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There are those who will always play second fiddle in their professional lives, according to Robert Greenberg. They are the also-rans, the Miss Havershams, the ladies-in-waiting, in the great orchestral symphony which is the workplace. They are last year's sales leaders.

These players suffer an often uncomfortable relationship with the first violins: the troublesome virtuosos who carry the tune within any organisation. They have the talent to sit up front and the egos to match.

But pity the poor violas: the support staff, the butts of innumerable jokes, the unsung heroes who keep the orchestra together but who are content to receive no recognition for their role. They are noticed only when they play a false note.

And what orchestra could manage without sound underpinning from the double bass section? These grave-sounding senior executives respond to the changing face of the firm by moving resources to where they are needed, providing the finances on which the rest is built.

Greenberg, a composer and professor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, is making a living out of one vast analogy between the orchestra and the corporation.

His speeches about music and leadership identify the conductor as chief executive and examine the rivalries that fester within an elite group of professional musicians. And he is bringing his mantra to Britain.

"For your average concert-goer, an orchestra would appear to be 100 tuxedo-clad penguins cheerfully, even mindlessly, sawing away at the whim of the conductor," explains Greenberg during a whistle-stop visit to London between speaking engagements in Berlin and Prague.

"In truth, just beneath the collaborative surface of an orchestra lies an incredible amalgam of cliques, competing interests, rivalries and personality conflicts, exacerbated by the fact that the musicians believe they are chronically underpaid and unappreciated. In other words, the symphony is like any organisation in the world of business."

Yes, Greenberg is the all-round American. He has intellectual

calibre all wrapped up in mass appeal with no small helping of US-style salesmanship. A walking, talking self-help manual, he is full of an irresistible kind of pop psychology, but don't be fooled. Greenberg's musical credentials are formidable.

A Princeton scholar, he has a PhD in music composition from the University of California, Berkeley. He has composed more than 40 of his own classical works and his composition for string quartet, *Child's Play*, was performed at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam in February 1993 to wide acclaim.

He is the head of the department of music history and literature at the San Francisco Conservatory and is the author of numerous music appreciation lectures. Yet Greenberg's sights are on business. Californian workers, who sense their high-octane lives are devoid of intellectual and artistic content, are soaking up his music appreciation courses on tape in the car.

"He is compelling and powerful," gushes Devinder Garawal, a company director at Canadian Pacific. "He makes you feel the whole of experience through music, in a way that brings clarity to the confusion of everyday issues in which we get lost."

Executives at Arthur Andersen and Andersen Consulting have been converted to the Greenberg vision, while the Bank of America has flung open meeting rooms at its headquarters for his "motivational" talks. *The Wall Street Journal* described him as "a virtuoso".

Now, Greenberg has been signed by the London Speaker Bureau, joining Sir David Frost and Sebastian Coe in giving motivational talks to global movers and shakers, including BP Amoco, American Express, Glaxo Wellcome, British Airways and Unilever.

We meet in a narrow back street, close to the Mayfair hotel where Greenberg is staying. He is keen to express his love of London's history and admires a cobbled square in the heart of Shepherd's Market. "This is where they used to hold public executions," he says excitedly, instantly betraying his Brooklyn roots.

Greenberg's essential theory is that business success, as with musical brilliance, relies on staying true to the score. "If it becomes a cult of personality, there's a danger that



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personal rivalries will take over. If you're careful to put the music first, which is what the really smart conductors do, then you can all have a common vision — not one's own aggrandisement but the thing you're working on."

Greenberg has indentified the key dilemma facing those in charge of a skilled workforce. "On the one hand, it's the conductor's neck on the line. If things go wrong, no one's going to blame the second clarinetist. The buck stops with the

conductor. And yet he can no longer take the dictatorial stance. Nowadays, you have to empower your workforce, not discipline them.

"This is the biggest difficulty facing modern management, modern parenting and modern organisations.

"The cult of personality doesn't work any more," he says. "The vision has to transcend the individual: that's true in a corporation and it's true of a piece of music. The music is the universal thing, not the conductor. A corporation listening to me say these things about music makes the connection."

