
OVERTHROW THE CONDUCTOR

FOR SIX PLAYERS

JAKE BERRAN
(2021, rev. 2023)



PROGRAM NOTES

The original program note for *Overthrow the Conductor* was about hierarchy, power, empires, and revolutions. Since that first iteration, I have stopped thinking of the piece as any sort of grand statement—whether social, political, or musical—and started appreciating the joy it brought to both the ensemble and the audience in the first performance. The piece was also an exercise in weaving aleatory, harmonic tropes, and dialogue to make a complete musical structure that is simultaneously a narrative. Finally, the whole thing is hypocritical: the players are resisting the authority of the conductor and composer in a highly prescribed manner.

Duration: approx. 10 minutes

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

There are lots of acting instructions. The more energy you put into those, even if it's faked, the more fun it will be! There is a "conductor" staff in the score containing instructions for the conductor. Occasionally, text instructions for the players which are unnecessary for the conductor are in very faint text.

At the beginning, everyone begins offstage and the players enter in a specified order with approximate wait times, repeating boxed gestures until the conductor comes on stage (angry at this disorder) and hits the baton on the stand to cut everyone off. After mocking the conductor, the players resume their boxed gestures only to be cut off once again. The players are intimidated and start following the conductor's beats. For a while, "normal" music alternates with dialogue.

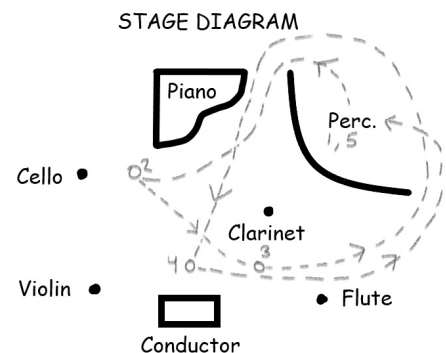
Near the end, every player stands up and gets out of their seat at some point. They will want to memorize their parts here in order to be successful. In terms of roles, the violinist supports the oppressive conductor (initially...), the percussionist is the emotional instigator, the pianist and cellist keep up the motivation, and the wind players are the ones who finally lead the crusade to dethrone the conductor.

All repeat signs are timed or indefinite cells (i.e. not "2x"). After m. 139, parenthetical cues are meant as a courtesy, and repeating cells should be continued naturally (i.e. don't suddenly restart the cell).

A stage diagram is provided below, showing the path the percussionist takes in the final section. The piece ends with everyone leaving the stage, then the pianist taking the score and leaving as well.

Dialogue may be modified to fit the situation. [PIANO] is a stand-in for the pianist's name, and so on.

Percussion instruments: Vibraphone, Crotales, Bass Drum, Temple Blocks, Tam-tam, Suspended Cymbal, Slapstick, Cowbell



OVERTHROW THE CONDUCTOR

♩ = 132

JAKE BERRAN

ca. 75"

Enter stage menacingly ca. 25"
after everyone starts playing

All players:

- Start offstage; measure lasts ca. 75"
- Repeat boxed figures (any order), decreasing pause from 3" → 0"
- Ad lib. after a few repetitions if desired (color, articulation, rhythm, etc.)

Conductor | **Flute** | **Bass Clarinet** | **Piano** | **Percussion** | **Percussion** | **Violin** | **Cello**

Flute: enter 10" after cello. *overblow*. first box 8va once piano has entered. dynamic of "X" *p* → *ff*.

Bass Clarinet: enter 10" after percussionist. choose one box each repetition. "jam out". dynamic of "X" *p* → *ff*.

Piano: enter 10" after violin. repeat boxes independently. dynamic of "X" *p* → *ff*.

Percussion: you enter first: *b.d.* (w/ towel) w/ drumsticks - vary timbra over time (beating spot, etc.) - move to *crotales* once dello has started - move back to *b.d.* once all are playing, with hard yarn mallets - improvise rhythms! *mute quickly after each note*. *Improvise! (based on surroundings)*. dynamic of "X" *p* → *ff*.

Violin: enter 10" after flute. switch between ord and sul pont. as desired. *harm. gliss.* dynamic of "X" *p* → *ff*.

Cello: enter 10" after bass clarinet. switch between ord. and sul pont. as desired. dynamic of "X" *p* → *ff*.

Slam score on stand and tap baton on stand in this rhythm. Don't conduct yet.

