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1

Women Conductors: Credibility in a Male-Dominated Profession

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At one time the mere suggestion that a woman is capable and more than qualified to lead an orchestra would have brought exclamations of disbelief, perhaps even chuckles muffled behind a discreet hand to the mouth. The nineteenth-century "beau ideal" of the conductor as the musical world's flamboyant, handsome cult hero continues to prevail even today in the minds of audiences, thus making it difficult for conductors not in that mold to gain prominence.

Recent attention accorded women conductors might give the impression that they are a phenomenon of the twentieth century, but this is clearly not the case. Tracing the historical path of conducting to its source, we find that modern conducting may have had its beginnings in the convent of St. Vito, a nunnery renowned for its musical performances. Bottrigari, in his publication of 1594, *Il Desiderio*, described a performance given there:

A long table has been prepared, at one end of which is a large clavicembalo, you would see them enter one by one, quietly bringing their instruments, either stringed or wind. They all enter quietly and approach the table without making the least noise and place themselves in the proper place, and some sit, who must do so in order to use their instruments, and others remain standing. Finally, the Maestra of the concert sits down at one end of the table; and with a long, slender and well-polished wand (which was placed there ready for her, because I saw it) and when all the other sisters are clearly ready, gives them without noise, several signs to begin, and then continues by beating the measure of time which they must obey in singing and playing.¹

Most historical references to the earliest examples of musical leadership indicate that a group of performers was kept together by a leader who beat time by hand or by pounding with a stick. Later, the eighteenth-century orchestra was led by the combined forces of the harpsichordist and first violinist from their

respective positions within the orchestra. It was not until the nineteenth century that the independent musical leader—the conductor—became an established figure in orchestral performances.

During most of the nineteenth century, conductors commonly rose from the ranks of composers, often functioning in both capacities throughout their musical careers. Carl Maria von Weber introduced the baton in Dresden during 1817, and Louis Spohr asked the pianist and first violinist of the London Philharmonic Society in 1820 to relinquish their traditional roles for his suggestion of silent conducting. Felix Mendelssohn made significant contributions to standardized baton movements and established the musical leadership of the conductor. By 1840, the cultivated personality had emerged in the conductor Louis Antoine Jullien, who

dressed like a dandy, and facing the audience, conducted from an ornate “throne” with a jewelled stick. An entertainer who knew how to titillate the large, middle-class, pleasure-seeking public, wearing a pair of kid gloves brought to him at the podium on a silver tray.²

Berlioz has been credited with modernizing conducting and successfully demonstrated his clear and precise technique when conducting his own music. In his *Treatise on Modern Instrumentation*, he not only included a chapter on the essential elements of conducting technique but suggested that conductors communicate through gesture and have the ability to read a full score.

Later Wagner dispensed with the white gloves and insisted on standing in front and facing the orchestra. After Wagner, the transformation of the composer-conductor took place, and the virtuosic conductor became a reality in the personalities of Hans von Bülow, Arthur Nikisch, and Karl Richter. They helped establish the charismatic personality as a role model for modern conductors such as Leopold Stokowski, Serge Koussevitzky, and Leonard Bernstein. The frequency with which the names of such conductors appear in print, and the publicity surrounding their personal and professional lives, have helped to establish their credibility in the minds of audiences. Often, concert reviews would include comments meant to create the impression that because these conductors displayed unique qualities they were deserving of admiration and respect. Although many twentieth-century conductors have promoted the personality cult of the *matinée* idol, the most recent group of conductors demands that high musical standards and a confident podium manner form the basis on which they are judged. Perhaps the precedent set by the nuns of St. Vito has come full circle. Four centuries later, their traditions of quality musical performances and silent baton conducting continue to provide inspiration for contemporary performers and conductors, among them women such as Margaret Hillis, JoAnn Falletta, and Catherine Comet.

Hillis, Falletta, and Comet have pursued careers in a profession that is perceived not only as being highly male-dominated, but also, by its very nature,

one that is highly selective. Hillis conducts the Chicago Symphony Chorus and is a frequent guest on the podiums of symphonies in United States cities. The winner of the 1985 Stokowski Conducting Competition, Falletta conducts the Queens Philharmonic (a group she created), the Denver Chamber Orchestra, and the Bay Area Women’s Philharmonic, and also holds the position of associate conductor with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. In addition, she enjoys a busy schedule of guest conducting in the United States and Europe. Catherine Comet is well established as music director of the American Symphony Orchestra, Grand Rapids Symphony, and also is in demand as a guest conductor. They are representative of conductors who depend on their reputations as exacting musicians to sustain conducting careers. The successes they have achieved serve as a testament to their abilities as serious music makers who are contributing significantly to the cultural and musical framework of contemporary society.

Since the sixteenth-century nuns of St. Vito, women have been intermittently active as conductors. Each generation has produced women conductors who were virtually invisible as role models for younger women or who lacked support to build a publicly visible career. Therefore, young women of the nineteenth century together with those of the first half of the twentieth century essentially found themselves breaking new ground. The unwritten rules, protocol, and even mode of dress for male conductors had been established by the end of the nineteenth century, but for women the absence of a track record, together with societal constraints, made the same conditions difficult to establish. Therefore, when Margaret Hillis chose conducting in the 1950s, even her choice of shoes or manner of dress for performances became important details. Not only did she have to know the music, but at the same time she had to forge a new path for women conductors. Her interest in supporting young conductors and her high visibility made her a role model for the current group of women.

Margaret Hillis, born in Kokomo, Indiana, in 1921, enjoyed the support and encouragement of her family from a young age. Her mother, an organist and pianist, encouraged the family to listen regularly to broadcasts of orchestral and operatic performances and often travelled long distances to hear live concerts. Hillis’s earliest musical training included study of the piano, oboe, French horn, and string bass. She began her orchestral experiences at age eight and continued playing in orchestras through her college years.

