caused an outburst in Paris, where it was unheard of for a national orchestra to be based outside the capital. *"So,"* they said, *"how's the national orchestra? Still at Lille? National and Lille, that sounds funny!"* Fortunately, Lyon and Toulouse followed.

Musicians and travelling entertainers

Lille had no concert hall when the orchestra first began in 1976. However, there was a circus, owned by Jean-Baptiste Thiérier, who was married to Victoria Chaplin at the time. We had an idea, together with an actor-friend called Cyril Robichez, who had helped set up the Théâtre Populaire de Flandres. The idea was to put on a show consisting of a day each of circus, theatre and concerts.

I can't possibly describe the looks on the musicians' faces when they saw their music stands set up under the big top at Lambersat, there on a rain-drenched field surrounded by goats, monkeys, an emaciated camel and a half-dead elephant! Was it a joke? I told them, *"We can start something new if you will agree to play here"*. I should explain that orchestras have strong unions. Fortunately my hard-line CGT union delegate could see the angle we needed to take. After a confab with the F.O. union, all the players who were union members sat down and started to rehearse Stravinsky's "The Firebird" to the sound of dogs barking in the background. It was incredibly hot - 40° under the canvas - so to help us, firemen hosed the tent down while we rehearsed with our shirts off. It was surreal, but it didn't stop us from working with our usual discipline: the musicians may have been demoralised but they were still talented.

At the time, we were still more hopeful than successful. The musicians were all good-quality, although they did not all have the same enthusiasm : some only came because they couldn't find work elsewhere.

However, after our performance in Aix en Provence, we started to receive invitations to play in prestigious venues. At first, we were called in as replacements, then as we did our work well, we started to receive other offers. For our first recording, Henri Dutilleux' First Symphony, we were awarded the 'Grand Prix du Disque'. This was wonderful news for the orchestra and the people financing us, who were happy to see that we were at last receiving recognition.

After that, we got bigger and better. Nord Pas-de-Calais became enthusiastic and lent us increasing support. From the 50 people we had had in our first audience, we attracted 800 season-ticket holders in our second year and 1,200 in our third year. In 1980 we hit the jackpot with 2,000

subscribers, and we have now doubled this figure, giving an average of 133 concerts per year. In addition, I set up a Music & Cinema Cycle to attract young people who wouldn't otherwise come to a classical concert. This meant we had to choose between buying a Dolby projector or investing in new lorries. We chose the projector, much to everyone's delight, and showed a première of the film "*Germinal*".

We did our first international tour in Italy in 1981. We were then invited to the United States and Salzburg. After this last invitation, I pursued the idea of playing to companies. We gave a large number of concerts at Renault, La Redoute, Les Trois Suisses, etc, which earned me a certain number of jibes: "*Oh, it's the orchestra that plays to factories*". This sort of comment rather overlooked the fact that we had already been given the honour of performing in Salzburg and at the Carnegie Hall in New York.

Nowadays, we are housed in a conference hall which we used to have to share, given that it was built 15 years ago to stage public meetings. In France, people often seem to forget that you have to spend three times more to make a multi-purpose hall genuinely versatile. Generally, a theatre is built with the idea of also using the stage for music, dance and even conferences and public speeches. Yet a theatre is not ideally suited to music because theatre work calls for dead-pan acoustics, whereas music needs to be able to reverberate. A concert hall is a musical instrument in itself, and poor acoustics will penalise even the world's best orchestra. This is why a magnificent orchestra like the Amsterdam Concertgebouw only really gives top performances in its own concert hall.

This is why we didn't use to practise in the conference hall. Instead, for fifteen years we had our rehearsals in a seminary in Lille and at various venues on the outskirts. We were squatters, which obviously wasn't the most comfortable of arrangements and did nothing to help the group's cohesion. France's culture is based on literature and does not have a natural inclination towards music. Wherever you go in Germany or Austria you can find modern and classic concert halls. Their orchestras are not necessarily better, but it's a million times easier for them to really play at their best.

The Region has now bought us the hall. However, the battle isn't over yet: as from next July, we're going to have to do some improvements because the hall is lacking 25% of the right acoustics. The practise rooms are on the same floor as the offices. This means that musicians leaving rehearsals can go straight to my office, the works committee, the administrator's office or the finance director's office if they want to.