React to the mockery!

ca. 10"
- Keep trying to cut them off, to no avail
- Look distraught, frustrated by the disobedience

Angrily tap baton!

Cnd. *ff* 3 3

All players:
- Violin cues ensemble (w/o conductor)
- obnoxious, mocking

All players:
- Violin cues ensemble
- Measure lasts ca. 10"
- Do not obey cutoffs

Fl. *flz.* *ff* *f* (4")

B. Cl. *annoyed* *ff* "jam out" *f* (4")

Pno *annoyed* *ff* black key clusters *f* repeat boxes independently (4")

Perc. *annoyed* *ff* *f* (4")

Vln *annoyed* *ff* arco battuto *ord.* *f* (4")

Vc. *annoyed* *ff* arco battuto *ord.* *f* *n* *f* (4")

2 3 4 5

(♩ = 132)
Begin conducting

Frustrated; try
to get them to
enter
go on once
all are on beat
(big cue)

A

Cnd. *fff* *p* gradually, starting 2nd x.

Fl. *ppp* *p* *mf*

B. Cl. *ppp* *p* *mf*

Pno *ppp* *p* *mf*

Perc. *ppp* *p* *mf* on rim w/ drumstick

Vln *ppp* *p* *mf*

Vc. *ppp* *p* *mf*

Each player:
- enter 1-8 beats in, slower than conductor
- gradually speed up to conductor's tempo
- wait for big cue to exit measure

ord.

get a drumstick in one hand

6 7 8 9 10

Musical score for measures 11-13. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), Piano (Pno), Percussion (Perc.), Violin (Vln), and Viola (Vc.).

- Fl.:** Measures 11-13. Dynamics: *p* (measures 11-12), *f* (measure 13). Includes a trill in measure 13.
- B. Cl.:** Measure 11: rest. Measure 12: *f* (trill). Measure 13: *f* (trill).
- Pno:** Measures 11-13. Dynamics: *p* (measures 11-12), *f* (measure 13).
- Perc.:** Measures 11-13. Dynamics: *p* (measures 11-12), *f* (measure 13).
- Vln.:** Measures 11-13. Dynamics: *p* (measures 11-12), *f* (measure 13).
- Vc.:** Measures 11-13. Dynamics: *p* (measures 11-12), *f* (measure 13).

Measures 11, 12, and 13 are marked with their respective measure numbers in boxes.

Musical score for measures 14-19. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), Piano (Pno), Percussion (Perc.), Violin (Vln), and Viola (Vc.).

- Fl.:** Measures 14-19. Dynamics: *p* (measures 14-15), *mf* (measure 16), *f* (measures 17-19). Includes triplets in measures 14-15 and 16.
- B. Cl.:** Measures 14-19. Dynamics: *f* (measures 14-15), *mf* (measure 16), *f* (measures 17-19). Includes triplets in measures 14-15 and 16.
- Pno:** Measures 14-19. Dynamics: *f* (measures 14-15), *p* (measures 16-17), *f* (measures 18-19). Includes triplets in measures 14-15 and 16.
- Perc.:** Measures 14-19. Dynamics: *f* (measures 14-15), *p* (measures 16-17), *f* (measures 18-19). Includes triplets in measures 14-15 and 16.
- Vln.:** Measures 14-19. Dynamics: *f* (measures 14-15), *p* (measures 16-17), *f* (measures 18-19). Includes triplets in measures 14-15 and 16.
- Vc.:** Measures 14-19. Dynamics: *f* (measures 14-15), *p* (measures 16-17), *f* (measures 18-19). Includes triplets in measures 14-15 and 16.

Measures 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 are marked with their respective measure numbers in boxes.

Fl. *pp* *fff*

B. Cl. *mf* *p*

Pno *pp* *fff*

Perc.

Vln *pp* *fff*

Vc. *pp* *fff*

20 21 22 23 24 25

Fl. *p* *mf* *p*

B. Cl. *p*

Pno *pp* *pp* *p*

Perc. *pp*

Vln

Vc. *pizz.* *p* *p*

B

26 27 28 29 30 31 32

3. (to pno.) Ha. You don't need to know how the music works. Just play the notes on the page. (go m. 35)

(As if this is the final note!)

Dialogue

1. (to pno.) [PIANO] That's not in the music.

(♩ = 132)

Cutoff gesture at pianist

2. (to cnd.) Sorry, I was just practicing for my music theory test tomorrow!

4. (to cnd. during prep beat) Okay...