After receiving an undergraduate degree in composition from Indiana University, Hillis chose to pursue a career in conducting. (Since she had been unable to study or earn a degree in conducting, Hillis felt composition would provide the best preparation for her chosen field.) Her teacher, Bernard Heiden, was not encouraging and suggested she pursue further composition studies at Yale. However, Hillis has recalled his advice concerning her choice of careers:

I conducted a chorus for Sigma Alpha Iota’s contemporary music concert. [Heiden] came back stage afterward and said, “You are a conductor, but there is no place for a woman in orchestral conducting.” It never occurred to me because I had been brought up believing

I could do anything. Heiden advised me to go into choral conducting. "There a woman is acceptable. Otherwise, you are going to go down the drain." He said I could probably get in through the back door, then to the orchestral field. So, I always kept watching that back door.³

Since Hillis had trained as an instrumentalist, her decision to enter the field of choral conducting meant she had to learn the techniques of a new performance medium and its repertoire. In an effort to improve her expertise, she enrolled in 1947 as a student at the Juilliard School, where she studied choral conducting with Robert Shaw and assisted him with his Collegiate Chorale. To gain experience as a conductor, in 1950 Hillis organized the Tanglewood Alumni Chorus, whose performances included a full New York season and broadcasts over radio station WNYC.

The Tanglewood Chorus became the basis for a new group Hillis organized in New York during 1951, formed expressly to perform repertoire she had researched for chorus and small orchestra. It was as conductor of this ensemble, Concert Choir and Orchestra, that Hillis established her reputation and received recognition for her abilities as a conductor.

In 1954, Fritz Reiner attended a rehearsal of the Concert Choir of New York, looking for a chorus to sing with the Chicago Symphony in a performance of Verdi's *Requiem*. Hillis recommended that a group of 120 singers be employed, noting that her present group of 60 was inadequate. Since it was prohibitively expensive to import New York singers, Hillis suggested that Reiner recruit a chorus in Chicago. He agreed on the condition that she would select and conduct the group.

Establishing a choir of professional quality comparable to that of the Chicago Symphony was a difficult task. Hillis initially had a large group of amateurs who required instruction in vocalizing, professionalism, and rehearsal procedure. As she has noted,

I had to refine them myself, and there was a good ten years when I planned and replanned every rehearsal, I don't know how many times . . . just to get that technique developed to the point where rehearsals would run smoothly, where the discipline of the chorus came out of the music making and not out of a whip being cracked over their heads.⁴

As director of the Chicago Symphony Chorus Margaret Hillis has been able to develop the ensemble into a world-class chorus over the last 36 years. In addition to preparing the chorus for all of its performances and recordings with the Chicago Symphony, she was invited to conduct a concert of the combined forces on the orchestra's yearly subscription series.

Although Hillis has had extensive experience as a choral conductor, she retains her primary interest in orchestral conducting. She has been music director of the Elgin (Illinois) Symphony, and has guest conducted the Cleveland, Minnesota, and National symphonies, as well as the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra and the

Figure 1.1
Margaret Hillis, Director, Chicago Symphony Orchestra.



Columbus Symphony. On occasion, she has substituted for conductors of the Chicago Symphony. On one notable occasion during the orchestra's 1977 New York City tour, Hillis conducted Mahler's *Symphony No. 8* with two days' study and rehearsal. Her performance was greeted by the critics with acclaim. The senior critic for the *New York Times* noted in his review that "by the last ecstatic pages she had her forces working for her and Mahler with a burning enthusiasm that radiated a fine glow over the Faustian finale . . . she conducted a triumphant performance that [won] her a standing ovation."⁵

Margaret Hillis has received many awards during her successful career, among them three Grammy Awards, awards presented each year by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for best recording in specific categories of music. In each instance, the Grammy she received was for "Best Choral Per-

formance”: in 1977, for the recording of Verdi’s *Requiem*; in 1978, for Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*; and in 1979, for Brahms’s *Ein Deutes Requiem*.

As Hillis sees it, some of the difficulties she faced as a woman in conducting have dissipated over the years. She finds this encouraging for younger women pursuing conducting careers. Since the social acceptance of female conductors is less of a problem in the 1990s, Hillis feels it is most important that women view themselves as women whose chosen career is conducting. In addition, she advises:

If you make a mistake, don’t blame the world for it. You’ve got to know what you can do. It has to do with your preparation, your abilities. If you can’t do it, go home, sit down, try to figure out why, and then try to correct it. As soon as you start blaming the world, your growth stops. You have no future, none whatsoever.⁶

JoAnn Falletta noted that the question she is most frequently asked is how it feels to be a woman conductor. The scarcity of women on the podium gives the impression it is still a rarity or that the experience must be different from that of a male conductor. Falletta, who views herself as a woman first and a conductor second, responds that she “has no way of knowing otherwise.” The hope of women like Falletta is that similar questions will fade in the future.

The 35-year-old Falletta shares with Hillis a love of the orchestra fostered from an early age. While a young musician in New York City, Falletta felt sure she wanted to be a conductor after hearing orchestral performances in Carnegie Hall.

Around 10 or 11, I fell in love with the symphony orchestra. I realized that the repertoire that I was playing as a guitarist or pianist to my mind was nothing like the repertoire the orchestra had been playing, and I wanted to be the person responsible for helping re-create that great music.⁷

After completing work at the Mannes College of Music and Queens College, Falletta received the Bruno Walter Award, a full scholarship to the Juilliard School, where she continued graduate studies, and earned a master’s degree in music and a doctoral degree in conducting.

