

Stocks and Batons

A Wall Street broker decided to use his wealth to realize his lifelong desire to conduct a symphony orchestra. He had the financial analysts of his firm do some research and found that the New York Philharmonic had a very poor profit record and was ripe for take over.

He approached them through an intermediary and they were enthusiastic about the prospect of a million dollar investment in the orchestra. Enthusiasm waned when they learned that the new owner would insist on conducting. They declined politely but firmly.

The industrialist tried Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia with the same disappointing results. In fact, he tried every orchestra, large and small, in the United States and its possessions. (For tax reasons he stayed away from Canada and Mexico and support for living composers gave European orchestras very bad futures.)

No ensemble would entrust their reputation to a man who thought that "lento" was an Italian soup and "sonata" was a Japanese automobile. Wait...Sonata IS a Japanese automobile.

He despaired that his fantasy would be forever unfulfilled until he dialed into the Manhattan mainframe from Zurich to check some figures. The computer analyst on the other end of the line had majored in oboe at MIT and suggested that he form his own orchestra.

He scrambled the pilot of the company jet and within a hours he was back in New York. An ad in the Times, Voice, and Sun proclaimed the formation (and circumstances) of the new orchestra and announced the time and place for auditions. Nobody came.

Undaunted, he retreated to corporate headquarters and called in his vice presidents to rethink the situation.

"What is an orchestra?"

"A hundred musicians."

"Where can I find a hundred musicians?"

"At local 802!"

He jumped in his limousine and arrived at the office of the American Federation of Musicians just before they opened for the day. He had already decided that he would hire the first hundred musicians who passed through the door.

As it happened, there was a Philharmonic audition that week and the first 99 musicians were tuba players. The hundredth member of the orchestra played

bass guitar. The ensemble was hired and the following day rehearsals began. The music on the stands was Beethoven's Fifth.

At the first downbeat, the familiar, yet extraordinarily sinister, motive was heard. The deep sonorities of the massed tubas projected a musical shadow that few are favored to hear. Fate never knocked on the door quite like this

before! They continued for a few bars until the conductor stopped the orchestra and observed, "this doesn't sound like Beethoven."

They rehearsed another twenty minutes and the conductor became increasingly impatient with the ensemble. He concluded that the problem was with his rehearsal technique. It wasn't strict enough. He called for exact entrances on the downbeats. More irksome, he insisted on precise cutoffs when he stopped to make corrections or comments. Because of his sloppy stick technique it was almost impossible to tell when he stopped so he became increasingly harsh in his criticism.

As the rehearsal disintegrated everyone was annoyed but the bass guitar player became particularly irritated by the conductor's tirades. He began to mumble something about being "bummed out." After all, he had played with the "Stones" and backed up Stevie Wonder in Helsinki. He didn't need this. When the next cutoff came he launched into 8 bars of a "slap-funk-distortion-fuzz" riff that he had learned from Pat Metheny.

The conductor locked into a stance that has not been seen since the guillotine was outlawed in France. He quivered with rage as he waited for the sound to stop. He panned across the orchestra with an icy stare fixing his glance on each musician in turn. Finally, he cast his eyes like daggers down into the score and screamed "When I identify the person who did that, they will be fired and their stock options will be canceled."

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