Confident!

Conducting score for measures 33-37. The conductor's staff shows cues for various instruments. The Flute (Fl.) and Clarinet in B-flat (B. Cl.) parts are marked with dynamics *f* and *p*. The Piano (Pno.) part features a triplet of chords in measure 34, marked *f* and *p*. The Percussion (Perc.) part has a steady rhythm marked *p*. The Violin (Vln.) part has a pizzicato section marked *p*. The Viola (Vc.) part has an arco section marked *p*. Measure numbers 33, 34, 35, 36, and 37 are indicated at the bottom of the staves.

Continuation of the musical score for measures 38-41. The Flute (Fl.) and Clarinet in B-flat (B. Cl.) parts continue with melodic lines, marked with dynamics *mf* and *f*. The Piano (Pno.) part has a melodic line marked *mp* and *mf*. The Percussion (Perc.) part continues with a steady rhythm marked *mp*. The Violin (Vln.) part has an arco section marked *p* and a pizzicato section marked *p*. The Viola (Vc.) part has an arco section marked *mp* and *mf*. Measure numbers 38, 39, 40, and 41 are indicated at the bottom of the staves.

C

Fl. *p* *mp*

B. Cl. *p* *mp*

Pno *p* *mp*

Perc.

Vln *p*

Vc. *p*

42 43 44 45 46 47

Fl. *mf*

B. Cl. *mp*

Pno *mp*

Perc. *p* *mp*

Vln *arco* *p*

Vc. *arco* *mp* *p*

48 49 50 51

Fl. *mf* *f*

B. Cl. *mf* *f*

Pno *p* *p* *mf* *t. blks.* *(w/ drumstick)* *cowbell*

Perc. *mf* *f* *p* *f*

Vln *f* *p* *pizz.* *col legno battuto* *f*

Vc. *f* *p* *pizz.* *col legno battuto* *mf*

52 53 54 55 56 57 58

Fl. *mf* *p* *3*

B. Cl. *mf* *p*

Pno *p* *mf*

Perc. *mf* *pp* *mf* *(w/ yarn mallet)* *b.d.* *t. blks.*

Vln *ord. arco* *mf* *mp*

Vc. *arco* *n* *f* *pizz.* *p*

59 60 61 62 63

Fl. *p* *mf* *f*

B. Cl. *f > p* *f*

Pno *p* *n* *mf* *p* *mf*

Perc. *p* *f*

Vln *mf* *p* *mf*

Vc. *f > p* *p* *mf* *p* *f* *p* *f* *f > n* *f*

to vibes vibes

pizz. arco ped. ad lib

pizz. arco

71 72 73 74 75

Fl. *p*

B. Cl. *p* to clarinet

Pno *p*

Perc. *p*

Vln *p*

Vc. *p* *f* *f > n* *f > p* *f* *p* sul tasto

76 77 78 79

F

Fl. *pp*

Pno *p*

Perc. *pp* sus. cym. to vibes *p* vibes *p*

Vln *sul tasto* *n* *p* *n* *pp* *pizz.* *p*

Vc. *pp* *pizz.* *p*

80 81 82 83 84

Fl. *p* *mf*

Cl. *p* *mf* clarinet

Pno *mf*

Perc. *ped. sim.* to slapstick

Vln *ord. pizz.* *p* *mf*

Vc. *ord. pizz.* *p* *mf*

85 86 87 88

Fl. *f* *ff*

Cl. *f* *ff* *f*

Pno *ff*

Perc. *ff* slapstick to sus. cym.

Vln. arco *p* *ff* pizz. arco *p* *f*

Vc. arco *p* *ff* pizz. arco *p* *f*

89 90 91 92

Fl. *f* *mf* *n*

Cl. *mf* *n* to B. Cl.

Pno *f* *p* *f* *p*

Perc. *p* *f* *p* hard yarn mallets sus. cym. shaft on dome

Vln. pizz. arco *p* *f* *p* (exact pitches unimportant)

Vc. *fp* *f* *p* *n* *pp*

93 94 95 96

to picc.