In 1985, Falletta won the American Symphony Orchestra’s Stokowski Conducting Competition, which brought with it greater visibility and an increased degree of acceptance. She has sensed that winning the Stokowski Competition was a credential that may have led others to feel more comfortable with the fact that she is a woman; certainly, doors previously closed to her were subsequently opened. Most importantly, it has given her the opportunity to audition for conducting posts and made it possible for her to secure professional career management.⁸

The Stokowski Competition is an important American competition for conductors—particularly important for women, because European conducting com-

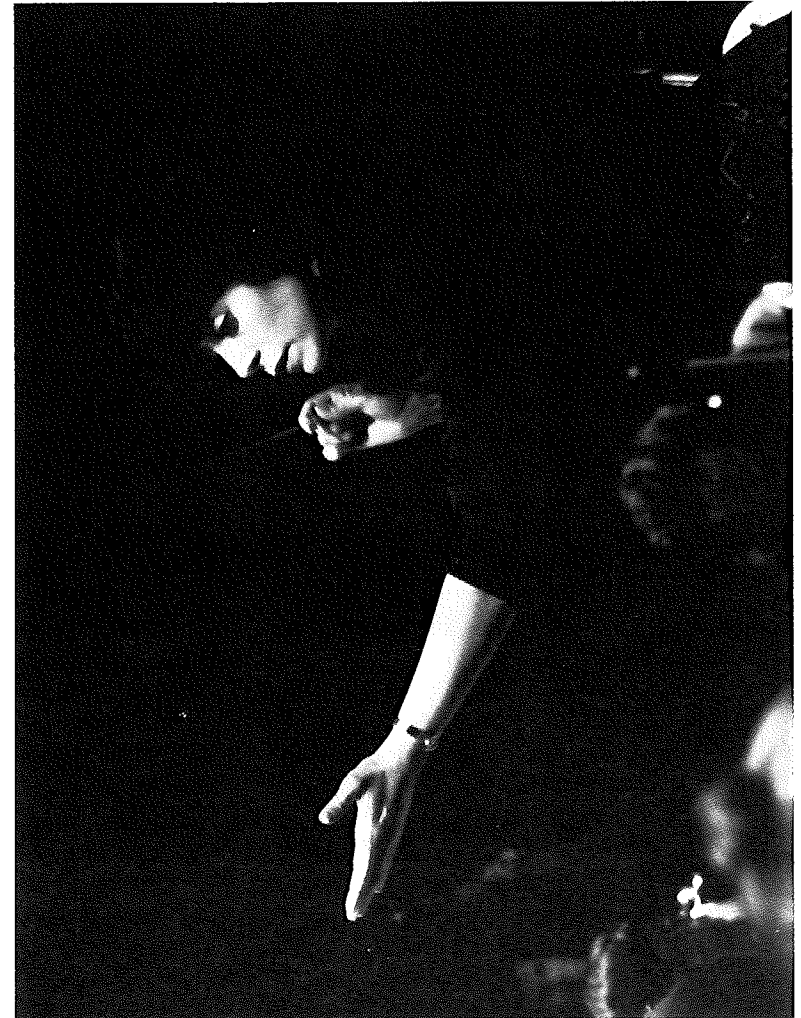


Figure 1.2
JoAnn Falletta, Music Director of the Bay Area Women’s Philharmonic.

petitions do not readily accept women applicants. (Falletta notes that women conductors in Europe face more difficulty than their American counterparts.) Although she feels that winning conducting competitions can help advance a career, it cannot be the only way to gain recognition:

I think that people should not pin all their hopes on a conducting competition as a way of making a career. There are so many people with wonderful careers, wonderful professional lives who have never won a competition, and maybe never even tried. While it does help, I certainly don't think in any way that it is a necessity.⁹

Developing a career in conducting can hinge on the conductor's quotient of resourcefulness. Since an important aspect of the career is finding regular opportunities to conduct—growth comes only with the experience that stems from time on the podium—conductors such as Falletta have found that creating their own ensembles is often necessary.

Now this is a tremendous amount of work, because of course, in addition to studying music and conducting, you are acting as an entrepreneur. You are acting as a manager. You are calling people, making arrangements with halls and hiring people to do performances. It is a great amount of work and some people are suited to it more than others but it certainly helps a person a great deal simply in giving more performing opportunities.¹⁰

Falletta feels that putting together a group and having it succeed can be a significant step in achieving recognition: it creates a showcase for the conductor's abilities, and also conveys to the public a sense that this conductor is an individual gifted with particular initiative.¹¹

Since 1986, Falletta has been the music director of the Bay Area Women's Philharmonic in San Francisco, an orchestra founded in 1982 by Miriam Abrams and Elizabeth Min. The focus of the ensemble's performances has been music by women, some of which is commissioned by the group and most of which is relatively unknown. Falletta and the artistic director choose the programs, which are played to capacity audiences of 1,000. (The artistic director also supervises the National Composers Resource Center, the educational and research arm of the Philharmonic devoted to discovering, documenting, and promoting performances of orchestral works composed by women.)¹²

One of the difficulties that women have faced in developing careers as conductors stems from their socialization: most are not prepared for taking on the ultimate authority vested in the conductor's role. Falletta considers that this may be one of the greatest hindrances still for women who want to conduct. The majority of the female population has not been taught to be demanding as individuals nor to expect that others would submit to a female authority figure. Traditionally, girls are trained to take on societal roles that require them to assume supportive positions and provide nurturing for others. As Falletta states:

Figure 1.3
Conductor Catherine Comet. Copyright © Steven J. Sherman.



