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## Marin Alsop: Showing them success

Marin Alsop was the only child of two classical musicians and had aspired to be a conductor for nearly her entire life. After earning her bachelor's (1977) and master's (1978) degrees in the Juilliard School in New York City, she became a working musician in New York City, but her childhood dream of conducting was never far from her mind. When she decided to apply to programmes to study conducting, however, her goal felt continually out of reach. Despite multiple applications, "I got rejected from everything," she remembered. "I mean, I couldn't get into conductor school. I was rejected from Juilliard four times – and I had just gotten my master's there."

Abandoning the traditional path to the podium, Alsop instead found a mentor and investor (businessman and philanthropist Tomio Taki), who backed her in creating the Concordia Orchestra – which she then conducted. The Concordia Orchestra performed everything from jazz to contemporary pieces, and cemented Alsop's skill and commitment as a conductor. She went on to lead US orchestras in Virginia, Oregon and New York and, by 1999, had expanded her career beyond the US, serving as Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra before being appointed Principal Conductor of England's Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in 2001.

In 2005, the board of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra – one of only 15 major orchestras in the United States (none of which had ever been led by a woman) – announced Alsop's appointment as Music Director, beginning in the 2007 season. Her lifelong dream of leading a major orchestra had apparently been achieved – but things quickly turned sour as the musicians and some board members raised a public outcry, objecting to Alsop's hiring. In a public letter, the detractors raised complaints about her technique, her ear and the insufficiencies of the selection process, from which they felt they'd been excluded.

The comments about Alsop's performance and skill were unfounded – and deeply hurtful. "I'd worked so hard and it felt like people who didn't even know me were out to destroy me. They were saying I didn't have a good ear, I didn't know how to rehearse . . . all things that are just completely false." Alsop tried not to take the attacks personally (although, of course, they were deeply personal). She believed that the negative reaction was "a manifestation of a really dysfunctional institution" where the musicians were angry at management and felt cut out of the conductor selection process – and she thought she could lead the orchestra successfully if she could figure out how to bring the musicians around. Some people told Alsop to decline the role because the negativity and hassle would not be worth it. And, on a personal level, she was tempted to agree, exclaiming, "Gosh, who needs this?" At the same time, she felt the weight of the appointment, both personally and historically: "I thought to myself, "Okay, I have this historic appointment as the first woman to lead a professional, full-time American orchestra. Am I going to say, 'Nah, I think I won't do it', because I feel intimidated?"

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