Picc. *p* 6 6 *picc.*

B. Cl. *B. Cl.* *tr* *p*

Pno *pp* *ad lib.* *vibes* (hard yarn mallets)

Perc. *p* *ℓto.* — hold

Vln

Vc. *n* — *pp* *n* — *p*

97 98 99 100

Picc. 6 6 *p* *mf* *p*

B. Cl. *mp* 3 *mf* 3 *p*

Pno *mp*

Perc. *mp*

Vln *p* *sul A pizz.* *mf*

Vc. *n* — *p*

101 102 103 104

H

Picc. *pp*

B. Cl.

Pno *pp*

Perc. *pp*

Vln arco *p*

Vc. *p*

105 106 107 108

Picc. *p* to flute

B. Cl.

Pno

Perc. to t. blks.

Vln (halfway to A#) *mf* gliss. *p*

Vc. (halfway to Gb) *mf* gliss. *p*

109 110 111 112

B. Cl. *pp*

Pno *pp sempre*
n
crossfade with perc.

Perc. *n*
crossfade with pno. *p*

Vln *mp* *p*
(halfway to A) *pp*

Vc. *mp* *p*
(halfway to DA) *pp*

113 114 115 116 117

B. Cl. *3* *3*

Pno *3* *3*
Red. hold

Perc. *n*

Vln *gliss.*

Vc.

118 119 120 121 122

I

Focus on pianist

Cnd.

Fl.

B. Cl.

Pno

Perc.

Vln

Vc.

123 124 125 126 127 128 129

quasi rit. in own tempo

Continue conducting, frustrated, until violinist speaks

Cnd.

Fl.

B. Cl.

Pno

Perc.

Vln

Vc.

130 131 132 133 134 135

1. Those crow tails are making me sleepy!

2. (pretentious, to vc.) It's pronounced cro-ta-les!

4. Cro-tales!

(looking around, concerned)

(fall asleep)

3. (sleepy) What?

(*) - yawn and "fall asleep"
 - shift around when you hear bass drum
 - wake up suddenly when percussionist plays slapstick by you (specific directions in parts)

5. —even your supposed freedom back in the first measure. If anything, blame the composer, for writing music that puts people to sleep. But that's just the way things are, and our only job right now is to finish this score. So who's with me?

J (♩ = 132)

3. (exasperated) [VLN.] and [PERC.] Don't you realize? Every move we make is commanded by the composer—

8. Very good. (go on)

Dialogue

Cnd.

Perc.

Vln

2. Don't look at me! (turn to cnd.) It's all because of you, [CONDUCTOR], bossing us around and telling us when we can and can't play!

4. —I miss measure 1, when we had the freedom to start and stop as we wished—

7. I'm not. But the score told me to say that, so I don't know anymore.

1. (interrupt conducting) Wait...why is everybody asleep? (pause, then turn to perc.) You! It's your fault, for playing the crotales.

6. I'm with you!

sul A pizz. obediently

p

136 137 138

Cnd.

Perc.

Vln

Affirm the violinist, e.g. a thumbs up (ca 5") (ca 15")

1. (after second crotales bow) [VLN.], we can't lose you too! You're the only loyal one here.

2. (shortly) [PERC.], you're putting [VLN.] to sleep. Can you please pick a different instrument? (ca. 13")

to crotales

crotales - bowed, l.v. - play cell 1x only (ca. 15") - look mischevously at conductor and violin after each note

- when instructed, make way to b.d. - remove towel - wait ca. 6" before going to next measure (no cue)

(crotales start) - yawn, rit., and dim. a little both times crotales play - come to senses and accel./cresc. back when conductor talks

(crotales stop, perc. makes way to bass drum)

mf

139 140 141

Cnd.

Perc.

Vln

(ca. 10") continue conducting violinist (don't cue measures), "erratic baton" when bass drum gets loud

2. It's that bass drum. (turn to perc.) [PERC.], you must play a different instrument. (go on)

accel. poco a poco..... ♩ = 160 (ca 11")

ca. 10" - ad lib. chaotically around the drum head - like thunder; rebellious

- pull out the slapstick dramatically and mischevously - walk over by piano/cello (cross in front of piano)

(bass drum starts) - erratic tempo when bass drum gets loud

1. (after second "erratic tempo") Why is everything so shaky?

(conductor starts to accel.)

p *f*

142 143

OVERTHROW THE CONDUCTOR - Full Score

Cnd.

(ca 10") surprised pno. and vc. woke up; conducting them intensely

(ca 6") watching perc. walk to wind players

(ca 10") frustrated at the wind players, motioning to sit down

(ca 20") look around frantically at everything happening

Picc.

