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**THE SUCCESS STORY OF FINNISH CONDUCTORS:
Grand Narratives and Small Stories on Global Leadership**

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Abstract

How come that a small country of five million people, located in the outskirts of European cultural mainstreams, has brought a notable number of well-known conductors, such as Paavo Berglund, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Sakari Oramo, and Osmo Vänskä, among others, to the world? What is the secret? The answer depends on whom you ask and who is asking: cultural policy makers, music instructors, conductors, composers, orchestra musicians, or music critics. We draw in this study both on our earlier orchestra field research and on our recent and ongoing interviews with the gatekeepers of the classical music field in Finland. Our theoretical perspectives include both institutional and leadership theory. We were able to construct two grand narratives on the success of Finnish conductors. We call them 'National Product' and 'Maestro'. The grand narratives suggest two powerful explanations of why so many Finnish conductors have been so successful world-wide. The National Product narrative emphasizes the role of historical and institutional conditions. The conductors are seen as purposeful outcomes of collective national efforts, such as national identity building, cultural policy, and cultural institutions, such as the Sibelius Academy and its exclusive conductor class. The Maestro narrative emphasizes the role of strong, talented and skilful individuals, who can thank other musical heroes for the success, such as the world-famous composer Jean Sibelius. Beyond these, we were able to see less grandiose constructions of conductor success, such as good early start, favourable organizations,

suitable gender, eroticism, and good luck. We conclude that the global success of Finnish conductors is embedded in complex interactions between the grand narratives and small stories.

Research Objective and Questions

We seek to make visible the elements and processes through which Finnish conductors have become world-class. We are interested in how globally noted conductorship is constructed by various actors in the music field, such as cultural policy makers, music critics, orchestra musicians, conductor instructors, composers, and conductors themselves. Our questions deal with the issues, such as: what kind of paths Finnish conductors have taken in their career; how conductors have been trained in Finland, what kind of triggering as well as supporting and hindering events there have been; how conductors rehearse their orchestras, and how they relate to the musicians.

Research Methodology

Our study is resting on five cornerstones. First, our personal interest, experience, and scholarly involvement in symphony orchestras. The first co-author has played in a symphony orchestra several years (ago), and has thus developed an inside understanding of orchestra life. The second co-author also has experience and personal contacts in the culture field, both in music and theatre. Our personal backgrounds have considerably helped us to contact key people in the field, quite a few of whom we know personally. Also, our backgrounds provide us with an expert position where we become partners in constructing the phenomenon in interest.

Second, during the past few years we have systematically studied Finnish symphony orchestras from different perspectives (Ropo & Sauer, 1998, 1999; 2002; 2003). Our extensive field observations and case studies serve as a background understanding and give guidance to our research and interview questions in this study.

Third, we have made and are in the process of making interviews with several types of people in the music field. For now, we have made expert interviews with 1) well-known Finnish conductors, such as Esa-Pekka Salonen (Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra), and Osmo Vänskä (Lahti Symphony, also Minnesota Symphony Orchestra); 2) key people in the Finnish conductor education, such as conductor and professor Jorma Panula, conductor, composer, and professor Leif Segerstam, and Juhani Poutanen, the coordinator of conductor instruction at the Sibelius Academy; 3) Tuulikki Karjalainen, a former cultural policy maker and former chairperson of the Finnish Symphony Orchestra League, and co-founder (with Seppo Kimanen) of the world-famous Kuhmo Chamber Orchestra Festival; 4) composer Jouni Kaipainen; 5) violist and conductor Jaana Haanterä; and 6) a music critic and former orchestra media relations executive Harri Hautala. In addition to the interviews, we have systematically collected newspaper and magazine articles of conductors (Finnish and other) over the past five

years.

Fourth, our understanding of management and organizing, whether it be orchestra conductors, leaders in global companies, or researchers in scholarly settings, is informed by a ‘thought style’ that could be called a version of social constructionism (Hosking, 2002). We are not in the pursuit of a universal or an unanimous truth that resides ‘out there’, separately from us or other people. As researchers we are not objectively making observations and ‘collecting’ data. The fundamental element of social constructionism is the idea, that there is no one truth, but there are multiple realities or ontologies as constructed worlds (not just different interpretations of the world). Everyone, including the researcher, is part of (rather than apart from) the process creating the world, in our case the construction of successful conductorship. It is largely depending on the position, choice, and competence of partners in knowledge creation in a particular field, to choose what are considered as key elements in conductor success. The researcher is part of the narrative by constructing it based on her own expertise and position, still negotiating continually with other narratives and elements.