I had to learn first that I had a right as the conductor and a responsibility to be demanding, to be exacting and not worry so much about nurturing and supporting people but simply expect the best and ask it from them. That is something that I worked for a very long time to assimilate into my psyche because it is crucial that a conductor be able to do that.¹³

The same sentiments have been expressed by Marin Alsop, recently named music director of the \$1.7-million Long Island Philharmonic, and one of the newest conductors to gain recognition in recent years. Alsop's particular concern centered around the lack of assertiveness that she may have displayed on the podium in the past, and the realization that assertiveness is a key element in achieving success as an authority figure. She believes that it is important to be sensitive but not vulnerable, and to respond with artistic demands when the situation warrants it.¹⁴

Catherine Comet has been successful in demonstrating her authority on the podium and has earned a reputation for being a sensitive and demanding conductor. Her personal intensity, honesty, and integrity, together with good musical

instincts and in-depth score preparation have earned her respect among the orchestral musicians with whom she has worked.¹⁵ Her seriousness about and dedication to conducting began at an early age: like Falletta and Hillis, she too attended concerts and fell in love with the sound of the orchestra: “The sound of the orchestra absolutely fascinated me. I wanted from a young age to make music with an orchestra because of its literature. It was such a magic world, and I wanted to be in that world.”¹⁶

Comet’s earliest musical training began with piano lessons in her hometown of Fontainebleau, France. Her parents were not musicians, but she learned to take advantage of the culture offered in nearby Paris, not only attending concerts and ballets but also visiting its museums. In 1956, at the age of 12, Comet began studies with Nadia Boulanger, who suggested they discuss the score for Beethoven’s *Eroica Symphony* in her first lesson. During her work with Boulanger, Comet studied score analysis, score reading, harmony writing, and counterpoint. Later she attended the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, and graduated when she was 15. Because the only conducting class at the Conservatoire had an audition age of 21 and Comet was only 17 at the time, Boulanger suggested that she enter the Juilliard School, where she went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in music and a master’s degree in orchestral conducting. (In addition to Boulanger, Comet’s principal teachers have included Pierre Boulez, Jean Fournet, and Igor Markevitch.)

Comet has recognized that developing a conducting career requires a commitment to a slow and consistent effort while working at the highest level of music making. She realizes that overnight success or the sudden jump to star status is illusive, and may not contribute to sustaining a career. She has been willing to accept opportunities as they have been presented and has depended on her reputation for serious music making to gain recognition and increased opportunities for conducting. When asked if she had set goals for herself, for example, to conduct a regional orchestra, Comet replied: “Your goals as a musician are not like this. Your goal is making music. You don’t say that ‘for so many years I will be here and do this and then do this and then this.’ You just spend all of your time with the music, studying the score.”¹⁷

Comet’s earliest professional experiences were as the conductor of the Ballet Company of the Théâtre National de L’Opéra de Paris. Later, she became the music director of the University of Wisconsin at Madison symphony and chamber orchestras. She has guest conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the orchestra of the Paris Opéra. In addition, she has been the visiting conductor for the Chamber Orchestra of the National Radio in Iran. In 1966, Comet won the first prize in the International Young Conductor’s Competition in France, and two years later was awarded the Dmitri Mitropoulos International Conducting Prize. (Comet’s successes in France confirm her belief, which diverges from Falletta’s view, that European competitions are open to women.)

In 1981, Comet’s experiences at the University of Wisconsin helped her to win a position as an Exxon/Arts Endowment Conductor with the St. Louis

Symphony. During her two seasons in St. Louis, she conducted concerts annually in the subscription, chamber orchestra, pops and summer classical series, as well as the yearly Missouri tour of the orchestra plus the holiday presentation of Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker* with the Missouri Concert Ballet. Under her direction, the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra won first prize at the Twelfth International Youth and Music Festival in July of 1983.

After leaving St. Louis, Comet became associate conductor of the Baltimore Symphony from 1984 through 1986. In Baltimore she was responsible for the orchestra’s run-out concerts; her duties included conducting community development concerts, Music for Youth concerts, family concerts, and subscription performances. Although Comet was not yet seen as an established conductor, she was able to earn the respect of the musicians. As one of the principal players with the Baltimore Symphony noted:

She’s a very intense person. This is projected in her conducting. It’s a good thing. She has very strong ideas of what she wants. Frequently, for a conductor in her position, the only command they have on the podium comes from what they have to bring to it. The honesty and integrity she has serves her in very good stead.¹⁸

In September 1990 Comet assumed her newest post: music director and conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra in New York City. This appointment is coupled with her position as music director of the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Symphony, where she completed her fourth full season in 1989–90. During her first Grand Rapids season, ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) awarded the orchestra a first prize for regional orchestras for adventuresome programming in contemporary American music, and in her second season, the orchestra was awarded third prize. In addition to conducting in New York and Grand Rapids, Comet has guest conducted the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, National Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, and the American Composers Orchestra.

During 1988, Comet was the co-recipient of the Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Conductors Award, administered by the New World Symphony. She received a significant monetary award for career development that will enable her to travel, and will provide access to a wide variety of artistic resources, plus opportunities to work with and observe master conductors—all designed to enhance her potential for artistic development and personal achievement.

Access to a professional music education was the beginning step for many women such as Hillis, Falletta, and Comet in the achievement of their career successes. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that women found higher education open to them. Traditionally, while males were expected to receive some level of schooling, females were kept in the home where their education, if any, was geared to enhance their prospects for a good marriage.

A proper education for girls included some training in music (usually piano playing), and it was socially acceptable for women to perform in the home, out of the public eye.

The female academies (“colleges for women”) did provide early opportunities for women to be educated beyond the most elementary level. Their curricula, like those of men’s colleges, were based on classical training but included lessons in drawing, painting, and music as concessions for the development of social graces. In addition, during the nineteenth century, the opening of conservatories in the United States was a milestone in the education of musicians. Conservatories not only raised the level of musical education for the first time, but allowed women to study music.

By the turn of the century, the enrollment of women in colleges and universities was at 17 percent; this grew to 34 percent by 1920, and by 1930 women represented 40 percent of those enrolled in higher education.¹⁹ During World War II the absence of men allowed women increased access to educational opportunities, but this was short-lived. Following the war, veterans returned and, with the support of the G.I. Bill, entered the ranks of higher education in record numbers. Once again, women found themselves with limited access to and, in some instances, exclusion from higher education.

