

# Conducting pedagogues: a dialogue with Maestro Jean-François Rivest, act II

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**Abstract:** Understanding the didactic-pedagogical structures concerning the teaching-learning process of the conducting, are not summarized to the technical-gestural aspects, it permeates administrative, logistics and psych-pedagogical elements. To visualize this perspective in the light of labor reality, the narratives of academic, artistic and professional life are resorted through a cycle of interviews with national (Brazil) and international conductors. The professional to be interviewed is the Canadian conductor and professor Jean-François Rivest. Considered one of the most prominent violinist of his generation, Rivest studied at Julliard School with Ivan Galamian, and his musical path soon led him to a fruitful international career. As a Professor at the Université de Montréal, founded the institution's Symphony Orchestra. Giving voice to conductors as Rivest allows us to visualize new practical, conceptual and pedagogical perspectives, and directs us to look at the real needs of the field of conducting: to think and act beyond the gestural technique.

**Keywords:** Jean-François Rivest, Conducting Teaching and Learning, Conductors Pedagogues.

**Resumo:** A compreensão das estruturas didático-pedagógicas concernentes ao processo de ensino-aprendizagem da regência, não estão resumidas aos aspectos técnico-gestuais, perpassam por elementos administrativos, logísticos e psicopedagógicos. Para visualizar essa perspectiva à luz da realidade laboral, recorre-se as narrativas da vida acadêmica, artística e profissional, por meio de um ciclo de entrevistas com Maestros e Professores internacionais e nacionais (Brasil). O segundo a ser entrevistado é o Maestro e Professor Canadense Jean-François Rivest. Considerado um dos mais proeminentes violinistas da sua geração, Maestro Rivest estudou na Julliard School com Ivan Galamian, e seu percurso musical logo lhe conduziu para uma profícua carreira internacional na regência. Professor da Université de Montréal, fundou a orquestra sinfônica da instituição. Dar voz a Maestros como Rivest permite visualizar novas perspectivas práticas, conceituais e pedagógicas, e nos direciona o olhar para as reais necessidades do campo da regência: pensar e agir para além da técnica gestual.

**Palavras-chave:** Jean-François Rivest, Ensino Aprendizagem da Regência, Pedagogos da Regência.

The phrase “the baton does not make the conductor” may initially sound impactful or ambiguous, but it holds undeniable truth. When my conducting studies began, my teacher imparted this wisdom in class. At the time, its full significance eluded me — *à priori*<sup>1</sup> — yet its resonance lingered. Over time, I came to grasp its profound meaning, realizing that effective training in conducting necessitates a multifaceted approach encompassing both musical and extramusical elements.

This understanding underscores the conductor’s pivotal role in repertoire selection and preparation. Armed with a chosen repertoire, the conductor delves into the intricate layers of aesthetic, stylistic, and analytical-musical dimensions. Whether through direct engagement with their instrument or by distilling passages on the piano, the conductor meticulously crafts the phrasal and harmonic structures. However, the true test lies in the rehearsal room, where the conductor’s preparatory efforts are put to the test. Yet, this phase is not without its challenges, as it intersects with various administrative, logistical, and psychopedagogical factors, all revolving around the human element—the musicians. Each musician brings their unique perspective, understanding, and response to the conductor’s direction, emphasizing the need for adaptability and effective communication.

Both the rehearsal and the moment of the concert itself correspond to the phase of musical performance: it’s the act of corroborating the feasibility of theoretical subsidies, obtained through the prospecting performed on the composition. Therefore, it is possible that an interpretive review in real time occurs. This review, for example, consists of reflection during performance, of precepts such as dynamics and sound balance of the ensemble (coral or instrumental), which can be reviewed/adjusted in real time, due to the acoustic response from where the concert will be performed. According to Lima (2013, p. 150), “the [conductor] is the one who gives him/herself to

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<sup>1</sup> The *à priori* concept, as exposed by Kant, substantiate the perspective that we cannot only let experience with future reality shows that extramusical aspects are part of the conductor’s work-related activities. It is necessary to reflect and dialogue beyond the gestural technique throughout the training period in conducting. “The kind of knowledge identified largely as *à priori* knowledge dates back to the early days of Greek philosophy, but it was, undoubtedly, by Kant that it found a more systematic elaboration [...]. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says: “For this reason we will hereby designate, by *a priori* judgments, not those who do not depend on this or that experience, but those in which absolute independence of any and all experience is verified” (Magalhães, 2014, p. 11-12). Experience should be a factor that shapes the information previously taught and seized according to the reality to which it is being applied.

the work, but knows how to control the situation, imagine in advance what to do, but at the same time listens to what he/she did and reacts continuously with this process of interpretative doing”.

The synthesis outlined in this preamble is an example that the abstraction, clarity and understanding of the gestural technique is only a fraction of the necessary elements for the conductor’s training (Lima et al., 2023). To highlight this factor, a cycle of interviews with renowned performers and teachers working in the Brazilian and international scenario was structured. It is believed that by sharing the experiences of the academic, artistic and professional life of these *actants*<sup>2</sup>, it is a small step towards the breaking of stifled stereotypes that consequently prevent the development of new methodological approaches to teaching-learning. At the same time, it is recorded for future generations of conductors, the voice of these educators and performers. The voice that will share his experiences belongs to the conductor and professor Jean-François Rivest.

