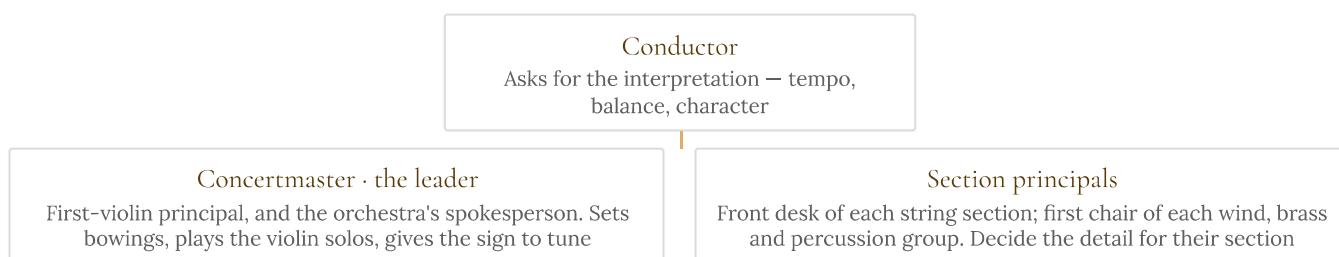


Who's who in an orchestra

An orchestra runs on a chain of responsibility. The conductor asks; the leader and principals turn it into bowings, breaths and lengths; the section makes it happen without discussion. Knowing where you sit in that chain is most of orchestral playing.

HOW A DECISION TRAVELS



ON THE PLATFORM

Concertmaster	Leads the first violins and the orchestra: marks every string bowing, plays the solos, speaks for the players.
Principal second violin	Runs a section whose job is rhythm and inner harmony, not tune. A different skill, not a lesser one.
String principals	Viola, cello and bass: set bowing and sound for their section, and take its solos.
Principal winds	One player per part, so every wind player is effectively a soloist. The oboe gives the tuning A.
Principal horn · trumpet · trombone	First chair of each brass group; sets articulation and volume for the rest to match.
Timpanist	A role of its own, not part of the percussion rota — tunes by ear, mid-piece, in public.
Section players	Two to a stand; the inside player turns the pages.

OFF THE PLATFORM

Music director	The chief conductor: plans seasons, shapes the sound over years. Guests take one programme.
Librarian	Sources parts, copies in the bowings, gets the right edition on every stand.
Orchestra manager	Schedules rehearsals, books extras, runs the day.
Stage manager	Chairs, stands, risers, percussion, lighting — the platform set for each piece.
Artistic planning	Chooses repertoire and soloists, years ahead.
Composer	Delivers a legible score <i>and</i> checked parts. Late or messy parts cost rehearsal time you will never get back.

GETTING IN

- 1 · Youth orchestra.** Where you learn to count, watch and blend. Nothing replaces the hours.
- 2 · Study.** Conservatorium or university, plus orchestral training programmes.
- 3 · Audition.** A set list of orchestral excerpts and a concerto movement, often played behind a screen so the panel cannot see who is playing.
- 4 · Trial, then a seat.** Weeks or months in the section before the job is confirmed. Most players start on the casual list, booked concert by concert — that is how you become known.

READING THE STAGE

The player nearest the conductor at the front of each group is the principal. Unsure who to follow? Follow the stand in front of you.

WHAT EARNS RESPECT

Arriving with the part learnt, pencil bowings copied, entries counted and the page turns planned. Not volume, not solos.

IN A SCHOOL ORCHESTRA

The same chain, fewer people: your leader sets bowings, your section leader sets the sound, and the librarian's job is probably yours.