



Teachers, here is additional background information about conductors that you may find helpful. This material can be used by teachers unfamiliar with elements of the orchestra, and/or as supplemental information for students seeking more information. If you or your students would like more materials about topics relating to music and the orchestra, please contact the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra by calling (304) 561-3531 or please visit our website at <http://wvsymphony.org>.

The Conductor

Since the conductor is the leader of the symphony orchestra, he/she stands on a podium, center stage, in front of the orchestra. The orchestra members enter first to warm up their instruments by playing them. Then the concertmaster enters to show that it is time for a final tuning. When the orchestra is tuned, the conductor enters. This shows us the concert is ready to begin.

The conductor is the one who helps all of the instruments play at the same tempo (speed). He/she helps the orchestra understand what the composer wanted for each piece of music. A conductor moves his/her hands and arms in certain ways that the orchestra understands. The conductor holds a baton, or stick, to help the orchestra members see the motions.

The conductor decides which music will be played in each concert. He/she helps choose the musicians who will play in each concert. The conductor must be well prepared before leading the orchestra. Most conductors have had many years of college training.

Before the orchestra is ready to play a concert, it must practice with the conductor. The conductor must study the music (score) of the piece(s) to be played. During the rehearsals, the conductor leads the orchestra through the music. He/she tells the orchestra how certain parts should be played.

At the end of a piece, the conductor will step off the podium. When the audience applauds, he/she will bow and thank the orchestra. The conductor leaves the stage first.

The conductor must coordinate all of the instruments so they play the same tempo and interpret what the composer intended for each piece of music. The conductor gestures to the orchestra to indicate other interpretations, such as louds and softs, or smoothness of playing. The conductor also cues the musicians to begin or stop playing. Each conductor develops a unique, personal style of conducting.

The conductor uses what is called a *full score* when he or she conducts the symphony. The *full score* contains the music for all of the instruments. Sometimes a conductor has memorized the entire score and does not use it during the performance.

The conductor must know what the orchestra sounds like in the performance hall so it will be balanced correctly. Most conductors have been successful instrumentalists before they began conducting orchestras. In addition to many years of college, most conductors have had graduate school training.