However, women were becoming more visible as participants in the wider musical world. Between 1870 and 1900, music teaching as a profession became a major female occupation. During the same period, women instrumentalists, such as the concert violinists Camilla Urso and Maud Powell, set precedents for women performers and campaigned for women’s access to a musical education. In addition, women’s orchestras grew in popularity before the turn of the century and continued to grow in number through the 1940s, providing opportunities for women instrumentalists. In 1888, Caroline Nichols founded the Fadette Orchestra, which traveled extensively until 1920 playing in theaters and vaudeville shows. Later, Frederique Petrides conducted the Orchestrette Classique from 1932 to 1943, and Eva Anderson headed the Long Beach (California) Women’s Symphony Orchestra from 1925 to 1948. Many other cities had women’s orchestras, including Cleveland, Baltimore, New York, and Detroit. However, women as performers were kept on the periphery and not in direct competition with men. Until 1904, the Musicians’ Union legally excluded women from playing in union-controlled public orchestras. Later, affiliation with the American Federation of Labor prohibited this practice.

The visibility of women orchestral performers grew steadily, but their participation in the same ranks as men had a much slower pace. Most women performed with second- and third-tier orchestras or were members of women’s orchestras. One factor that had a negative impact on both men and women musicians was the enduring domination of European performers on the stage, in the orchestra, and on the podium. It was not until the 1930s that American men became accepted and established members of American orchestras. During the same decade, a few women became members of major orchestras. Among them were Elsa Hilger,

who played in the cello section of the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1935; Lois Putlitz, a violinist hired by the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1936; and Ellen Stone, who joined the French horn section of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 1937.²⁰

During the two decades following the end of World War II the growing prosperity of the American economy provided support for the growth of orchestras throughout the United States; in addition, equal opportunity was guaranteed for anyone who wished to pursue an education. The publicity surrounding the appointment of Doriot Anthony Dwyer as the Boston Symphony’s first flute in 1952 and the employment of Orin O’Brien in 1966 as a bassist with the New York Philharmonic (the first women in their respective orchestras) focused attention on the lack of women in the major orchestras, both as players and conductors.

Although few women were conducting in the 1960s, Beatrice Brown earned the distinction of being the only woman under contract to an orchestra in the eastern United States in that era. She was appointed music director and conductor of the Scranton Philharmonic in 1963 and remained in that position until 1970, when she became conductor of the Ridgefield (Connecticut) Orchestra, which she still conducts. In addition, she has guest-conducted in Europe on many occasions.

Brown made her American conducting debut in 1953, leading members of the New York Philharmonic in the American premiere of Vuataz’s arrangement of Bach’s *Art of the Fugue*. Although she received invitations to conduct in the United States, Switzerland, Naples, and Berlin, she encountered difficulties she attributed to being female. According to Brown, women conductors in the 1950s and 1960s were too much of a phenomenon; the lingering nineteenth-century stereotype of the conductor as male cult figure operated against women not just in the minds of the audience, but also for other professionals with whom they worked, such as managers.

Brown experienced difficulty in securing management. In 1962, she received the following response to her inquiry from Ronald Wilford, a representative of Columbia Artists, a major New York concert management firm:

For reasons unknown to us, we have never been able to interest managements in women conductors. There seems no logical reason for this but the situation exists nevertheless. We are perfectly certain that many women conductors are far superior to the males but since we have had no luck at all in handling women conductors, it seems useless to encourage you to have any kind of career with us. It may be that one of the smaller managements with a smaller list of artists could promote you better than we could. . . .²¹

Managers not only spare their clients business details but can effectively increase the visibility and credibility of the conductors on their rosters. Working through management can mean the difference between gaining opportunities to conduct

or spending much time on the periphery of the profession. Antonia Brico experienced the impact of Arthur Judson's refusal to manage her during the 1930s, and thirty years later Brown found some of the same difficulties. Fortunately, the same rejection was not experienced by JoAnn Falletta, who has established a good relationship with her manager. However, it is important to note that only after winning the Stowkowski competition was she able to secure a manager.

Falletta feels that the management staff see no differences in working with her, and although it would be possible for her femaleness to be exploited, Falletta has said this is not the case: "He has never relied on the fact that I am a woman to sell the product. The product has to be a musically good one. I would never have allowed that to happen, . . . and he has been very cooperative."²² Comet was offered management while she was an Exxon/Arts Endowment (Affiliate Artist) conductor in St. Louis, and Hillis has maintained a long-standing relationship with her manager.

A difficulty faced by all American conductors has been the lack of available training for high-level positions in the United States. Although conservatory and university music departments have begun to offer graduate degrees in conducting, there is a consensus among conductors that key aspects in their preparation are overlooked or lacking. In general, most music schools offer a thorough background in musical theory, analysis, history, and score study. However, it is difficult to accumulate podium time in a university setting when the commitments and priorities for student orchestras cannot accommodate more than one or two short appearances by an assistant or apprentice conductor. Academia cannot produce an ideal setting for gaining extensive experience both on the podium and in administration. Therefore, aspiring conductors must work hard after graduation to find opportunities to become experienced artists, a requirement for attaining a permanent post.

According to statistics compiled annually by the National Association of Schools of Music, conducting was listed for the first time as a degree program at the doctoral level in 1983–84, with 23 institutions reporting 31 male and 4 female graduates. In 1984–85, the same number of institutions graduated 36 male and 3 female doctoral conducting students, and in 1985–86, the last year of available statistics, the institutions graduated 44 doctoral conducting students. It is important to note that not all conducting graduates prepare for a career in professional orchestral conducting since a variety of possibilities exist in teaching at the college level, conducting bands, choral conducting, and college orchestras. However, these programs do provide the framework for conducting study at the highest level in the system of American universities; considering the numbers of graduates, it is clear that very few conducting students would have gained significant time and experience on the podium in this context.

