

Part III : Reflections – analysis of historical sources

Taking into account all the information that has been presented, one can acknowledge the significant differences between eighteenth century and today's leadership practices. As the historical sources reveal, eighteenth century musicians thought leadership practices had an important musical impact. They were required to adopt different methods of leadership, from time-beating to leadership from the keyboard or the violin. All depended on the context. The main characteristic of leadership practices in the eighteenth century lies in the fact that a variety of solutions were offered depending on the kind of music that was played or on the performance's context. If nowadays orchestral performances are under the direction of a conductor for all musical contexts (opera, symphonic repertoire, concerto, etc.), eighteenth century musicians were much more flexible in regards to how the music had to be led, finding one method highly more effective for a particular context. Pragmatism was the watchword.

Time-beating was used during the eighteenth century but often as a necessary evil, being unavoidable in certain contexts (large-scale and church choir performances) when the musicians were unable to perform accurately using their ears alone. It was surely not used because musicians didn't know what to play or how to play, but rather not knowing when to play it! Time-beating thus indicated only the rhythmic impulse, not other musical parameters. It is no coincidence that all sources bear witness of simplicity in the practice of time-beating in the eighteenth century, since it should be as efficient as possible, enabling only cohesive

playing in problematic performance contexts. Given that it had a negative effect on the music and on the musicians, the leader had to choose wisely if it was absolutely necessary, because, from these leadership practices, time-beating was by far the one that has been frequently called into question. There has been a lot of criticisms regarding time-beating; musicians were even trying to find alternative solutions to solve the problem. Indeed, time-beating was often a distraction for the musicians preventing them from listening to the soloists or the singers. Indeed, with the presence of time-beating, the dynamic within the orchestra changed drastically. Involving at times noisy sounds made by the stick or the hand of the Kapellmeister hitting the floor, the rim of the stage or his music stand, time-beating was seen as an enemy of the music, destroying the enchantment of the theater. It had also a negative effect on the psychology of musicians, some considering this method humiliating.

In contrast, the process of leading while playing enabled the leader the possibility to participate actively, giving acoustic signals that had clear meanings for the performers. Eighteenth century musicians were convinced that playing was far more useful in conveying musical ideas and keeping a steady tempo, then by long explanations and visual signs. By playing along with their colleagues, leaders could be involved in the actual performance and could invite them to be more involved themselves. In fact, every musicians had different responsibilities according to their role in the orchestra. As I mentioned in the second part, the high-string players had to work as a team, same as with the continuo group. The winds, often responsible as soloist, had to exert leadership within their small sections and perhaps would have also led the orchestra when playing a solo. It is this team work that is representative of eighteenth century orchestral leadership, not time-beating. Thus, the liberty accorded to the

musicians was part of the musical spirit of the time. All musicians had weight in the performance. The composer, an intrinsic leader, didn't feel obliged to exert leadership constantly, demonstrating a great deal of faith towards the musicians, sometimes even leaving his position at the first keyboard and walking away to listen. In addition, if musicians gained more freedom in this orchestral playing dynamic, this liberty was exacerbated in regards to the soloist. Actually, at the opera, the leader should have been at the service of the singing actor, without imposing anything to him. In instrumental contexts, it was completely normal for the soloist to be most of the time the leader, since you are never as well served as when you serve yourself!

Historical sources reveal one essential aspect of leadership in the eighteenth century, the leader's competence. In fact, eighteenth century orchestras needed someone with the proper expertise. Before seeking for a leading position, a musician had to acquire a professional experience by playing for many years in great orchestras and should gain the respect of its peers. It may be the reason also why composers were leaders *par excellence*, since they were the most knowledgeable musicians. Leaders had to have insights in every aspects of music : among other things they had to know all the different kinds of musical styles, be able to improvise in different genres, have great sight-reading skills and be convincing players.

Finally, we observe that even if time-beating practices have been criticized for their negative impact on music for centuries around Europe, there are places like the *Académie Royale de musique* or the *Concert spirituel* in France that conscientiously chose time-beating as the ultimate way to control the orchestra. Inevitably, the way a monarchy treats his

population is reflected in the manner a dictatorial *maître de musique* deals with his orchestral musicians. Today, luckily, we have the luxury to choose, living in a democratic society: do we desire the music to suffer from the conductor's yoke ?

The question that would interest players of today is certainly : are eighteenth century historical leadership practices relevant for today's performance practice? If these practices were so meaningful for them, why would it be different for us? Thus, historical leadership practices lead us to reconsider our ways of exerting leadership in musical contexts today and inspire us more convincing ways of performing music of the 18th century.