We receive 52 million francs in annual subsidies and earn 10 million. This represents 20% of our funds, which is an enormous figure for a non-profit association. Our fixed costs represent 83.5% of our expenses before we even start playing. This is why we need to be subsidised, which is natural since we're acting in the public interest.

"We don't like school holidays..."

I have directed part of my efforts towards children. One reason is that we should try to inspire our music-lovers of the future, but also because the region has a lot of delinquency and children with problems at school. There are schools in the Nord Pas-de-Calais where 80% of the classes are poor North African kids. I felt very protective towards them, remembering how I felt at their age. I told myself that we could open doors for these children whose minds were only really open to rap and rock music. By giving them access to a major artform, we could plant seeds of hope for the future, even if the children wouldn't necessarily become dedicated music-lovers. People are always changed in a way by the first concert they go to, especially if somebody helped explain it.

This is what we have done. For years we played to groups of 1-2,000 children in sports halls. However, I believed we should also go into schools. Despite the fustiness of state education, we managed to convince headteachers to let some of the musicians go into their schools. They have shown the children their instruments, talked to them and forged links. I have also welcomed them to

our rehearsals, although the musicians treated this with suspicion at first. However, they quickly understood that we would have to bridge the distance between the orchestra and the children. For this reason, we have sat each of them in turn next to the musicians, where they can see how people learn from their mistakes. They observe how adults also have to start again when they make a mistake, that the conductor is not infallible, and that if he makes the musicians start again from the top, it's not for his own benefit but to enable everyone to reach a common goal, i.e. a high quality performance.

The children have been keen. I have made them sing on several occasions when we have rehearsed without a choir. Of course, this sort of thing is only possible if the children are prepared. We therefore enlist the help of their teachers to introduce the concert in advance and explain the music that we later play to them. Many of the children have gone on to enrol at music schools, dozens last year. There is no delinquency at these schools. Why is this? Because when you have a passion for something, you think of nothing else. Often the children have told me with real sadness in their voices, *"We don't like the school holidays. We can't wait for school to start again."*

They later bring their families to the concerts, and in doing so create new links between the orchestra and the community. These days, 20% of our subscribers are aged 25-30 and come to concerts with their families. They knew the orchestra as children and now have children of their own, which has strengthened the links. This might explain why the Region has given us consistent support: we made the first step towards them and they have rewarded us with considerable affection and loyalty.

We also keep strong contacts with the University of Lille. Ten years ago, we created the Partenariat Associatif Régional, to bring together 45 of the largest regional and national companies, including Elf Aquitaine, Scalbert Dupont, Total, La Redoute and Les Trois Suisses. We all put our heads together to find the best ways of improving the Region's image, participating in cultural events abroad, in Paris or other French regions.

Every man has his trade

These days there are new uncertainties to face, but we are strong in terms of our annual 130 concerts, 4,000 subscribers and the 30 countries we have visited since 1981. We have also recorded many records, often winning prizes in the process.

I never used to have a brief, but I have now asked for one because nothing lasts forever and my whole ambition is for the orchestra to be solid and continue well after I've gone. We have a perfectly professional organisation chart with clear job descriptions. For the first 12 years, everyone did a bit of everything, since we lacked the means, experience and technical expertise to do otherwise. However, I think I can safely say that we are now one of the major orchestras in continental Europe. The fact that everything is going well has led me to call for an audit so that we can evaluate any potential needs and weaknesses and avoid becoming complacent.

I'm not the person who deals with money matters - every man has his trade - but I am kept very well-informed of our financial health and any decisions that are taken. We need to be flexible both in the way we look at things and our management style, but we are obliged to be economical and sometimes fight for the investments we need since we never have the security of knowing exactly how much we will receive.

There are now 122 members of the orchestra, including 22 administrative staff. The administration might seem excessively large until you consider the orchestra's schedule: on average we give 125-130 concerts per year. Each requires 3-4 rehearsals, and the orchestra is on the road for one in three days. We give two concerts per programme at Lille for our subscribers, as well as two or three in the Region. On top of this, we also give concerts elsewhere in France and abroad. In fact, we have just come back from a major tour, which we were able to do thanks to the help of the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs. We played to a very warm reception in Latin America: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, where we found out just how high people's expectations are of France.