Maestro Jean-François Rivest (2023):

Québec conductor Jean-François Rivest is renowned for his energy, his extremely precise technique, his style, which is passionate, moving and deeply involved, and his great communication skills. His discography serves as proof to the ease with which he masters a large variety of musical genres ranging from the baroque era up to today. He was recently appointed Principal Guest Conductor and Music Advisor of Quebec’s premier chamber orchestra, I Musici de Montréal. He has been Artistic Director of the Orchestre Symphonique de Laval, (10 years) and of Ottawa’s *Thirteen Strings Ensemble*, (5 years), as well as Conductor in Residence of the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal (OSM) where his tenure has been particularly significant. Jean-François Rivest firmly believes that the next generation of musicians must rely on performers that are also active as pedagogues. He has worked for several institutions and has been teaching violin, orchestral conducting as well as a variety of advanced performance classes at Université de Montréal since 1992. He is the founder, Artistic Director and principal conductor of the Orchestre de l’Université de Montréal (OUM). From 2009 to 2015, he has been Artistic Director of the Orford Arts Centre, (now Orford Music), nearby Montréal where he presided over the destiny of Orford’s prestigious International Academy and Festival. His period at the head of the Arts Center is unanimously seen as a time of tremendous artistic renewal and growth. In the 2012 Opus Prizes Awards ceremony, he was given the Opus Prize for the Artistic Director of the year (2011). Mr. Rivest, who trained at the Conservatoire de Montréal and at the Juilliard School in New York, quickly established himself as one of the foremost Quebec violinists of his generation. His main teachers were Sonia Jelinkova, Ivan

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<sup>2</sup> It dialogues with the perspective of Bruno Latour’s *Actor-Network Theory* (2012). More precisely, “*actant* is all that generates an action, which produces movement and difference, whether human or non-human. The *actant* is the mediator, in other words, it is the one who changes, translates, distorts and modifies the meaning he/she supposedly carries. [...] The means that participate in the associations in a system can be the mediators (*actants*) or intermediaries, which are those that do not produce modifications in the message. A mediator can become an intermediary just as an intermediary can turn into a mediator” (Praude 2016, 15).

Galamian and Dorothy DeLay. Being the father of four children, family is at the center of his life. He is passionate about nature and outdoor activities, such as scuba diving, kayak, climbing, trekking and photography. He has even participated in several expeditions of a challenging level. He holds a Private Pilot License and flies his good old Cessna regularly. Jean-François Rivest believes that the many facets of nature are a vital source of artistic inspiration.

## 1. Dialogue with Maestro Jean-François Rivest

### Erickinson Lima (EL), André Oliveira (AO): Who is Jean-François Rivest?

**Jean-François Rivest (JFR):** Well, I am a 65-year-old Canadian from Montreal. I am a violinist, fundamentally: I was a violinist when I was young, and I did the normal curriculum of a young talented violinist. I went to Juilliard, and I did all that. At age 20, I succeed to get an audition for the Montreal Symphony Orchestra as a violinist, and I played there for 5 years. After that, my life took me: I decided I took my retirement from the symphony at 25. Then I went to teach in conservatory, and I did some ensemble, chamber music, and teaching, and composing... all sorts of things.

And my life took a small turn of 7 years when I left Montreal and I went very far, north. You probably don't know but it's called Chicoutimi, and it's a place about 500 kilometers north of Montreal, in wilderness, and evergreen in: there's lots of snow, and Aurora Borealis... and I taught there in the conservatory for 7 years. It was when I met my wife, and we had 2 kids there.

Finally, I got a phone call from the University of Montreal's Dean, who said: "Are you interested to teach at the University of Montreal at the violin?" So, it was when I came back to Montreal and I started teaching at the University of Montreal, 32 years ago.

It was there, at the beginning of my tenure as a violine teacher, I was working on the string department, when I went to the Dean and said: "How do you want me to make a strong violin or string department without an orchestra?" — There was no orchestra — So he said: "Well, sure. Then create one!"

And I was not a conductor at all! I think at that time I hated conductors ... I was a violinist, but I started an orchestra there, at the University, and that's why and how I started conducting. I've been a conductor since then, and I'm taking my retirement of University of Montreal after this season

(2023-2024), after 30 and some years. But there is one more thing that you have to add, if you ask me who I am: besides music, I am a family guy and I have 4 kids. Also, I love outdoor and nature activities: I do kayak, I do mountain climbing. You know, I do all sorts of things like that. That's all part of who I am.

**EL, AO: How and When did occur your awaken to your musical path/journey?**

**JFR:** I don't remember. I was too young, you know? I was very, very young when my parents took me to concerts. I mean, that's the same story of many of our colleagues. But I was 1 or 2 years old, and I was always surrounded by music: my mother was a piano teacher, my father was a former musician. They took me to a lot of musical events, and I seemed to be very sensitive to that. I don't remember, you know? I was too young.

**EL, AO: In your path as a violinist you studied with renowned professors such as: Dorothy DeLay, Sonia Jelinkova, and Ivan Galamian. Tell us about that.**

**JFR:** I studied in Montreal in the conservatory. Then, at age 18, I went to Juilliard, and I studied with Ms. Delay. But since age 11 or 12, I used to go to the summer camp of Mr. Galamian, and just to give you a few names: the guy who was teaching chamber music was Joseph Gingold. And there was a young cellist, a 15-year-old that nobody knew, playing concert there. He had a funny name: his name was Yo-Yo Ma... you know? And the assistant to Galamian was Miss Delay.

I mean, it was an amazing period, because I saw there Michael Rabin. I saw there Kyung-Wha Chung, Perlman, Zukerman. They were all there, advanced students, when I was a kid.

So, it was very, very inspiring and very pushing, because I used to practice for an hour, and then I got there, and I was obliged to practice 5 hours a day. When you're 12 years old, what do you do for 5 hours, you know? I had a lot of coaching and lots of lessons. It was a bit humiliating, because before me, Michael Rabin would play a lesson to Mr. Galamian... He played, like: 3 *Paganini Caprice*, one Bach Sonata, and then the Brahms concerto. Then, I came in and I played a *Fiocco's Allegro*, a piece for babies, you know? But I was very young: just 11-12 years old. And then, after that, I went to Aspen - Colorado, and that's where I met Miss Lee and she told me: "Come to Julliard!", and I stayed 2 years in New York. I was very quick because I did my bachelors at the first year, and my masters at the senior

year. So, I did it all very fast. Then I came back, and that's the end of the studying.

But you know, all the while I was in Montreal, I did study a lot of composition, writing, counterpoint, harmony, history, analysis, and all of that, which I was very interested in. So, if you ask me later in one of your questions: "What got me interested to conducting?" First, I think that we don't become a conductor. We are a conductor in the soul, already. But the main criteria for me was the desire to understand everything of the work, to understand and to take responsibility for all aspects of the music. And then, therefore, it goes much more beyond finding a fingering or a bowing for your violin, but it's really thinking about the whole music. It's funny because I've been spending the last 4 days analyzing the Mahler Second Symphony. And I am like crazy, you know? I dream about it every night... I mean, that's why we conduct.