In her studies at Juilliard, JoAnn Falletta noted the lack of podium experience as a problem but also points to another inhibiting factor:

I know that Juilliard thought long and hard about accepting a woman in the program because their goal was to have as a graduate of the program a conductor who would

make a significant impact on the musical world and have a large career. They were not sure that a woman was in a position to do that.²³

In addition to conducting programs in universities, other opportunities are open to conductors in the United States. Most of these are designed for post-graduate work and expect that a participant would have completed the necessary training in subjects such as analysis and music theory, and have podium experience. The Affiliate Artists Conductors Program (formerly the Exxon/Arts Endowment Conductors Program) provides experience for conductors in the early stages of their careers. Conductors complete an audition in several stages, and a small group of participants is selected to work with orchestras on a full-season basis for up to three years, working under the guidance and supervision of an experienced conductor and the orchestra's administrative staff. Since the program's inception in 1973, 80 percent of its conductors have assumed full-time positions with American symphonies and opera companies. Some of the program's graduates include Victoria Bond, music director of the Roanoke (Virginia) Symphony; Paulette Haupt-Nolen, artistic director, Opera/Music Theater Conference, Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theater Center; Antonia Joy Wilson, music director of the Women's Composer's Orchestra (Maryland); Rachel Worby, music director of the Wheeling (West Virginia) Symphony; and Catherine Comet.

Additional opportunities for young conductors include study at the Tanglewood and Aspen Music festivals, the American Symphony Orchestra League Workshops, and the recently created Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute for Young Conductors and Instrumentalists. These programs offer a variety of opportunities to study and conduct under guidance of eminent conductors. Despite the quality of these programs, they do not meet the needs of day-to-day contact with the operations of an orchestra. There needs to be a parallel track for conductors comparable to that of a singer or an instrumentalist who must practice every day to achieve and maintain a high level of artistry.

Gustav Meier, music director of the Greater Lansing (Michigan) and Bridgeport (Connecticut) symphonies, believes that young conductors should have more chances to observe and work with top conductors: "I think it would be great if people who are in top positions would really take on some of the conductors, not just give them a job, but guide them in their careers."²⁴

The chance to work with a master teacher or mentor is certainly influential for a young conductor. Margaret Hillis lacked a master teacher early in her career. Hillis believes that such a person can make a profound difference, and recalls that her later studies with Otto Werner Mueller gave her the confidence to conduct orchestras. Although it is possible for women to gain access to mentors, Hillis feels that women may have to display even better abilities than men must to ensure a mentor's support.

Beatrice Brown found her studies with Stokowski and Koussevitzky at the Berkshire Festival valuable in their own right, as well as stepping-stones in building her career. Her association with these master teachers was important

to her professional development. She believes the type of training offered by experienced conductors should follow the collegiate experience and recommends that a conducting student study with a first-rate teacher such as Hermann Scherchen:

You have to be with a teacher like that and completely follow his/her lead. You must know what they do professionally and work with them. That means attending all the rehearsals and concerts they participate in plus studying. . . . An association like that involves not only the teaching and the study of music but also involves psychological help and other areas as well that relate to your future work.²⁵

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the demands for social and economic changes succeeded in focusing attention on populations that felt discouraged, and who considered themselves essentially barred from the mainstream. Women began to expect that educational opportunities afforded them would open up higher-level and better-paying positions. In direct consequence, women's participation in music in general gained much credibility during the 1970s. A group of conductors that became the focus of media attention helped to establish women on the podium, and importantly, provided role models for others who later chose conducting as their life's work. The group included Judith Somogi, Victoria Bond, Eve Queler, and Sarah Caldwell. These women chose different paths to conducting, but they have shared many of the same difficulties: their greatest obstacle was gaining the experience needed to launch a career.

Traditionally, the realm of opera represents a training ground that provides diverse musical opportunities. Initially, Eve Queler and Sarah Caldwell found difficulties in gaining conducting positions with well-known opera companies and, as a result, created their own. Queler founded the Opera Orchestra of New York in 1968 and debuted with the ensemble in 1972 at Carnegie Hall. She has chosen a less-than-traditional approach to presenting favorite operas by staging performances in concert versions only. Caldwell started her own opera company and took on the responsibilities of music director, stage director, stage designer, and whatever else needed to be done. The Opera Company of Boston has earned its reputation by presenting relatively unknown or obscure operas in productions that have been praised by the critics. Caldwell has concentrated most of her efforts on directing her company, but since the 1970s Queler has guest-conducted symphony orchestras in several U.S. cities and in Europe. One of Queler's guest-conducting experiences is typical of the frustrations confronting women conductors during the transition period of the 1970s. She remembers, "I had a great success conducting the San Antonio Symphony. When the conductor died six months later and I applied for the job, I couldn't even get an answer."²⁶

The late Judith Somogi earned her reputation as an opera conductor and followed a career path that involved her in a variety of musical experiences. She cited her work with the Oberlin Music Theater in opera and musical theater, a position with the American Symphony Orchestra under Stokowski, and expe-

riences directing Gilbert and Sullivan musicals Off-Broadway as significant in shaping her career.

Somogi went to the New York City Opera as a rehearsal pianist in 1966; she later became an assistant to Julius Rudel with responsibilities for many aspects of the company's repertoire. In 1974, she debuted at the New York City Opera directing the *Mikado*. From 1981 through 1987, Somogi was first Kapellmeister at the Frankfurt Opera; her only American appearances during the same period were with the Tulsa Opera. At the time of her engagement with the Frankfurt Opera, Michael Gielen, general music director of the Frankfurt Opera (1977–82), stated: "We took her because she was the best. Our orchestra has some old experienced hands who cannot be taught very much. Within five minutes she had them on the edge of their seats."²⁷ Somogi's high profile undoubtedly contributed to the credibility of the woman conductor.²⁸

Victoria Bond considers that her perspective as a composer has helped her successes on the podium by providing her insight into the construction of orchestral works, and deeper sensitivity in her musical interpretations. Bond has steadily built a reputation as an orchestral conductor, accepting engagements as a guest-conductor of orchestras in the United States. Since 1986, she has been music director of the Roanoke (Virginia) Symphony Orchestra. During her tenure the orchestra has expanded its concert series, added five full-time string musicians to perform in schools, tripled its budget, and now performs before capacity audiences. Initially, she was apprehensive about how she would be accepted in Roanoke and felt that as a woman conductor she would find resistance. She decided to let her abilities as a musician speak for her and made demands on the orchestra during her audition; as a result, the musicians responded favorably, and they have grown to respect her as a conductor.²⁹

However, during the early years of her career in the 1970s, Bond found that musicians in orchestras were less accepting of women on the podium. She cited the relatively older age of the players as an influencing factor in a perspective that perceived men's and women's roles as separate but not equal. Since men form the majority in almost all orchestras, some have felt threatened by a woman who was in a position to give direction and leadership. However, her prescription to overcome this bias is clear, and positive:

The best thing you can do is set a good example. Be serious about your work and focus your energies on it, not on what other people think of you. Once people realize you're serious about what you're doing—and that doesn't mean without a sense of humor; that just means that you're sincere and your love of music is very profound—they respect that.³⁰

Victoria Bond's success demonstrates that being given time and opportunities for making music can lead to positions at higher levels and acceptance based on artistic standards.