Our budget is 65 million francs, whereas a comparable orchestra in Paris would have about 80-85 million. We are required to work for 114 hours per month, whereas the Parisian average is nearer to 100 or 104 hours. In fact, we have just enough money to function properly, i.e. to preserve the quality of the music, respect the public and honour our duty to represent the region and the country.

II - DEBATE

Managing artists

Participant : How do you pick the musicians and what career opportunities are open to them?

J.-C. Casadesus : It is a boon to have been able to offer musicians the prospect of internal promotion, which is very important. In an artistic organisation, new people can rock the boat: the management has to make rational choices whilst considering the effect they will have on the artists, who are extremely thin-skinned. You always have to keep a very careful eye on the group's emotional frame of mind.

The musicians start their careers at a high level, but promotion is fairly slow. It all goes on entrance examinations. The orchestra is very young, with an average age of 37, and I am happy to see that there are many young applicants.

I once listened to 70 trumpet players without hiring a single one, because when you do take someone on, it's for 35 or 40 years. I decided to ask the applicants to play behind a curtain, so that I could judge their musical talent without being influenced by any personal factors. This has enabled us to pick the best, regardless of whether they are French, Rumanian, Polish or Italian.

Each applicant is asked to play behind a screen. We then see the person and talk for a short while to get the feel of his or her personality. We also judge the musicians' curriculum vitae and consider the career paths they have followed. Successful candidates are offered a 9-month training period, which can either lead onto a permanent contract or simply end there. So far, I have withheld a permanent position only three times, once for a solo violinist who played magnificently but was just too eccentric to be leader of a section.

An orchestra has a strong hierarchy : in theory, the solo violin is the head of the string section; then you have the second violinists, who are also respected. Next come the "swamp", or the back-row musicians who are often experts at making demands and tend to hate the musicians in front of them.

There are ten members of the jury that I chair, where the "swamp" has one vote. Nobody joins the orchestra without my approval, but I have to admit there have never been any major disagreements. I listen to the other members a lot because it's the only way to get anywhere, but in the end I have to make the decisions. It is true that you sometimes have to make excuses for being the one with all the authority, or at least justify it with a competence that only comes after years of experience. After 19 years of good, loyal service, I feel that we're on the same side.

A good example is my relationship with the CGT union delegate: we were originally at the Conservatory together, where he played the horn and I the drums. When we met up again 15 years later, he was still a horn-player while I had become a young conductor. This obviously didn't go down too well: we thought along the same lines but the problem was that I was now in charge. However, we respect each other and although we have sometimes had clashes, things are now running smoothly. I managed to make him our general secretary, in charge of human resources. He

fulfils his role with integrity and the fact that he is also a hard-line unionist forces us to keep on our toes.

I have always tried to surround myself with people who have strong personalities.

Participant : What role do women play in your organisation ?

J.-C. C. : There are 35 women in the orchestra and my right-hand man is, in fact, a woman. She is an HEC graduate who started off as our press attaché and public relations officer, before becoming my deputy. Women are just as competent as men and they have the added quality of being direct and not wasting any time: with them things are always black or white, yes or no. Men are more vain and need to have their egos flattered.

Participant : What is your status and how does it fit into the organisational chart ?

J.-C. C. : I am the General Director, as opposed to just Artistic Director, which is what I would be if I were anywhere else. I have a salary of 12 months' pay plus a bonus which is exactly the same for everyone. This system particularly benefits our lower wage-earners, which means for example that the cleaners earn three times their salary at the end of a season.

As for the organisational chart, after the director comes the administrator-deputy manager, the general secretary, who is also the personnel manager, then the director of finance with his team of three people. At my side I have a programme manager and an artistic assistant, who is also the management assistant. There are four secretaries, a technical director and a general agent. Then we have a stage manager who is in charge of the stage hands, some secretaries and a PR officer with three assistants. This PR office deals with the Parisian, national and international press, as well as regional communication. Another person is in charge of the joint committees and advertising to the mass public. We also employ a librarian and a canvasser who travels all over the region selling concerts to town councils.

Finally, amongst the administration and the musicians there are union representatives, as well as a works council, with whom we meet regularly to negotiate and exchange information. The administration is very open.

Participant : What are the relations like between the musicians ?