**EL, AO: And how do you think the lessons with those "legends" reflect upon your conducting?**

**JFR:** That's an interesting question. Because the real question that any conductor should answer is: "How do you translate your musical upbringing into some tools for the conductor? And how it serves your conducting?" Of course, the technical aspects of the violin don't seem to serve the conductor so much, but they do, because there's a lot of violins in front of you in an orchestra. So, if you understand the strings, it helps. But we know many very good conductors who are not string players. So, at the end, it's not an obligation.

My old teacher, Madame Sonia Jelinkova, with whom I was from age 12 to 19, before I went to Juilliard, just died a few months ago, at age 99. So, we gathered all the students and we talked about her, and one of the things that I had to say was what she taught us: it was to make a direct connection between the musical idea that you feel in your heart or in your brain, and the appropriate technical tool to do it. I think that summarizes the answer.

So, we did a lot of scales with, you know, slow bow, fast bow, nearly 2 notes slurred, one note detached, and that sounds stupid. But when you start thinking about how you manage a beautiful line with varied bowings like that, you discover that in order to manage the line, you have to harness the technical aspects, and it has to become a second nature. That's a good instrumentalist: the good instrumentalist has a set of tools that translates instantaneously the music that he feels in his heart.

Well, I think with the conductor is the same thing, or it's even better: you don't make any noise. You just hear the music, and you make an appropriate gesture, and if the orchestra doesn't react the way you want, then you have to find a modulation of that gesture or another gesture, or you have to find a way, so that instantaneously you change the sound of the orchestra. Otherwise, you are just a metronome. Many conductors are just shaking the stick, you know?

So that's the answer to your question: all these great teachers, they teach you how to make a connection between your musicality and the technical demands of your instrument, be it the violin or the conducting.

**EL, AO: You told us already a bit about it: From violinist to conductor, how did occur the awaken of your interest to be a conductor?**

**JFR:** I didn't tell you everything. No. I told you that, the Dean said: "make an orchestra", and then I made one. But that's not the full answer. The full answer to "What is a conductor and when you become one?" is the following: Of course, one part of it is a technical thing that knows how to be, so that people understand...And blah blah blah...and we can teach that. That's the only thing we can teach about conducting.

Then, the other parts of the conductor are: the main one, is exactly the same one as the pianist, and the violinist, which is being just a good musician. It is the same thing as any other good musician. The third part is very specific to human relationships, and it's the leadership aspect. The leadership aspect is how psychologically and artistically, how to propose to other people such a strong proposition that they agree to go with you in the same direction. That's how I conceive leadership: how to make such a good proposition that people will agree on their own will to follow you on the same path. So, you go all together with a goal.

I will make a parenthesis: do you know who wrote *The Little Prince*? Well, that guy once said: "Love is not to look at each other, love is to look together in the same direction". I think leadership is the same: you don't force people to go somewhere. Well, in the Army they do that. But the good leadership is that you propose something that people there will agree to go with you.

So, my answer to "how do you become that?" is: I think that in a way, you must have it inside of you. It has to be born with you. You have to be born like that. But it can reveal itself with age. It

can take some time. For example, when I was a small kid, I was quite a bit not extrovert. It's funny because I've been outgoing since then, but it took for perhaps the beginning of the adolescence to make it come out. But if I go back to 10 years old, I was already the first violin of a string quartet. And I was leading the rehearsing, you know? "Let's start at A, and let's do this faster, and let's do this slower", and I was 10/11 years old, you know? And then, after that, at age 14, I composed the whole Rock Opera, like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, you know? And I musically conducted everything, rehearsed the girls... Then, at age 15, I was the lead guitar of a progressive rock group, in the style of *Gentle Giant* or *King Crimson* or *Genesis*. I wrote music for the group, and I rehearsed the group... Finally, when I was in Juilliard, I had a group of singers and instrumentalists and we did a concert per month in Alice Tully Hall, in New York, with *Bach Cantatas*, and I conducted from the first violin. You know, I conducted small ensembles for about 10 years from the position of the *Konzertmeister*, especially smaller ensembles. And it's only after I got to Montreal, as I said, when the Dean said "make an orchestra", that I really took a baton, and I started conducting like a real conductor.

And the other aspect, is the one that you really want to take responsibility for the full music, and it is also something that is innate. I remember when I was 12-13, I used to spend 5 hours every day at the piano reading Bach Chorales for organ, reducing symphonies and trying to understand some very complex things. I used to read *The Art of the Fugue* with some friends: "Let's play 2 voices each" ... You know? It's an interest, a craving for much higher level of understanding than just playing your own little instrument.

**EL, AO: We know that you founded and until today you are the artistic director and the main conductor of the Orchestre de l'Université de Montréal, as well as you were Conductor in Residence of the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal. How your rehearsals use to be, considering orchestras with such different goals and perspectives? Is there a difference on dealing with an academic orchestra or a professional one?**

**JFR:** First, it's a funny way how the question starts, because I've had relationship with many professional orchestras. I was 10 years the artistic director for the Laval Symphony. I was 5 years the artistic director of an orchestra in Ottawa. I am now, for a couple of years, the artistic director of a chamber orchestra, in I Musici de Montreal, and I've been conducting as a guest conductor, many,



many others around the world, mostly in Canada, but also in many other places. So, the comparison is not only between the Montreal Symphony and the University of Montreal, but between professional orchestras and student orchestras. And I conducted other student orchestras, by the way. Even nowadays, certain orchestras.

So, there is a very big difference, of course, and the first difference is their experience. People in professional orchestras have the experience, so you relate to them by getting their experience into practice. You ask them to do things, and then you let them use their experience to make what you asked. In a student orchestra, you have to teach them everything. And it takes much more time. But I like to transmit the good practices and the good way of doing things. I mean, there are things that you will teach to a student orchestra that you don't need to tell a professional orchestra. But it is relative...there are some professional orchestras that are not so good, and there are some that are very good.