Fifth, as hinted above, our research method is narrative analysis (Boje, 2001). Narrative method has roots in storytelling (see also Czarniawska 1997). Traditionally, story has been viewed as somewhat less than narrative. Narrative requires a plot and coherence, whereas story is folksy, a simple telling of chronology. Antenarrative (ante=before) is a fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, and unplotted speculation, a bet. Antenarrative is ‘ante’ to story and narrative is a ‘post’ story (Boje, 2001). Narrative has a rational form (beginning – middle – end). Antenarrative happens before the plots have been agreed to. Antenarratives are many voiced fragmented pieces of subjective knowledge (Boje 2001).

Grand narratives are often about grand personalities. There are grand narratives on great conductors and there are grand narratives on horrible conductors. Then there are small stories telling about the everyday life of conductors or musicians. The narrative method (both antenarratives and grand narratives) offers a multi-voiced, subjective perspective to life. Ways of constructing the world varies, even though the grand narratives try to create consensus and uniformity. The grand narratives offer us tools to put ourselves in relation to the world around us, but at the same time, they define the criteria through which we see ourselves and others (Boje 2001).

Theoretical Perspectives: Structure and Action Debate and Leadership Theory

Institutional theory

Our way of constructing global conductorship is informed by two scholarly frames: the institutional theory and leadership theory. The institutional theory focuses on the structure – action debate that has been a classical concern in organization theory (for recent discussions, see the ‘Special Research Forum on Institutional Theory and Institutional Change’ in *Academy of Management Journal*, 2002, 45:1 and the Special Issue on ‘Action, Structure, and Organizations’ in *Organization Studies*, 1997, 18:1). Basically, the institutional theory deals with the question whether organizations (and

individuals for that matter) are determined by their environments (environmental determinism) or by their own actions (action determinism) (e.g., Child, 1997, 49).

We find the tension between structure and action vital in understanding constructions of the Finnish conductor success phenomenon. Both represent different ontologies or grand narratives of the world, different understandings of human life, organizations, and action (success). Also, we follow March's line of thinking of the relevance of social construction of organization–environment relationships. Especially noteworthy in conductorship development we find March's notion about the importance of understanding history; 'change needs continuity and future needs past' (March 1996). Furthermore, we find that social constructions of organizations and environments are made relationally and negotiated by a variety of actors, both individual and collective (Dachler & Hosking, 1995).

Leadership theory

Leadership theory provides another basis for different narratives of conductors. The great man theory of leadership (trait studies, charismatic leadership studies) is well noted and appreciated even today while speaking of and calling for charismatic and transformational leaders (for a good coverage of leadership studies, see Yukl, 2002; Bryman, 1996). However, also in the leadership field, the mainstream mono-voiced, hierarchical understanding of leadership is greatly challenged. Dispersed, shared, and relational leadership approaches are getting stronger voices (e.g., Gordon, 2002; Gronn, 2002; Ropo, Parviainen, & Koivunen, 2002). Leadership is not a characteristic that some individuals have (either inherited or through training), but it is constructed and thus created through every day social interaction among people, structures, and events. The traditional, individually-centered leadership theory promotes the heroic narrative of conductors whereas the more recent relational leadership approaches construct leadership as multiple understandings, as small stories of every day organizational life and social relationships.

Grand narratives of Finnish conductors' success

'National Product' – a caricature

Finnish conductors are the crown jewels of Finnish national identity. The three cornerstones of the Finnish mentality, Sauna, Sibelius, and the Guts are personified in our young conductors in the world. We couldn't have better icons than our men on the global stages for what 'Finland' and 'Finnish' stands for: stamina, discipline, innovative.

Finnish conductors are ripe fruits of the systematic cultural policy in action. What great law-makers we had in the early days of our nation's building when they saw that music needs state support, both monetary and legal support!