J.-C. C. : They are often very aggressive, although the musicians do stick together if ever one of them is under threat. I haven't had to deal much with this sort of problem as the more senior musicians have now retired and the three or four who are left still play very well. The others have a competitive spirit, which I forced myself to create and keep up. I did this by setting up a cycle of chamber music and I have been delighted to see that they have formed 13 ensembles. Chamber music means permanent competition for them because it is performed publicly in our hall. Those who don't get to play are rated individually and feel obliged to practise harder.

Managing an orchestra

Participant : How does one conduct musicians ?

J.-C. C. : It's a tricky business. You have to talk as little as possible, simply saying "*piano*", "*forte*", or "*with expression*". You should never teach music theory since the musicians are there first and foremost to provide their technical expertise. ART can then follow naturally.

Group listening in a purely musical sense first of all means saying, "*Don't play. Just listen to your neighbour.*" When you have 100 musicians in front of you who each have a strong character, their talking can spoil the rehearsals. If they lose interest they will talk about everything under the sun from the price of eggs to their tax returns and this causes a commotion. At the beginning, I used to shout. I got silence, but only by annoying everyone and this was very tiring. Now, I simply wait while turning my back to the orchestra and the musicians are generally silent within a few seconds. I

thank them and then we carry on. Perhaps I also have a better mastery of these techniques than before.

The orchestra quickly give you their attention if you're competent, move along quickly and avoid pointless explanations. The conductor is there to keep the rhythm together, which means that he must be able to demonstrate what he wants to hear. I always sing to them. If you want a particular phrasing or rhythm, you have to be able to sing it: this works in any language. There is a woodwind section, brass, percussion and strings. You explain to them why one particular section should wait for another section, which players should be heard above everyone else, who has a solo, who is accompanying and who should play more quietly or show off. Group listening does come. Every musician is, by nature, a bit self-centred, so you have to persuade the orchestra that they are all extremely important but sometimes pastel shades go better than bright red, so to speak: in other words, the colour of their playing has to fit the music.

Participant : Unlike a company, the orchestra has a score to follow. What role does it play ?

J.-C. C. : The score shows each of the parts the musicians are following. The conductor is the only person to have this overall view. My credibility comes above all from my skill in interpreting the score: if I made the orchestra play badly I would be nothing more than a human metronome. What is essential is the conductor's vision of the music. Everyone thinks that this is easy, but in fact it demands an analysis of the score, an authentic appreciation and the ability to justify the choices made.

There is nothing more difficult than stepping into a composer's shoes and seeing whether or not they are too big for you. Composers are the real geniuses, whereas we are merely their slaves. Gide was once asked to define French art in three words. He replied, "Rien de trop" ("Not too much"). This is the French sense of balance.

You have to know what you're aiming for and what is possible. The musicians' main concern is that they are being led to do a good job. Certain instruments have strict limitations and the conductor has to understand. A bad conductor can be like the architect who never listens to the builders' advice, which is obviously wrong. If you make a mistake with an orchestra you're out in a flash like a horse rider thrown from his own horse.

The orchestra and its audiences

Participant : How do you decide on the programmes ?

J.-C. C. : I feel that it is my duty to open people's ears. I have my own tastes, as do the audience and the musicians but they don't always overlap. For me to develop as a conductor, I have to conduct the same symphony 15-20 times during my career, whereas the musicians want a change as soon as they've played it once.

The public would be delighted to hear only Beethoven, Tchaïkovsky and Rachmaninov. However, you run the risk of boredom once you've exhausted all their works.

Then there's contemporary music, which people must have the freedom to love or hate for themselves. To give them this chance, you have to present one or two new pieces from the twentieth century each year: in this way, people can be aware of the changing musical environment. We also have a duty to play works by French composers. Then there are obviously the great classics, the great romantics, great choral works and operas that we perform once or twice a year. In addition, there are certain pieces that the orchestra needs to play in order to improve its quality. Building an orchestra means developing a certain sound and expression. Just like dancers who exercise at the barre every morning, good musicians try to regularly play classic pieces by composers such as Haydn and Mozart which will keep their playing in shape. I therefore try to include music in the programme which will help improve the orchestra's sound.

Planning a season and offering a menu really is the most difficult part. Every year you have to know what will interest the musicians, what they didn't play the year before, what the public liked and what they are likely to love or hate this year. The orchestra reaches a consensus on what it would like to play and we manage to construct a kaleidoscope season around it.