There is another problem as well, or it's a reverse situation. There's an advantage to a student orchestra: they are very eager to do well, and they're very positive and very emotional and very involved, and some professional orchestras are less positive, let's say, sometimes... And we could say much worse than that, they can be less encouraging or less involved and, sometimes, rightful negative, you know?

So, sometimes in a professional orchestra, a lot of energy will be put to just make sure that you get a good going relationship with them, to start with. And, you know, there's one secret for that: it is to play a lot. So, every new orchestra, when you're invited, the first thing you have to do is to play for half an hour, even though it sounds bad. Don't stop to correct things, you know? So, every time I go somewhere, for a new symphony, I will just start by reading the whole symphony. And I take note, in my head, what is to rehearse. On the other hand, they will take note, in their heads, of who I am. Hopefully after the first reading, I will not be a bad person for them, because a week can be long... But I mean, they can decide you're a bad person after 3 minutes, and it's finished, you know?

So, students are not like that. The relationship is much more true, much more humanly interesting. But I think it's different. With a professional orchestra, you can go further in the details, in the refinement. But with the student orchestra you can go as far as you want, with the brute emotion, because they are so eager to do it well, you know?

In a student orchestra, you have to fill the cup content... So, you you'll see some experiences with a student orchestra, especially the one of the University of Montreal, which is a very good orchestra. We played all Brahms symphonies, Beethoven symphonies, most symphonies of Mahler and Shostakovich, and they are memorable moments. Last year we did the *Rite of Spring* (Stravinsky), and it was very good, too. Those memorable moments are not as perfect as with the Montreal Symphony. There are some little problems, but the level of involvement and energy is fantastic, and even when professionals come to our conference, they are always amazed by what the students can do, you know? So that's the difference, let's say.

**EL, AO: And how do you know the limit of a student orchestra?**

**JFR:** That's a very good question. You see, when you have students, you need to (and that's good for every instrument) propose some programs that will challenge them. If the program is too easy. They will not learn much, and they will get bored. But if it's something impossible, they will come out with sore feelings or with "broken bones", you know? So, for example, I cannot do, with a student orchestra, the Alpine Symphony, by Strauss. It's impossible. There is nobody with 20-year-old lungs capable of it, and trombone can't hold the breath that you need in the Alpine symphony. They will all break their lips. They don't know how to manage, the brass specially, they don't know how to manage their energy to play that. And we had a discussion with the brass teachers: "there's no way we can do Alpine symphony, but we can do the Rite of Spring", which is one of the most difficult pieces of all, but it doesn't require this kind of skill.

I mean, we cannot do, let's say, a concert version of Tristan. The string players will just hurt themselves: so many notes there are to play, and they don't know how to fake. But we can do a Mahler 2, which we are going to do soon. And how do I know this? It's experience and intuition and knowledge of the repertoire.

I think it would go together with another question: "how do you know, as a conductor, what are the real difficulties of a score?" It's not so evident...

Let's say: taking a conductor who is not a string player. I've seen many young student conductors not really understanding what the difficulties for the first violins are. They think that the minute it's written a little high, it's more difficult. But it's not true. It's not always more difficult.

Sometimes it's not high, and it's pretty difficult! And we know very well that, in brass, they can have 3 notes as in the high C, and it's going to be very difficult, you know?

So, "how do you decode the difficulty of a score?" It takes a lot of knowledge and understanding of each instrument, and some, I would say a lot of observation from rehearsals of professional orchestras. And that comes down to: if I had a counsel to give to any young conductor who is learning is to go to a lot of rehearsals, because that's where you're going to learn all these things, tactics and limits. And I mean, you will see when the horns crack the solo at the third time, because they get too tired. You will see... And if you ask the guy to play one half step higher, the note just doesn't come out! So, I mean, there's all sorts of things you can observe.

**EL, AO: If we go back on time, at the first time that you were leading a group, what memories do you have of that moment? And what would the Conductor Jean François from today say to the young Conductor Jean François from then?**

**JFR:** I think I can share what all *debutant* conductors feel: you have the feeling that you're behind everything, that you don't think fast enough, that the orchestra doesn't understand you, that you do something, and it doesn't do what you want. And then you do more subdivisions and other insignificant things, and it's even worse. I mean: that's the beginning of conducting, you know?

I remember first time I did the *Adagietto* from Mahler 5: I subdivided about every half-beat everywhere, and the orchestra didn't understand me, and I was mad because, in my head, it was so clear! But then I realize that you should not subdivide all this. Of course, you should not!

So, as a young conductor, the first impressions are of not knowing how to do it. And even if a teacher tells you: "do not subdivide this, and do not do that such big gesture", we all have some impulses. And we have some wrong kinematics impulses that our body wants to do. Some people will jump on their knees for 10 years before we put a nail in the bottom... There are all sorts of problems, you know?

But that's where I think good teaching can help a student to get better technically. And when we get better, technically, we feel that suddenly we can achieve better what we are hearing, you know? Because, if I go back to the beginning of our conversation, to be able to modulate your gesture to get what your musical mind is hearing, you have to have a good set of technical skills. Otherwise, you're

going to do all wrong. When I talk about myself of when I started conducting, I really think I conducted like a crow, you know? way too big, way too big! Because I'm very enthusiastic and have a lot of energy... And then you look some other people, and they are so boring, and they sleep, and they don't play.

So, to answer your question: the difference now, the bigger difference is that I don't really think of what I have to do, and I just breathe the music, and I do what I want most of the time, and I feel very good. You know, I didn't feel so good when I started.

**EL, AO: So, if you had some advice to give to yourself back then, what would it be?**

**JFR:** It's difficult to say, because each person is different. Well, one of the advices would be to never stop developing the inner musical world, so that we have a greater imagination. All the while, doing everything we can to learn a good technique, as quick as possible. And there are some tools to do it by yourself, like some people will have a good way to be self-taught. I don't think that going to thousands of conducting workshops is going to help that much. I don't think so.

Probably the best advice would be self-criticism. That's why we record videos of everything we do and look at it without liking it, we look at it and try to say: "what can I do better?"