Great music institutions have given birth to extraordinarily talented Finnish conductors. The one hundred music conservatories around the country are the basic music institutions to thank for the first up-bringing of the conductors.

Without the unique conductor class at the Sibelius Academy we couldn't now testify the success of Finnish conductors. Foreign conductor students come in crowds to apply for the class – very few are eventually accepted. The standards need to be kept high!

A country of five million people, having survived several wars, having paid high war restorations, has built an exemplary knowledge-intensive Nordic welfare state that provides a national home for thirteen professional symphony orchestras and tens of other orchestras. All these are available for our conductors to rehearse with. Without live orchestras the conductors wouldn't have developed their skills to the top.

Analysis of the 'National Product' narrative

National identity

Along with the national movement all over the Europe in the 19th century, Finns started their own nation building. The adoption of own language, Finnish, instead of Swedish or Russian and collecting the material for and publishing the national mythological epic Kalevala were the most important achievements of the early years of the 19th century (Ropo & Sauer, 1998).

At the turn of the century, cultural icons, such as Ida Alberg (an actress), Aino Ackté (a singer), Jean Sibelius (a composer), and Akseli Gallen-Kallela (a painter) were influential people in the social and cultural life of Finland. Culture was not seen as an isolated phenomenon but linked with broader social issues, such as the women's movement, realism in literature, and caring for poor. Artists travelled frequently in Europe, absorbing styles and adopting new influences. Especially the battle over national independence opened doors to other European countries. After claiming the independence in 1917, Finland continued its nation-building by increasing the level of people's education, thus contributing to the development of a culturally civilized country (ibid.).

After the wars, culture development got a political swing and more radical innovations were called for. The social democratic movement demanded to break the borders between the elitist high-brow and low-brow culture. Anyone should have the possibility to cultivate his/her cultural talent in spite of the social status, wealth, or living place in the country. The wars had taught a valuable lesson. Without consensus, collective effort, and equal opportunity among the citizens, the nation would not prosper (ibid.) This turned out to be a fruitful basis for developing national cultural policy.

Cultural policy

Kangas, Mangset, and Onsér-Franzén (1994) have divided the Finnish cultural policy into five periods: The first period which they call 'occasional cultural policy' lasted from 1800 to 1940 (Kangas et al., 1994). This era started the national identity building, as described above.

During 1940-1960 the development of national cultural policy was rather systematic. Libraries, schools, community colleges as well as different types of associations (youth, sports, etc.) were founded as fundamental elements of the national culture. As poverty turned into welfare, the state started financially subsidising the cultural activities (ibid.).

The time period from 1960s to the 1980s represents the 'Grand saga of the new cultural policy' (ibid.). Along with Scandinavian countries, Finland developed to a Nordic welfare state. Health care, social security and child day-care systems were established.

The fourth period was the time of stabilisation (the 1980's). Cultural and leisure activities were seen equal in politicians' speeches. Typical of the period were big investments in socio-culture and in building cultural monuments. Training in arts and art professions increased (ibid.).

The fifth period starting from 1993 can be characterized as the era of agreements between the state and the municipalities. The State Support System (SSS) was established. The state supports now the municipalities partially for maintaining cultural institutions. The municipalities allocate the resources locally based on their own decision-making. Pluralism became the mainstream cultural policy.

During the recession in early 1990s, discussions on giving up the welfare state in favour of managerialism in culture provision brought up contradictory demands: on the one hand centralized institutional conditions were appreciated, on the other hand, more freedom and responsibility to culture professionals were called for (ibid.).

At the turn of the 21st century, Finland has become known as a so called knowledge society where both citizens' welfare as well as technological advancement has been reached. Strong emphasis on developing attractive regions in the European Union context has been embraced with energy in Finland. Along this development, culture in its different forms has been given a central role, much like in the early years of national identity building. Now culture is needed to build a knowledge intensive Finnish society that tries to soften the hard technology emphasis.

Cultural institutions

Cultural institutions have been a central part of the national identity building and cultural policy development. The origins of Finnish cultural institutions go back to the Swedish reign and to the development of the Finnish identity. To mention a few, Association of the Finnish Culture was founded in 1846 and Finnish Publishing Association in 1858. The Drawing school was founded to Turku in 1830 and to Helsinki in 1848, the latter of which became The Finnish Academy of Art (Cultural Policy in Finland, 1995).