We also try to keep an aesthetic balance by sometimes inviting Russian, German, Italian or English conductors which the audience can judge. On the subject of music critics, a reviled Brahms once said, *"Have you ever heard of a street being named after a music critic?"*

Participant : What relationship do you have with the politicians ?

J.-C. C. : The orchestra has a duty to remember them. It is unique in having been built up practically from scratch. As the Minister of Culture told me in 1975, it was perhaps a cruel gift, but I had a free hand to express my ideas and fight for what I wanted. The musicians are aware of this. In addition, Pierre Mauroy was our president for four years, then Noël Joseph. The president of the Conseil Régional was also president of the orchestra. Nowadays the Green party has delegated a communist senator, Ivan Renar, who has been behind the orchestra right from the start. He is a friend who knows us well, and I managed to get him elected unanimously by the Right, the Centre, the Left and the Greens. He talks about us in superlatives and the orchestra is known in political circles and by other decision-makers. We have all helped each other without exception, and it has been my honour and duty never to be dependent on anyone.

Participant : Have you thought about any particular ways of choosing a successor if ever you were to move on ?

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J.-C. C. : I have had several assistants, but an assistant rarely replaces a director unless he or she is a unanimous choice with all the many decision-makers. These include the financial people, the musicians, politicians and the government. This is why people are always on fixed-term contracts at first: each person has to prove his or her worth above the rest. You might find a wonderful technician who has a firm grasp of music theory but he or she may be unable to get his message across to the orchestra. You also have to accept the fact that all company directors are bound to be unpopular for a time if they have a strong vision and know where they're going. I firmly believe that you should look 5 years ahead and ask yourself what is going to happen, what threats there are, and so on.

The thought of leaving has only crossed my mind once or twice when there were misunderstandings. I'm now reaping the artistic benefits of 20 years' effort and have turned down several offers which were flattering but would have forced me to leave Lille. Perhaps one day I'll leave to conduct a foreign orchestra, but for the moment I'm too attached to this one. I think of it as my baby.

Given that nobody is indispensable, how can we prepare for someone else to take over? Unlike me, my successor will not be the general director, and this is no bad thing, given the workload I have. Instead he or she will be the artistic director. There is rarely the opportunity for someone to build up an orchestra from scratch as I have. It is far more usual for orchestras to simply need patching up and consolidating.

The orchestra will require a good musician who can fill the gap for a while. Every year, we invite a large number of conductors to work with us, luckily for the musicians who would soon be fed up if they always saw the same one. Some of our guest conductors are well-liked and have the musical talent needed to take on the job.

Nowadays, conductors and orchestra directors have two distinct roles. At the moment, our organisation is such that if I were to disappear tomorrow, things could carry on without too much fuss. This is because the administration is solid and I have been able to delegate. I have an administrator to take care of political relations in the noble sense of the term, and a financial director who works with a team. I am only really needed now for negotiating with the important decision-makers.

Participant : How do you see the situation today ?

J.-C. C. : Everything has to be continually renewed and followed-up. There are still parts of the Region which have not yet been exploited, musically speaking. We are doing something about this. By taking a proactive approach to the situation, we can build support for any potential problems

in the future, for example, if ever any of our benefactors let us down. If tomorrow we were to find out that we were not going to be given any more money, I would be in the position to organise a protest by tens of thousands of people. Nowadays, people are proud of their orchestra and talk about it with a great deal of affection. We have toured the world and been on television, but we have also played in places where there are only 500 inhabitants and our concerts were a major event.

I have tried to describe the synergy we have created between traditional concerts, the search for new audiences and contact with children from deprived areas: the musicians go there to introduce their music and then invite the children back to rehearsals and concerts.

My own artistic achievement has been in interpreting the music. I got where I am today by following St. Augustus, and I am first and foremost a conductor of classical and symphony music. In this way the orchestra is my one great love. I have taken it to 30 countries, where we have been applauded by some of the world's major music capitals: Berlin, Tokyo, New York, Salzburg, Buenos Aires, Moscow, Leningrad, Prague, London, Leipzig and Amsterdam. In addition, I often follow the 19th century tradition of accepting invitations to conduct other orchestras and then returning to these places with my own orchestra.

Now that we have gained recognition on the European cultural stage, my ambition is to do everything in my power to ensure that the orchestra continues this way. I also want to ensure that people never forget how powerful culture is as a way of unifying people and nations.