I think that's the only way, because in our way, nobody will really, really teach you anything more than a few skills and tools and techniques. The rest you're going to learn by yourself. So, my advice is to be very self-critical: record everything and debrief with some other people if you can, and don't be afraid to ask some professional musicians what they think, even though they're not going to care about you, sometimes.

I will give you 2 examples that happened to me. When I was a very young conductor (I was not even a conductor, actually. I was just the leader of a group when I was 10 years old), my musical idea was so clear in my mind, but the group was not getting it. So, I got so mad, that I didn't realize that I was not being nice. I was not respectful. Then, at one point, the contrabass player, who was a very good friend, took me apart and said: "You know you're a really good musician. But if you continue like this, nobody is going to want to play for you". At that time, I had never thought of that. I didn't even think about it, because I was all in my musical ideas, you know? So, it was like my first slap in the face. And it really helped me a lot, because after that, I changed a lot of things.

And another time later, just when I started conducting and I was in Laval, I was all in my musical mind again, you know? In a way I thought I was playing a big organ, you know? So, one of the musicians, in a friendly discussion, told me about another conductor who had much more contact with the musicians, and that he thought I didn't have much contact with them. It was another slap in the face. Of course, when I teach now, I yell at my students to stop looking at the score and to make contact. And I mean, that's something you can help somebody to learn. But nobody had told me before that. So that was a big realization.

And after that I realized that memorization, division of the bars in your score, a good preparation of the music (so you don't have to look to it for very long), and basically every tool that you can use to keep your eyes in the eyes of the musicians, makes this contact better. So, the advice is to take these "slaps in the face" and make them good advice for yourself.

I have one last story: once I was conducting at Montreal symphony, for my first time, the final dance in *Daphnis et Chloé* (Ravel)...You know, in 5, very complicated, and we know many instances where orchestras just fall apart in that piece. It's very difficult! It's very difficult to keep that all together. So, I prepared myself: there were all sorts of patterns, and I had discussed them with Paulo. It was fun and I was ready, you know? Then I conducted it, and it went fine, it was beautiful. After that I discussed with the concertmaster, he was a friend, and I said: "you know it's my first time. I had prepared such a way so that no one escape, was it clear enough?" Then he looked at me and said: "Oh, yeah! It was very clear! But you know, I don't really look at the conductor. I count '1, 2, 3, 4, 5' and I'm good". That was one of the biggest lessons I learned, you know? That's a big lesson.

**EL, AO: In the literature about conducting, it is possible to identify divergent points of view about the teaching and learning process of it: there is a speech saying that the Conducting is not something to be taught ("we cannot teach conducting, we are born as a conductor or not"); on the other hand, there is a speech saying that, with a good methodological structure, conducting can be taught. What would Jean François say about this discussion, being the Professor and conductor that you are today?**

**JFR:** As you can see, I have already answered many parts of this question before, but to make a synthesis, I think that, again, conducting has many aspects. But let's take the main one: is the

musicianship. You have to be a good musician, like Barenboim is a good pianist way before being a great conductor. Anybody should be, before being a conductor, a very good musician.

One of the main reasons is to have the ability to create a good musical idea. But another reason that is very pragmatic is that: if you're good enough, the musicians will respect you and follow you, but how can they be led or follow somebody who they think is not even as good as them? Is that possible? So, the first thing is being a good musician, and that is not something that you teach a young conductor. He must have it. He must have learned it from young age how to be a good instrumentalist.

The other thing is to be a good leader and have some psychological skills. Of course, you cannot teach that. So, the best way to try to teach that is to not teach it, but to put the right circumstances around the student. So that's why, in a program like we have at Montreal, we have some concerts with the orchestra, we have some workshops with 2 pianos, we have some discussions with the teachers. All of this makes the student make his own idea and grow his own thing. But I cannot teach him. I can only present some good circumstances where he can grow as a musician and as a conductor.

The third aspect, which I would call the Kinematic aspect, or the technical aspect, is good for all instruments: pianists need to know how to work on their *thirds*, violinists need to work on their *spiccato*s. I mean, we all need some stupid technical skills. Well, that we can teach! It's difficult to change somebody who has taken some bad habits. But at least we can try to teach this person.

Technique is made of several different aspects: some in the left arm, some in the right arm, some in the back, some in the zones, and the high, and the low, and in front, and in the back, and some in the suppleness, and some in the clicks, and some in the shape of the gestures, and some in the *staccato*, *legato*, *piano*, *forte*. And all of this is very well summed up in some very good books like the Max Rudolf's *The Grammar of Conducting*. And we can use some good tools... For example, I used to put some little stickers on the wall, so we can make good patterns and everything. I mean, that's pure technique. Then, I think we can help a student to learn, but he still is going to learn by himself.

But that is the good about life: nobody really teaches us anything. People present us things with passion and information, and we learn them ourselves. So yeah, I can only present as much information as I can. I can only present it with as much passion as I can get, and I can give a good example of other conductors. We can look at millions of videos, and we go to concerts and everything. Therefore, my answer is that you can teach someone some aspects of conducting, and there are some

other aspects you cannot teach. But the final thing is how it comes all together, and that you cannot teach it either. It comes all together, usually in experience. So, every student that I've had, I've always said: "try to conduct something, anything: a choral, a group of anything; but conduct regularly". It's like: if I teach you driving and you never drive, you're going to learn the idea of it, but you're going to become bad at it very quickly.

**EL, AO: Which elements do you consider to be crucial in a conductor's training? And how should we organize the various subjects and abilities to be explored during this shaping?**

**JFR:** I will not go into full details here, because that would require a few months of discussion. That's the whole purpose of what I teach when they arrive. The first couple of weeks and months I do teach that, specifically. But let me just try to synthesize it. My thought, personally, is that there are 2 opposite goals in the way we prepare ourselves to conduct a piece. One of them, which is the final goal, is total integration, coherence, and holistic thinking: everything should come into one piece, from the first note to the last note, from the top to the bottom, from the back to the front. Everything should be like a big one idea. I am totally sure that Mozart, when he wrote *The Magic Flute*, he started from one big, cosmic Big Bang! And then he made the whole thing, by the way, in 2 weeks! That's impossible! So, we need to make ourselves, starting from all the information that we gather about the piece, we need to end up with a Big Bang kind of molecule of that piece, from which we can explode to our own version.