Although progress for women in conducting has been slow, their participation

Table 1.1
Women Conductors in American Orchestras—Comparison 1980 and 1989

Orch. Class	Type	Budget 1989	No. of Orch. 1980	Women Cond. 1980	No. of Orch. 1989	Women Cond. 1989
A	Major	over \$3,600,000	30	0	39	0
B	Regional	\$1,000,000 - \$3,600,000	38	1	65	0
C	Metropolitan	\$280,000 - \$1,000,000	103	1	154	2
D	Urban	\$135,000 - \$280,000	104	2	156	5
E	Community, College and Youth	less than \$135,000	836	21	558	33
TOTALS			1,111	25	972	40

is on the increase. Table 1.1 shows that in 1980, of 1,111 orchestras, 25 were conducted by females, and in 1989, 40 out of 972 orchestras had women conductors.³¹

Most of the positions held by women have been with Urban (D) and Community (E) orchestras, but the increase in females leading Metropolitan (C) orchestras has more than doubled. Furthermore, while the only Regional (B) orchestra led by a woman in 1980 was the Opera Orchestra of New York organized by Eve Queler, by 1989 Catherine Comet had been music director of the Grand Rapids Symphony for three seasons and British-born Iona Brown had assumed the position of concertmistress and conductor with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. Presumably, if the trend continues, more women will attain positions with orchestras, and those with experience will move on to bigger situations.

The growing number of American women conductors offers some encouragement for charting a trend, but it is also worth noting that women in other countries have been successful in making careers in conducting. Yip Wing-sie has been called the "first lady" of conducting in Hong Kong, where she directs the Hong Kong Philharmonic.³² She received her earliest training at the age of four as a pianist; later, she studied the violin, and in 1982, earned a diploma in violin and conducting from the Royal College of Music in London. During 1983, she entered the University of Indiana and earned a master's degree in music in conducting. Zheng Xilaoying is the chief conductor of the Central Opera Theatre in Beijing and serves as chairman of the Conducting Department of the Central Conservatory in Beijing.³³ She studied both operatic and orchestral conducting in Moscow. The Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, one of Russia's prestigious musical organizations, is conducted by Veronika Dudarova, who also serves as its artistic director.³⁴ Without resorting to excessive conjecture, one may assume

that societal constraints on musicians and a lack of high-level training have been difficulties faced by women not only in Hong Kong, Beijing and Moscow, but in many other locations. While the rarity of women conductors abroad is apparent, it seems possible that their numbers will increase just as has happened in the United States over the course of time.

The many factors—professional and personal—that affect conductor appointments at any level have equal impact on all aspirants to the podiums. An important consideration has been the increasing number of conducting graduates from American universities and colleges. As in many branches of music, there are fewer positions open during any one year than those hoping to find employment; often, the small salaries or lack of salary altogether may prohibit some from taking positions without more security. And, although many orchestras have enjoyed growth during the 1980s, others have found the time to be a difficult one in which to sustain operations, and some have been forced to disband. Another influence has been the desire on the part of many American orchestras to hire a European or Asian conductor, one who can appeal to the long-standing mystique that audiences and boards of directors find appealing. Collectively, the above factors must enter into the considerations of aspiring conductors, for they are factors in a very competitive market. Elizabeth Green, professor emeritus of conducting, University of Michigan, has summed up the important traits for conductors to have in a highly selective profession:

Musical competence, solid orchestral leadership, fine manual technique, in-depth score knowledge, personal appearance, excellent rehearsal technique, and performance flair—all of these contribute toward success in the competitive market.³⁵

Possessing the right personal and professional characteristics is important. However, presenting them to an orchestra's board of directors effectively, so as to receive an offer of a position, can be another matter. Orchestra managements are a curious mix of volunteers and professionals who have the life of a symphony orchestra as their primary concern, but each group has varying directions and priorities for achieving the same end. Ultimately, the board of any orchestra is primarily concerned with the audience reaction to a conductor, although it may also take into consideration the opinions of the players. The conductor must be very intuitive and astute when meeting with boards for the first time, and later be able to develop a working relationship that can promote an orchestra's growth.

Although acceptance by the orchestra's board has been an elusive factor for many women conductors, resistance to females seems to be diminishing in the management ranks and has been an additional influence in the trend toward more women on the podiums of American orchestras. Factors that no longer remain obstacles for women in conducting have not suddenly diminished but have taken many years to change. In education, women's enrollment in higher education has reached 50 percent of the population in colleges and universities. Importantly,

conducting can be studied at a high level in graduate programs in the United States. Still, any increases in women's participation, particularly in male-dominated professions such as conducting, will depend on more girls choosing nontraditional professions and taking advantage of the openings available to them. Therefore, it is critical that women conductors attain an even higher profile that can emphasize their contributions as role models.

A second encouraging change has been the increase of musical women before the public as their numbers continue to grow as players in the orchestral ranks. Undoubtedly, blind auditions are a major contributing factor here.