Orchestra music has been performed in Finland starting the 1500s. An orchestra ensemble grew around the organist of the Turku Cathedral in 1620s. Turku Musical Association was founded in 1790 that collected a valuable music library and brought up the first Finnish composers, beyond providing concerts. Fredrick Pacius, a German violist, university teacher, and conductor was in a key role to organize concerts. His

orchestra consisted of musically talented professors and students who played chamber music (ibid.). Composer and conductor Robert Kajanus gathered and trained musicians aiming at a professional orchestra that later became the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 1882.

The first Opera Festivals were organized in the 1820's. The Finnish Opera, later The Finnish National Opera was founded in 1911. However, the orchestra for the opera was not founded until 1963. After the German model, theatres and orchestras started to grow in nearly every town in the 1920s. Today, the Savonlinna Opera Festivals are well-known among the music lovers in the world.

The Finnish music education relies on three cornerstones: first, the general music education in public schools; second, a national network of music conservatories including over 100 conservatories, and third, the Sibelius Academy that provides higher music education all the way to doctoral degrees in performing art. The Helsinki Music High School that was founded in 1882, became the first music conservatory in 1924, and turned to the Sibelius Academy in 1939, named after the most famous Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius. Sibelius Academy is a university level music institution maintained by the state of Finland. Both the music conservatories and the Sibelius Academy train professional musicians.

Sibelius Academy and its conductor class

*“The best musicians and conductors today come from the Sibelius Academy”
(the artistic director of the Carnegie Hall, Judit Aran, in Suomen Kuvalehti, 2001, 55).*

The conductor class at the Sibelius Academy started already in the 1940s. Jussi Jalas, an experienced and committed conductor took responsibility for developing young conductor candidates. There was a demand to train more musicians, both players and conductors to growing Finnish symphony orchestras. After Jalas retired, nobody was really interested in instructing conductors (interview with Juhani Poutanen).

It wasn't until the 1970s that Jorma Panula took the office that the conductor class started booming. He was very strict about not accepting other than students who played an orchestra instrument. He has become known of teaching without a method, as he calls it himself (interview with Jorma Panula). However, he seems to have rather clear instructions on how to become a good conductor. He insists on conductor having to listen to the sound, helping the musicians, but not getting in the way (Jorma Panula, personal memo). He also teaches to use the hands in a modest but purposeful way, not theatrically, as is often seen in concerts. His method also includes as little speaking as possible (Don't speak, just show). He knows that musicians do not like conductors who use up the rehearsal time for speaking instead of playing.

All the conducting lessons are videotaped, and the students watch them together and make comments on own and each others' performance. The videotapes are found very revealing in the learning process. It is healthy to learn to laugh at yourself, one conductor says. While watching the videotapes, Panula may give some suggestions on how to improve, basically he keeps asking questions and helps the students to see for themselves what is wrong about their conducting. Panula emphasizes that every

conductor has his own solution and must look for it. “It is a longer way to go, but worth it. You have to have the courage to jump into the water before you learn to swim. I do not throw in the life-belt until someone is really drowning” Jormal Panula says in an interview.

The conductor class atmosphere is very social and communicative. The students go out together, and have social gatherings at the professor’s summer cabin (interviews with Juhani Poutanen, Jorma Panula, and Leif Segerstam).

The conductor candidates rehears with a live orchestra, compiled of the most advanced students at the Sibelius Academy. This is a distinctive characteristic compared to other conductor institutions in the world where the students have to rehearse orchestra music with the piano only.

MAESTRO – a caricature

Tonight HE would be here! The electrifying feeling of soon being able to experience something divine is getting thicker in the air...He is our maestro. This young and handsome conductor started his musical career as an extremely talented five year old. His knowledgeable parents, also from musical families, admired their young son conducting the famous symphonies from the record. He got all the best teachers, but towards the end of his education there was only one important figure. The maker of the maestros, the most famous teacher with his unconventional methods saw the young talent and took the under his wings and made him ready for the world.