But to do that, we have to go the opposite of the spectrum and examine it in immense details. And that's where my method, I think, has an advantage. My method is what I would call "The layered river method" or "The sandwich method", if you want. But I really believe that music is made of layers of musical thoughts, or musical preoccupations, while we play or conduct. These preoccupations can be on separate layers, or/and can sum up later in one big thing. And if we study them in separate layers, we don't miss anything and we make our head clear. You know that I'm a pilot, right? The first word that comes to piloting is always "compartmentalization". I mean, the craft could be crashing, but I need to make a Mayday radio call, not to be desperate. It's the same thing for the conductor.

I'll make an example, because it's too abstract what I'm saying now. Let's say what are the main rivers of the music. When I say river, I mean a flow of thinking that goes through the music while the music advances.

The river always keeps going, it's inexorable. You cannot stop that river. You are in a little canoe on that river, and you can just drive it, but you cannot stop it. In the river, one main aspect, one of the first one, is "the time management aspect". Let's call it that way. That's called a *tempo*, that's called the *rhythm*, it's called the *tempi*, *accelerando*, *ritardando*, the rhythmical machine, the *fermata*, the *start*, the *stop*... Everything that has to do with time. It's particularly difficult in an opera. You start and you stop all the time.

This is one preoccupation that has nothing to do with the nuances, for example, loud or soft. The time goes. I can be very loud, can be very soft. It can be like Beethoven with *subito forte* all the time, and *subito pianos*, but it's the same beat that goes by. So let's call it "the beat". But it's more complex than the beat, but it's called "the time management", or "Rhythmical beat kind of layer". That's one layer.

Another river, that is equally as important, has nothing to do with that. It is "the harmony and structure". Of course, it starts with harmony between Bach and Wagner, and then, when you have the big picture of the harmonic structure, you go to smaller structures. Then you have the harmonic structure of the Exposition, and inside you have the harmonic structure of one theme, and then you have 4 bars by 4 bars, and we all know that... I teach that to my students.

Well, that structural thinking is like the architecture. So, if I cross the bridge, my time management river will be my speed, my car. But the architecture will be: "we go up for one kilometer, and we go down for another kilometer, it requires some effort to go up, and it's easy to go down" ... things like that, you know? I mean, the overall architecture is going to be your master plan of how you conduct and how you interpret something.

So, this layer of thinking must be always present. For example, if you have an *accelerando* that lasts for 17 pages, like in the Sibelius *Seventh Symphony*, you must manage it very, very wisely, because it's a very long *accelerando*. So you have to see very far ahead. You really must think architecturally if you want to not lose track of the structure. So that's another river that goes on in your mind, and that has nothing to do with the time and the beat.



Ok, there's another one. For me, it's the most interesting one, and it's a very "conductor one". It's "the itinerary of who is doing what". What contacts you should make? Who is playing what, and what instruments are playing? Cues, balance, colors... You know, it's the itinerary of who you are looking at.

That has many aspects, and is usually pre-decided, but it can be changed on the fly because something happens. You can have a guy who's sick and suddenly he is replaced by someone else, so you have to look at him all the time... Many, many reasons why you have to worry. But that itinerary has nothing to do with the beat and nothing to do with the structure. It's the invitation. It's the color, it's the balance. "Why do you look at the second bassoons? Because they're playing more of the lower octave; Why do you look at the second violins? Because they have an entrance without first, and they're scared to death! Why do you look at the timpanist? Because you always look at the timpanist every time he plays. Why do you look? etc., etc..." So, this is a third river that should flow in one's mind while he conducts.

Make the fourth one, "the dynamics", because the dynamics controls your technique very much. You know, the first river, the one that was called "time management" influences your technique much, because it's there when you decide if you're in 2 or in 4, depending on the *tempo* that you decide, depending on the time management. So, the first layer has a lot of technical aspects, subdivision or not, etc. But the layer of "the dynamics" has an incredible impact on your technique. Because you can conduct big or small, or etc. And then there are many more. Let's talk about one of the most musical ones, and I would call it "the phrasing articulations, rhetorical and logical aspect".

Let's say... Are you going to do some music part with or without an accent, with an accent bigger or smaller than at the first chorus? That is a balance of phrasing, and it has to do with harmony. This is all phrasing, agogics, rhetorics and articulations, and that's part of the language of the music. And if you go one way, it's like you speak with a British accent, if you go another, it's like the accent of the United States. So, I will say that's another very important aspect. But there are many more. If it's a song piece, the text will be one of the main aspects, and everything will start from there: the structure will start from the text rather than the harmony, usually.

By the way, I have a good story: I finished working "Urlicht", on the last movement of Mahler 2 and my opinion of its structure is different than Henri de La Grange's and some other books. I

couldn't understand their analysis of the last movement. It did not work. And I found that, if I take the text which everybody says is with 8 strophes, and if I take it the way Mahler instruments it, it's 7 strophes, It's not 8! We're talking about the Apocalypse, by the way, here, no? It has 7 angels, you know? And I found that, for me, if I put the entrance of the choir, like a second part of the last movement - it's 2 big parts: the first part is a symphony with an exposition, big development and then a smaller exposition; and then you have a conducting in seventh verses – then I, just for fun, divide the number of bars by the number of bar where the chords starts. And it's precisely the golden ratio. Precisely! I mean, it's incredible, you know? But anyways... So, the text can be one of those most important layers, and there are more.

But to finish my too long explanation: “how do you do you make all this work” - is that, at the same time, you have examined the whole score from the perspective of each of these layers of the sandwich, including each part of the percussion part, and each wind, and the second winds, and everybody... You've looked at every note, because you find some very interesting things, everywhere. There're so many questions that arises when you look at it! I must be in the head of each player of the orchestra who is going to be faced by looking at one part, and wondering “what does that mean?”.