Family obligations remain a concern for women in conducting, as they do for all working women. Although men may have the same concerns, women are most often asked about them, and societal expectations continue to project that women will remain the primary care providers for the family. A conductor's obligations often mean that marriages may have to accommodate long periods of separation and frequent travel. Often the family is based in one city while the conductor travels to different conducting locations; for example, Falletta and Bond maintain heavy schedules of conducting and commute from their homes. Comet commuted to Grand Rapids from Philadelphia, but in past situations in other cities, it has been her husband who has commuted to his work in university administration.

Children present a particular concern since their presence frequently means taking time off. Having children is often a choice that must be made at a time when the career is gaining momentum or has reached a level of visibility that would be difficult to recover after a hiatus. Comet, who has a child, chose to devote time to her pregnancy and child-rearing, and returned full-time to conducting when her daughter was two years of age. However, Falletta is concerned about taking time away from her career, and Bond has decided that raising children and having a conducting career are incompatible.

One of the difficulties faced by women in conducting will undoubtedly endure for the foreseeable future: women are criticized for being more emotional than men. There are some who would point to this and claim that it weakens the ability of women to be firm, aggressive, and demanding; that under pressure they will resort to uncontrolled outbursts on the podium. In addition, women are socialized to be nurturing, supportive, and intuitive, while men traditionally have been expected to act out their thoughts and take risks, all while displaying total control and unemotional responses. Of the qualities displayed by both genders, which would be desirable for a conductor to possess? Is it possible for any person to be aggressive and intuitive? Can a nurturing personality ever possess the charisma that so appeals to audiences? Would a nurturing personality be more successful in understanding the psyche of the composer, and so present a musical interpretation that has energy and deep meaning to the audience? If conductors are willing to work for acceptance based on artistic and musical standards, then they can look forward to honestly expressing their true natures on the podium without the interference of extra-musical factors.³⁶

Fortunately for the current generation of conductors, the phenomenon and uniqueness of women on the podium has largely dissipated. Much of this can be attributed to the efforts of the women who forged new ground in the 1970s. It is evident that concern over women's stamina and intellectual capacity has been replaced by acceptance based on artistic and musical criteria. More objective treatment by the media has helped attract attention to the contributions of women in conducting and has begun to present them in a more positive light, and the newest group of conductors has contributed to the change by defusing discussions of problems with regard to gender. As they take on higher-level conducting posts and continue to demand high levels of music making from themselves, women can assume positions as models and mentors for those who will follow. And they will be able to expect—rightly—that their work will be evaluated according to artistic and musical criteria alone.

In general, mainstream pressures for the equality of women continue, but considerable movement toward equity must take place before a social balance is achieved. In conducting, the key to achieving absolute parity for women lies in the coming together of all essential elements: access to education, availability of mentors, continuing blind orchestral auditions, discovering a receptive professional climate in which to build a career. Once this occurs, we will have eliminated the need to include any future discussion of conductors solely or chiefly on the basis of gender.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Elliot W. Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting: In Theory and Practice* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1988), p. 492–93.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 498.
3. Margaret Hillis, interview by author, Chicago, Illinois, 23 February 1982.
4. Quoted in W. B. Furlong, *Season with Solti* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 214.
5. Donal Henahan, "Fills in for Solti on Mahler," *New York Times*, 1 November 1977, p. 1.
6. Hillis, interview, 1982.
7. JoAnn Falletta, taped response to a questionnaire, spring 1989.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Nan Washburn was artistic director from 1980 through summer 1990. A new appointment will be made in spring 1991.
13. JoAnn Falletta, taped response to a questionnaire, spring 1989.
14. Heidi Waleson, "Music, Maestra, Please," *New York Times*, 16 April 1989, sec. 2, p. 36.
15. Christopher Swan, "Catherine Comet: Moving into the Majors with Determination and Distinction," *AWC News/Forum* (Spring-Summer 1987), p. 10.
16. Quoted in Chester Lane, "Baltimore's Comet: Team Player on the Podium," *Symphony Magazine* (February-March 1986), p. 17.

17. Catherine Comet, telephone interview by author, spring 1989.
18. Quoted in Swan, "Catherine Comet," pp. 10–11.
19. P. Stock, *Better Than Rubies: A History of Women's Education* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1978), pp. 223–25.
20. Carol Neuls-Bates, "Women's Orchestras in the United States, 1925–35," in *Women Making Music*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 362.
21. Quoted in Barbara Jepson, "American Women in Conducting," *Music Clubs Magazine* (Autumn 1976), p. 13.
22. Falletta, taped response, 1989.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Quoted in Martin Bookspan, "A Dialogue on Conductor Training," *Symphony Magazine* (December 1984), p. 82.
25. Beatrice Brown, telephone response to a questionnaire, winter 1982.
26. Quoted in Waleson, "Music Maestra, Please," p. 36.
27. Quoted in Bernard Holland, "Judith Somogi, 47, Conductor: Among First Women on the Podium," *New York Times*, 26 March 1988, p. 38.
28. Judith Somogi died in New York City on 23 March 1988.
29. Mary Huffly, "Victoria Bond: New York to the New South," *AWC News/Forum* (Spring-Summer 1987), p. 7.
30. Victoria Bond, taped response to a questionnaire, fall 1981.
31. Information from *The Musician's Guide: The Directory of the World of Music*, 6th ed. (New York: Music Information Services, Inc., 1980), and *Musical America's International Directory of Music and Musicians* (New York: ABC Leisure Magazines, Inc., 1989).
32. "How Music's First Lady Conducts a Busy Week," *Hong Kong Sunday Morning Post* 1 May 1988, p. 10.
33. "Operatic Double Bill from Beijing in Mandarin," program notes from Hong Kong's Central Opera Theatre, January 1988.
34. Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting*, p. 540.
35. Elizabeth Green, *The Dynamic Orchestra: Principles of Orchestral Performance for Instrumentalists, Conductors, and Audiences* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987), p. 153.
36. John Diamond, *The Life Energy in Music*, vol. 1 (Valley Cottage, N.Y.: Archaeus Press, 1981), pp. 89–98.

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