He knows the score, he hears every sound the orchestra makes and he knows how to rehearse the musicians. The musicians like to work with him since he likes to speak of himself as “one of the guys”.

The beautiful black and white press photos, the sleek and modern quality-conscious personal style as well as relaxed and intelligent way of presenting himself do speak for him. He has got one of the best-known agents in the world, who has succeeded in making him a brand, a synonym for quality, youth and art.

The anticipating electricity starts getting almost unbearable. Ladies are sitting in their most beautiful dresses, coiffed, and ready for our young maestro on the podium. There he comes...so handsome in the black tie, turning to the audience, and sharing his boyish smile...(maybe directly to me?)...he raises his hands, the music starts, and I am melting away....

Analysis of the ‘Maestro’ narrative

The themes of genius, collegiality, leadership and individual heroism are found in most discussions, texts and interviews on successful conductors, often spun in a misty net of mythical references to charisma, authority and divine or diabolic ability to get the best out of musicians. Through the research interviews we have tried to take a closer look to these building-blocks of the maestro myth.

Discovery of the genius: personality and charisma

The teachers in the music schools sometimes ‘see a conductor’ in their young students. They are given opportunities to try conducting and in case they really are good at it, they’ll be guided forward.

“He (teacher) said that you are a multitalented person. You compose, you play trumpet, piano and a recorder, maybe you should try conducting and he gave me the baton. And so i did, and here I am.” (Leif Segerstam)

“...this is the Finnish Style, as soon as a talent is found, he is allowed to try it, and if he really is a talent, he will be given all the support. It has always been like this.” (Leif Segerstam)

The notion genius beholds the obvious professional excellence in music, and the importance of hearing, seeing and reacting. Charismatic and professional qualities are somewhat intertwined.

“...they all (young talents) have an instrument and either as chamber musicians or as orchestra musicians they have reached the level of radiating natural authority” (Leif Segerstam)

“Common for all the charismatic conductors is, that they seem to hear and see everything. It is a vast entity that you are responsible of. The whole orchestra, 100 musicians play, and you have to correct the mistakes, and if not mistakes, you have to guide them through the music...all the hearing and seeing in that situation, you can see he measures up to his task.” (Jaana Haanterä)

“charisma is somewhat dependent also on your attitude towards your own mistakes...” (Jouni Kaipainen)

“exactly, and on your attitude towards the mistakes others make” (Jaana Haanterä)

The charismatic personality, social skills are undeniable assets, even to the extent that doubts whether the professional qualities would be enough, nowadays, were expressed.

“Today a conductor must be a great diplomat and an extremely charismatic person. The audience must fall in love with him, otherwise he cannot make it.” (Jouni Kaipainen)

“I think I must have been born with some kind of a talent to be able to work with people.” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

The skilful win-win relationship with the media is today an undeniable advantage, because the commercial laws play, to the disappointment of the purists, a growing role in artistic world, also.

“The commercial field is pushing towards the conductor cult...the salaries of the world-class conductors are reaching to the skies, and they can pretty independently decide what they want to do”(Jouni Kaipainen)

The famous artists are presented to us like unearthly figures, who have sacrificed themselves on the altar of the music.

“He (one specific world-class Finnish conductor) is a completely mad personality, who can drive both himself as well as the orchestra to their utmost limits, and get the best out of them.” (Jaana Haanterä)

The compelling mixture of suffering artist’s subtle modesty and next second behaving like a self-centered diva is intriguing. The creation of myth obviously helps in marketing efforts.

Collegiality

The collegiality code of the older conductors giving a chance to the younger ones has helped many careers to take off. This has been the case in Finland for at least 35 years. The network of the conductors resembles a guild, where there is loyalty towards the younger generation, because that is where the future of the profession lies.