Once you have finished this all, you have an immense sandwich in your head, with all those layers starting by all the parts, and then all those strata that I just explained. Then they all flow at the same time, and they make one big river, and that big river will be your ultimate goal of interpretation. But the fact that is still compartmentalized in several different rivers is going to be your safeguard. It's going to save your life as a conductor, because the minute something is going really wrong and you have an emergency — let's say somebody doesn't come in, or the basses are a beat late, and everything starts to go wrong — well, you should keep your front beat going while you take your left hand to do: “come in, come in, come in!”. I mean, you have to use one of the layers to address the situation, but keep the others layers going. That's why, having a head compartmentalized like that helps to keep the situation calm inside and ready for any emergencies.

I have to say: I learned that teaching violin, because I realized that when you play something very *virtuoso*, like a *Pagani Caprice*, for example, you become very nervous. And then, when you're in front of an audience playing your *Caprice*, and you miss something and you have a little memory slip, you can paralyze. And your head is like the RAM of a computer. If the whole RAM is taken by your

activity of playing *Caprice*, if something is wrong, the whole RAM is compromised.

I usually make my student walk around and speak while doing their Paganini until they are good enough. And then, in the ultimate test, I use to take them to the staircase: they have to go up and down the staircase while playing *Paganini Caprice* without stopping. That means that their *Paganini Caprice* is not taking a hundred per cent of their RAM. Then, there is something that is free for something else. Well, it's the same thing when we conduct.

There are many moments where panic can come, and there are many emergencies that can arise. So, we need to have some slack in our RAM to address those situations. That's why, if everything is compartmentalized, we have enough room to address things. By the way, if you're going to give an entrance to someone, or a *super piano* to someone else, it shouldn't slow your beat. Every young conductor does that: the minute they do an entrance for someone, or they make a gesture for a musical idea, there'll be changes, you know?

To finish, there is also a very good way to prepare. To do so, I always follow very faithfully a checklist, like all pilots: I do the text, and I do the structure, and I do the nuances, and I do this, and I do that... Then I say "check!" when it's done, you know? And if I work on 10 pieces at the same time, I have a sheet for each, so I know exactly where I am.

All those strategies, even after 30 years of conducting, they save my life every day.

**EL, AO: There is a big emphasis about the gestural technique in the conducting training. Do you think this emphasis represents some kind of risk on the development of new conductors?**

**JFR:** Yes, definitely. But the answer to that is not easy, because as I said, we can teach a good technique, and if somebody has a good technique, it's going to be easier to show your musical ideas. But, that provided, the gestures are not learned as themselves. The gesture is not important. The gesture is just a translation of a musical idea. Therefore, those who learn to do nice gestures are very bad conductors. They just conduct nice gestures.

Let's say, for example: look at some great conductors of the past, starting with Furtwängler... "My God! Does he do nice gestures? No!" but he was charismatic, and people followed him to death, you know?

But there's an exception to that, which is how quickly one has to address a situation, for example, preconductors. That's where you need to have the most perfect technique, because you don't have much time, and you have to make it very clear to all players where to stop, where to start.

So, for example, conductors will be called, typically (if you're called for production), the conductor will get a long time with the singers, maybe a month. But usually, you will get 3 or 4 rehearsals with the orchestra with the dress, and that's it. But many times you will be called to replace somebody because he's sick, and you will have just one dress rehearsal. In that case, you must be so clear that even without rehearsals, you know.

At the *Wiener Staatsoper*, in Vienna, they never rehearse. They know all the operas, so they just do a dress rehearsal. Perhaps a *Wandelprobe* or the technical aspects, but they don't do rehearsals. So, a conductor comes with, you know, a *Lady Macbeth* from Shostakovich and they don't rehearse... Can you imagine this?

I have a good story about Kent Nagano, because he told me that — if you remember, many years ago he got the Munich Opera, which's the *Staatsoper*, not the *Wiener Staatsoper* but the *Bayerische Staatsoper*, in Munich — and their Christmas tradition is *Parsifal*. They do *Parsifal* every Christmas, which is a 5-hour Opera. And he said very candidly: “you know, I had never done it”. Even though he had done a lot of music, he had never done it. So, he asked 4 or 5 rehearsals. Then the Musicians Committee came to him: “Maestro, we cannot do 5 rehearsals for *Parsifal*. We played it 84 times, every year, since Wagner!”. At the end, he got 2 rehearsals. That's very funny!

Anyways, to answer your question, learning good technique is going to help showing the appropriate things in the context where we don't have much time to rehearse. But still, that's why in the context of our modern world, where (1): there's not enough money, there's not enough rehearsal time, and there's not enough anything; and (2): we have so many reasons to do things that are not musical, like the marketing, the “looks of people”... for example, now we have some new problems...I don't know if it's the same thing in your country, but here we have to have a woman conductor, otherwise it's not politically correct, or if I don't hire aboriginal people... I'm fine with that, really. But it's too much. Now, everything is about being politically correct.

So, there are so many reasons to do things, that the most important, the actual musical reasons, are not usually the priority. And one of the good things is somebody who “looks good” and has “nice

gestures”, and he just comes and goes, you know? That is why I think young conductors tend to think that the solution to become good is to learn good gestures. They all talk about this, by the way, in workshops and all that...But it's not important!

**EL, AO: When you do have the time to fully prepare yourself and rehearsing with the orchestra, how do you structure your study?**

**JFR:** That I already answered: it is the sandwich technique. However, I didn't talk about the end.

Once you've done all that, and once everything is clear in your head, when everything is clear in your score, or everything is learnt and everything has been looked at, then you start taking a big picture out of it, or one idea out of it.

Well, there's more to say. I have something else to say here: “how do you prepare?”. Because then, it's the interpretation. When you know everything about the piece, it doesn't mean you know how fast or how slow, or how dense, or how not dense, or how energetic, or how soft. You know... how are you going to approach your idea of the piece? The observation of the material gives you all the pieces, but then you have to put the pieces back together yourself.

I have a comparison. I always like to compare myself to a watchmaker. Imagine that I am in no gravity, in space. Then I take the music of the symphony, and I take it apart. I put the first theme here, the second theme there, put the transition in another place, a *motive* there...Then all parts float around me. That way, you keep always an eye on everything: every note of every instrument, every motif, every phrase, every anything. Finally, when it's like a big cloud of things around you, you can put all the pieces back together slowly, but with your own intuition of an idea, with your own color. So, you're going to build a clock again the way it was. But it definitely will have a flavor or a color, that is your doing.

