

Conductor... or No Conductor?

Conducting: The art of leading a musical ensemble to play together using hand gestures, other signals such as ones conveyed through eye contact, and possibly a baton.

The **conductor:**

- Has a full score of the music and pays attention to what is happening in all of the parts
- Interprets the music notation
- Sets the tempo
- Cues various parts to enter at the appropriate times
- Helps balance the parts so the melody or other important elements can be heard
- Shapes the phrases
- Rehearses the ensemble to prepare for performance.

Since the mid-1800s, the conductor's place has been standing at the podium facing the musicians. Before that time, however, conductors led from within the ensemble. In the example of an orchestra, the leader was also the musician who played the harpsichord or sat in the position of concertmaster.

The transition from **No Conductor** (a leader within the ensemble) to **Conductor** (a leader in front of the ensemble) took place during Ludwig van Beethoven's lifetime.

[Watch Beyond the Stage: The Musician-Led Model](#) (8:17). Members of The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Kyu-Young Kim (principal violin), Cassie Pilgrim (principal oboe), and Maureen Nelson (violin) give us a deeper look into their (conductor-less) collaborative approach to classical music. Note their experiences using the chart. Be ready to share your observations in a discussion.

Advantages of Having No Conductor	Challenges of Having No Conductor
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____

Watch two performances of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 1, movement 1. What do you notice in each performance?

The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Symphony No. 1 (0:00-9:22)	Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra Andres Orozco-Estrada, conductor (0:00-9:30) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QddwQbanlmQ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____

Answer two of these questions and be ready to share your thoughts in a discussion.

1. Is one performance more interesting or engaging for the audience? Explain.

2. Is one performance seemingly more interesting and engaging for the musicians? Explain.

3. What did you notice that can be applied to your own participation in an ensemble? Explain.