“...there is no tripping mentality in Finland, which means that if you are old and good, you are open to younger ones, you let them try, and if they are talented, they are allowed to try their wings.” (Leif Segerstam)

“The best orchestras in the country offered me jobs all the time (as an aspiring conductor), especially Leif Segerstam was an important supporter.” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

“Panula was generous to the younger ones, and as I got orchestras, I have been the same again to the youngsters...I took both Saraste and Salonen with me for example to Australia when I was the chief of the Radio Symphony Orchestra. They were both there to share the conducting of the symphonies of Sibelius and both bounced to the fame during that trip...I took Mikko Franck also to Stockholm to conduct Carmen, where Barenboim saw him and he got to go to Chicago.” (Leif Segerstam)

Sometimes this collegiality has been experienced somewhat suffocating, because the older professionals are claimed to have taken the right of defining the quality in the art of conducting.

Leadership

The work of the conductor is described as a tension between dictatorship, democratic aspirations and close trust relationship with the orchestra musicians.

“The conductor bears the overall responsibility of the music, how it is played and what the end result is...when (a concert) is rehearsed, it is done on conductor’s terms and he decides when we start, what we do and he is an unconditioned authority, and nobody can touch that.” (Juhani Poutanen)

Underlining the democratic leadership style, the young conductors represent a new generation. The musicians like to work with them since they like to speak of themselves as “one of the guys”.

“The Finnish leadership style is not autocratic...in orchestra management the Finnish conductors seldom choose to position themselves above the musicians.” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

Still, when asked, they admit that there has to be one person in charge, and that happens to be the conductor. The musicians, though, willingly accept this, because of the professional hierarchy of a symphony orchestra.

“...other conductors get their authority from the hierarchical position and dictatorship, then there is the normal Finnish authority, that rises from the capability as a conductor, trust from the musicians’ side, that the things the conductor says have some general value and that the conductor hears everything that happens in the orchestra.” (Harri Hautala)

“...you have to go there open-minded, well prepared...if you have something interesting or surprising to say, then you must say it, but the more you can express by non-verbal means, the better.” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

Musicians value good organizers, who know what to rehearse and when, who hear every note, and who know what to speak, maybe even more importantly, when **not** to speak. A special gift to build the tension during the rehearsals, in the way that the orchestra can give its best in the concert, is highly appreciated.

Jean Sibelius and Jorma Panula as symbols of individual heroism

Jean Sibelius has had an undeniable influence on the Finnish music culture as a composer, whose music knows no boundaries.

“Sibelius may be the key reason for the fact that in Finland people, at least used to, value the classical music talents as high as the statesmen.” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

The music experts we interviewed often referred to Sibelius, the nature of Finland, as well as our national character, as plausible explanations to global success of quite a few musicians. Some, however, said that the nature or national character do not explain anything in the complex, heterogenic and urban world. Instead, they say that there have been leading figures, like Sibelius, who have shown, that one can have a successful career in the classical music field. This, in turn, has appealed to generations to come.

The large amount of successful Finnish conductors has become a myth itself. The conductors have grown tired of answering to the same questions about the ‘secret formula’ how to ‘produce’ excellent musicians and maestros, so tired, that when asked to be interviewed for this research, one of the most successful conductors found this to be *“an extremely dull subject”*.

Usually, when speaking of the success of the conductors, Jorma Panula is mentioned as a key figure. He is the person said to have invented the method of no method to train the conductors, as was described earlier. He created the rehearsing orchestra with whom the conductor class is rehearsing at the Sibelius Academy, and he launched the use of the video in the training, obviously in a successful way. But the technical virtuosity is not all he wants the students to master. He emphasizes the personal artistic growth, also outside the music education.

"..lately also Almila and Segerstam have modified this philosophy to their own direction, but all the time you can find Panula's influence there...he has been here for 30 long years and he has had time to develop this system." (Juhani Poutanen)

Small stories

Besides the grand narratives, the 'National product' and 'Maestro' that stand up in constructing the successful conductorship, we were able to hear 'smaller' themes, ideas, and hints, sometimes even whispers, that we think to very often play a part in the individual stories of conductors. We call them small stories in a sense, that these themes are often overlooked and buried under the more mainstream grand constructions. We, however, think that it is the small things or even coincidences that have a major impact on the successful conductor career. These small things can be very personal, sometimes even uncomfortable or perhaps even self-evident. Intertwined with the grand narratives the small stories become the glue or the necessary ingredient in understanding successful conductorship.

Head-start

Typically, talented conductors-to-be have started taking music lessons at an early age. The influence of the family role models and the teacher are obviously important.