(pianist and cellist start)

(perc. walks to winds)

picc.

on second slapstick hit; do 3x
- wake up surprised, begin playing
- stand up slowly and dramatically (ca. 10") as you repeat this figure

once standing up, do 8x:
- take a loud stomp towards conductor as each cello bowstroke finishes (8 total)
- play figure, keeping contour, go up in pitch

(stomp) *p* \rightarrow *mf*

Cl.

(pianist and cellist start)

(perc. walks to winds)

cl.

on second slapstick hit, do 3x:
- wake up surprised, begin playing
- stand up slowly and dramatically (ca. 10") as you repeat this figure

once standing up, do 8x:
- take a loud stomp towards conductor as each cello bowstroke finishes (8 total)
- play figure, keeping contour, go up in pitch

(stomp) *p* \rightarrow *f*

Pno

on first slapstick hit
- wake up surprised, begin playing
- slightly faster than conductor and violin
- stirring up the other players

(perc. walks to winds)

(winds enter)

(winds fully standing)

(turn page at any time)

p \rightarrow *mp* \rightarrow *mf*

Perc.

slapstick

- 1x only
- wake up pianist and cellist!
- wait 10" and go to next bar

walk over to wind players

- 1x only
- wake up wind players!
- wait 5" and go to next bar

- play with piano's quarter notes, NOT with violin/conductor
- walk counterclockwise around your perc. setup then approach the conductor (see performance note)

f

Vln

(pianist and cellist start)

(perc. walks to winds)

(winds start)

(winds fully standing)

on first slapstick hit
- wake up surprised, begin playing
- slightly faster than conductor and violin
- stirring up the other players

(perc. walks to winds)
- don't restart bow on cues, just continue naturally

(winds start)

(winds fully standing)
approx. 8x (until winds stop approaching conductor)

Vc.

(4")

(3")

(2")

(1" --> 0")

n \rightarrow *p* \rightarrow *mp* \rightarrow *mf* \rightarrow *f*

144 145 146 147

(ca 12")
- as if hallucinating, conduct angels in the sky

(ca 5")
- come back to senses, act flustered and cower in fear

(ca 20")
- quickly turn around, mortified, take a bow, and exit the stage (leave score on stand)

Cnd.

once very close to conductor:
- ad lib. high notes frantically, breathe as needed
- flz. more often as slapstick speeds up

2" after clarinet starts this rhythm

once conductor bows: anarchy!
- ad lib. any notes, any rhythm, breathe as needed
- form a line at front of stage

Picc.

f

once very close to conductor:
- ad lib. high notes frantically
- growl/flz. more often as slapstick speeds up

2" after cello starts this rhythm

once conductor bows: anarchy!
- ad lib. any notes, any rhythm, breathe as needed
- form a line at front of stage

Cl.

f

once at a steady tempo w/ perc.

once conductor bows: anarchy!
- ad lib. glissandos
- any speeds, any registers

Pno

(w/ perc) accel. gradually to ♩ = ca. 250

f gradually with accel.

ff

gliss.

gliss.

once at a steady tempo w/ piano

once conductor bows: anarchy!
- chase conductor off stage with slapstick
- return to percussion setup and do whatever you want besides tam-tam!
- ca. 15", go to next bar when ready
- loud, energetic!

Perc.

accel. (w/ piano) gradually to ♩ = ca. 250

ff

2" after flute starts this rhythm:
- high, screeching double stop (pitch unimportant)

once conductor bows: anarchy!
- ad lib. any notes, any rhythm, etc.
- walk around if you want!
- form a line at front of stage

Vln

arco

f

gliss.

gliss.

once winds stop approaching conductor:
- get up and join them! (you defected)
- angry at conductor! chaotic, ad lib.

2" after slapstick doubles speed

once conductor bows: anarchy!
- ad lib. any notes, any rhythm, etc.
- if able to stand, join line at front of stage

Vc.

arco

f

gliss.

gliss.

148

149

150

♩ = 132

suddenly look sad
once piano starts:
- exit stage

Picc. (9")

Cl. (9") once piano starts:
- exit stage

Pno (9") once fermata is over
mf dim. gradually, as people leave (not each repetition) *p*

Perc. tam-tam (9") once piano starts:
- exit stage
- bring whatever you want

Vln suddenly look sad (9") once piano starts:
- exit stage

Vc. suddenly look sad (9") once piano starts:
- exit stage

151 152

once all players are out of sight
 - play this bar
 - get up, walk to the podium very happily
 - grab conductor's score, take a bow, exit stage

Pno

153