In conversation, Greenberg moves seamlessly between orchestra and business. "Conductors are by their nature singular creatures, egotistical creatures and also often not very clever," he says.

Not clever? What about Georg Solti, Leonard Bernstein, André Previn?

"Now, you're talking about the elite of the elite," he argues.

"But for every Fortune 500 organisation, there are 8,000 smaller com-

panies with a turkey at the helm.

"Most people will have had the experience of looking above them and saying: 'How did this person get to a position of power?' They are borderline incompetent, they have no social skills, their intellect is of a minimum quality. The only thing they have going for them is a ferocious desire to succeed. That should not be enough.

"These are people who hold on long enough until everyone around them either dies off or gives up. I would say about 70 per cent of players I've talked to say the same thing about their conductors, but I'm not going to name names."

Old-style autocrats, such as the stern conductor Otto Klemperer, have been replaced by those who can interpret and negotiate.

"Bernstein managed to convince his players they were free to innovate and express themselves while convincing them to accept his vision for the music and to follow his direction," says Greenberg.

"When that happens, the results can be magical."

Which instrument are you?



Flutes, cellos, violins: the glamour instruments. Always on top because they get to play thematic melody. Cellists are especially important because they also get to play baseline. So they are the support on which so much of the orchestra rests, and they're also the melody, projecting the top. They are just like the executive directors of any firm.



First violins: the most numerous and obnoxious group in the orchestra. The leader of the first violins is the concert master, who is hired and fired by the conductor alone. The conductor communicates with his orchestra via the concert master — a strange position to be in and an unhappy one: the concert master is not part of the team they work with and he's not the conductor either. Everyone, essentially, hates the concert master. The first violins generally, as the orchestral elites, are always on the edge of rancour and hostility.



Second violins: who wants to admit they're a second violin? These are people who never quite got there and it's their job to play second fiddle. Often very bitter because, if you play violin, it means you want to play the melody. I know a lot of second violins will be gunning for me over this, but who's the person I'm least afraid of in this world? A second violin. These are second-level management, hoping to move up but with no real hope of doing so, grasping to keep hold of their positions. Yet you can't have an orchestra without them. Not everyone can be a star.



Viola: constantly sidelined, providing the inner voice, the support, the harmonic. They are the backbone of the entire string section and yet the butt of all the jokes: "How do you get two violas to play in tune? shoot one. What's black and brown and looks good on a viola player? A Doberman. What did the violas get on the college exams? Drool."

They are sandwiched between the front-line deal-makers and the executive directors. Essentially they are human resource people and senior administrative staff: the people who make everything happen but are only noticed when they make a mistake.



The double basses: they shift the resources to where they are needed. They are aware of the large-scale needs of the organisation: not flashy, not visible, but absolutely necessary. The financial management of an organisation.



Oboe, bassoon, English horn: double reed players spend one half of their lives making reeds, and the other half of their lives getting migraines from blowing them. Who wants to do that? These are very fussy, particular people. They might be designers of some kind, stuck on detail. A position where the very nature of your job causes constant physical discomfort.



Clarinet: the single reed player. Getting a note is not a problem: this is one of the easiest instruments to play. Clarinetists are generally mellow people: they must blend with the other wind instruments. They are mediators and problem solvers, keeping everyone in synchrony without drawing undue attention to themselves.



Trumpet: the prima donnas of the brass section: snappy dressers with fancy cars and a tendency to strut and crow. Trumpet players tend to date flute players who are, of course, the prima donnas of the wind section. Lots of machismo with the trumpet players; the higher and louder they can play, the better. They are marketing managers: proud of their "performance targets".



French horn: the most difficult instrument to play in the orchestra, and the most unforgiving as well: you make a mistake on the French horn and the entire world knows about it. Despite this, the horns play a supporting role, like the auditing or accounting department.



Trombones: the orchestral primitives, the heavy-lifting specialists of the ensemble. These people blow and they get a note, but frankly, they should be kept as far away from other instruments as possible.

Robert Greenburg