"I was actually a late starter, I began my music lessons only as I was 9 years old...The turning point in my studies was as I got Holger Fransman as my teacher. For the first time in my life I was face to face with an inspirer, an authority, an important figure in our country's cultural history...I was a half-professional by sixteen, and did gigs for the major orchestras in the city." (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

Parents play an important role in the musical education of their children. Often, the parents play an instrument themselves, or are even professional musicians having musical talent in their family for generations (e.g. Sakari Oramo). Music is considered to belong to a civilized education of a young person no matter how the young ones choose their profession. The attention music gets at home also affects the child's value system. Most of the children taking music lessons never make, or even plan, it to become a profession. The exceptionally talented children, however, are usually guided to best teachers, who in turn, build up not only the technical skills of the child but also the psychological capability to proceed in their path. This applies also to the higher musical education given at the Sibelius Academy.

Fortunate conditions and coincidents

The agents play a big role in classical music field. They have an increasing power to rise up or put down young, talented but still unknown conductors. The good reputation of the Sibelius Academy has attracted agents to keep an eye on the conductor class, but for the young conductors getting a well-known agent very early may be double headed sword. On the one hand, the aspiring conductor may be given well known orchestras to lead. On the other hand, the personal development and maturing process may suffer.

“Today it seems that the international agents ferret out the (people in) conductor class of the Sibelius Academy.” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

In many cases unfortunate surprises, as the star-conductor falling ill, and a freshman substituting him, have sky-rocketed the careers (e.g. Sakari Oramo, Esa-Pekka Salonen). To be invited to conduct a world-class orchestra in one of the metropolis of the world, and to succeed brilliantly gives an enormous boost to a young conductor, both through growing self-esteem and by getting the key players to know you.

“ Mr. VanWalsum (a well-known agent) came to my concert (substitute gig organized by Mr. Panula) in Copenhagen. After the concert he asked if he could represent me in London...After a while he called and asked if I'd go to London to conduct Mahler's 3rd symphony on a few days notice...after that my status changed completely.” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

Favourable organizations

Finnish symphony orchestras have taken seriously their responsibility of giving working opportunities for young conductors. Both major orchestras in Helsinki are praised for this.

“The best orchestras in the country offered me jobs all the time...” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

“we can absolutely say, that on the average the Finnish conductors have had plenty of chances to perform and that certainly has had it's effect on their high professional quality.” (Jouni Kaipainen)

The general managers of the orchestras have their own network and preferences to ask around for promising talents to present themselves. Also the musicians have an increasing amount of influence on hiring conductors, both visiting conductors and artistic leaders.

“Yes, the musicians have more and more power..if there is a conductor that the musicians don't like, he will not be asked to visit again...the musicians have quite a lot to say there, especially in Finland and increasingly also in Central Europe.” (Harri Hautala)

Still, there is an invisible line to cross to become accepted as a successful conductor in one's own country. Despite the overall positive attitude towards young conductors, the collaboration is not always unproblematic. Sometimes the orchestras are unable to pay the high salaries the young talents demand.

“You have to go away from Finland, get rewards or good critics in foreign newspapers in foreign language. After that you'll get glory and jobs in here.” (Jouni Kaipainen)

“it was rather funny...I had worked with the best orchestras in Finland, but only after I had performed in Chicago, the provincial small orchestra, Turku Symphony (in Finland) offered me chance to perform there.” (Esa-PekkaSalonen)

“When he was sixteen, he was here (in Sibelius Academy) a year, a year and a half. He worked a couple of times in Pori, Vaasa and Hyvinkää, but Joensuu (provincial orchestras in

Finland) *could not pay for him any more, after he took an agent. It just was not financially possible...*” (Juhani Poutanen)

Eroticism

The conductorship can be understood to contain a multifaceted erotic aspect, in relation to the art form, in relation to the orchestra, and also to the audience.

“at best, there is an emotional contact between the orchestra and the conductor, which, when most intensive, can resemble a love affair. The orchestra feels that the conductor is able to take them to an emotional level, what they could not have reached without him and where the best experiences are born” (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

“a person does not know anything about music if he is sexually completely inexperienced, because the pulsating sensuality and the sensual touch build the bridge between people.” (Leif Segerstam)

There are several conductors and musicians who benefit from their appealing image, making them more attractive to media. The agents also sometimes participate in the image-building of a conductor.

“...I know that the record companies try to create a certain image a conductor, in (name of a famous conductor) it obviously is the handsome guy.” (Jaana Haanterä)

“It is that strange thing that there are some conductors, that when they arrive into a town, all the ladies dress up...” (Jaana Haanterä)

“I admit it is cool when Salonen comes in his tight black jeans and t-shirt...” (Juhani Poutanen)

Conductorship becomes easily also a gender issue. There are just a few well-known female conductors in the world (e.g. Anu Tali, Susanna Mälkki). A female conductor is a rarity as such, and for her to play it safe it is easiest to do that by the masculine, or at least androgynous rules, because the use of the good looks or attractive image may turn against the female conductor.

“...is it really necessary to underline the femininity, because the professionalism is the most important thing, so if you dress extremely...it may cause wrong associations.” (Juhani Poutanen)

“I have got some nasty remarks about a too low neck-line when conducting an orchestra.” (Jaana Haanterä)

‘Tits are in the way’ is a flying sentence, claimed to have heard in the conductor training. (Jaana Haanterä)

Conclusions

We aimed at this study to investigate how the unproportional success (in relation to the size of the country and its population) of Finnish conductors is understood and

constructed by various experts in the classical music field. From the start, we have been aware that we as researchers and semi-experts in the field are also partners in constructing global conductorship. Two grand narratives stood up from the interviews and the documents and writings in the field.

The ‘National Product’ narrative underlines the historical and structural conditions under which global conductors are created and develop. This narrative concentrates on the cultivation of the skills rather than natural born talent, on hard work towards the magical touch. In this narrative the key elements emphasized include the following: the music education system in general and the extraordinary conductor class at the Sibelius Academy, especially; and the role of the Finnish cultural policy that historically promotes the big number (relative to the size of the country) of orchestras.

Another grand explanation constructs the successful conductors through the ‘Maestro’ narrative, where the individual talent and superiority is a key theme. The technical virtuosity is not seen very interesting: emotional attraction is needed to get fascinated. An extraordinary talent is emphasized. The Maestro narrative describes successful conductors to be ‘out of this world’, demon-like, having the magical glow and flow etc. These myths are self-constructing, and make everybody happy: the audience gets to see the star, the musicians give their best to the victorious personality and the media gets big headlines. The Maestro is created by the way of his relationships with the musicians, the audience, and the media.

The structural construction of conductorship is found in the ‘National product’ narrative, and its level of analysis is institutional, whereas the ‘Maestro’ is the individual level Action Man. After constructing these narratives, our challenge was to see beyond these carefully constructed, logically rational grand narratives that are largely shared among professionals. Grand narratives could easily be seen as recipes for success. We wish to underline that this is not the case. Even though the grand narratives give us reasonable and logical explanations of Finnish conductors’ success, they are not imitable. On the contrary, even the grand narratives are historically and socially unique. We wish to make the point that the grand narratives are not enough to explain the success. The small stories we picked up, suggest – often between the lines or in subtle ways – how critical some every-day life incidents or background histories, and favourable responses to social situations can be in a conductor’s life.

Antenarratives, the small stories revealed the more hazardous, socially demanding, and emotionally hard daily work with the hard-to-please musicians and other music actors. Small stories some times include even uncomfortable or culturally covert issues. With the small stories we wanted to point out the importance of the organizational (orchestra) level, where the everyday action takes place among different individuals, where certain institutions and structures exist, and where changes are made while conserving the continuity; where future success is constructed resting on the past experience; and where global success calls for local commitment. Small stories also emphasize the importance of informal networks and social relationships.

The development of Finnish conductors to well-known players in the global music field has taken a long time, starting from the days of national identity building and

structuring of cultural institutions in the 1860s. Our study points out, among other things, that Finland has been an incubator, where the conductor competence has been and is still being developed extremely intrinsically by a core group in a pointedly national setting. The close system has gradually opened to the opportunities, challenges, and favourable coincidences of the wider music world.

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