Usually, it takes several hours for a movement of music, and then you look at it, and you say: “Oh my God! That's not good!”. Then, you take a break, and you start again, then you can put it apart again... All the little pieces they float around you. And you say: “Ok, how can I do different? Perhaps, if I tried a little faster, or if I did that or this in a different way, or if I put some more emphasis on the harmony of the structure...” Then you build it all again, and it's a different block, but with the

same pieces. And again, it works, or it doesn't. Usually, it's going to start making sense only pretty close to concert, in the last few weeks. So that answers your question. But the first part of the preparation takes months, and is **the sandwich technique**, and last part of the preparation is much more intuitive, and it's the **watchmaker technique**. Then at the end, once you become really convinced that you have the right color and the right approach, only then you can mark your tempos and decide if you're doing 2 or/and 4, then you can decide if you subdivide or not this or that, because they have your idea. But that's probably 3 days or 5 days before the concert, so you have to stick to it. You can have a bit fantasy, but usually you cannot be radically different from the one thing to another.

So, my idea is that everything is like this big funnel. You start with a big sandwich technique with all the little details, and then you go back down to the watchmaker technique to make one idea, and at the end, you live that idea. The very last instant of the preparation is like the ramp of where they put the rockets to go to the moon, you know? You're already energized until the countdown of the concert, and then there's nothing that will stop you. You can even be sick like hell, but you're just going to do it, you know?

**EL, AO: What were the biggest challenges that you dealt with as a conducting professor? What difficulties did you find on your way? And how did you overcome those difficulties?**

**JFR:** There are a few things that come to my mind. But the first thing that comes to my mind is a sense of helplessness. If someone doesn't have the drive, or if someone doesn't have the musicianship, there's nothing I can do. It's happened sometimes that I felt that there's nothing I can do. And that's bad. That's pretty bad. But it's not a difficulty that you overcome. It's really a sense of helplessness.

The main difficulty is to be faced with bad habits of Students. You know, I used to teach violin, and my students started with me, usually at 13-14, when they were already good violinists, but very malleable and very young. Then, through adolescence, at age 14-15-16, you really make them to your hand. They follow whatever you ask, and after that they have good habits. Even their bodies don't have bad habits.

But usually you teach to older people (older than 25 and, many times, older than 30), which is fine with me, because I've had some very interesting musicians who became some very good friends

and some colleagues with whom we have great discussions. I've had many students of conducting with whom I had the impression, and we had a real musical discussion, and not like a baby to whom I have to feed with a spoon, you know? But teaching older people comes with the problem of having some bad habits that are very difficult to kill or change.

Now, the second part of the question: "how do you overcome that?". Well, sometimes you can't, and sometimes you can. You try your best. One of my strategies (it doesn't work all the time) is the checklist strategy again. I tell the student: "pick one thing we want to change", and then every time you start conducting, don't start without saying "check this, now this, and this!". Then you can start every bar you conduct; you will always have one thing.

That has helped some people. But sometimes, if you say, "don't do that", they will stop, then they will do it again. Then the next week they'll do it again. Then, 2 years later, you are trying to correct the same thing. So, in order to change something, it has to change radically from now. It's like an alcoholic. If you don't correct immediately, the problem keeps returning.

Therefore, pick one bad habit and work immediately on it. Pick one and just address it like crazy, you know? I guess it's the same thing with life, and with violin, and with everything. A lot of this I learned teaching violin, actually. I must say it.

### **EL, AO: How are your conducting classes structured?**

**JFR:** I must say, please give credit to Paolo Bellomia about that, because he's the one who had imagined the structure before I arrived in the teaching there. But we both agree that the conducting learning needs to be divided into a few aspects.

One of them is pure technique. One of them is score analysis and examining and studying. One of them is application of those things into a laboratory scene (like, 2 pianos). Finally, one of them is to put everything in a concert with an orchestra.

We did that at the University of Montreal. So, we had weekly meetings with our students, with studying the chords at the table, weekly meetings with the students doing some technique on the wall and in the air, and all that patterns and gestures, we had some weekly workshops with 2 pianos where we put into action all their thinking about all these aspects. But it's still a laboratory setting, so we have some activities with the orchestra: mainly one big concert with 2 weeks rehearsal, and sometimes

they add some things outside of the university, as well.

So, the structure is like that. But if you want one more answer, like: “how do you structure one meeting with a student?”, I’ll say: imagine you come for 2 hours. It has an introduction, a very human one, when you talk about yourselves (“how are you?”, and everything). Then it leads you to some preoccupations, because some students can be very preoccupied with things, but you kind of go for a certain work, or a certain technique or a certain aspect. Then there is the bulk of the lesson, when you work on something. And there is the end, which usually I like to make it by synthesizing the ideas, so we can remember them. But that’s good for teaching anything.

Also, there should be a good proportion between talking, doing some conducting, looking at some videos, or looking at ourselves on the camera. I like it very much when they record themselves in a rehearsal, and then we look at it together, and we do a debriefing. I think debriefing is one of the keys to everything. Your know debriefing is the best, but debriefing with your teacher is very difficult because, personally, I don’t let anything pass, but it’s always very good. That is actually another pilot’s thing. In *Top Gun*, for example, they fly for an hour. And they debrief for 5.

And you know what? When I learned how to pilot, I had 1 hour of ground school before we jump in the plane. We did an hour in sky, and another 2 hours of ground school after that, debriefing what we would do, with a board with drawings and everything, talking about speeds and perspectives. That’s how you really learn to prepare yourself mentally and to self-criticize. Debriefing is very important, for sure.

**EL, AO: With your experience as a performer and a professor, do you think that it is possible to conciliate the academic life with the artistic life? What strategies do you use to balance both?**

**JFR:** Oh, sure! I mean, it’s true that some profiles of high-end artists (soloists) and conductors usually need to travel all the time. So, if you do that and, for example, you have an agent in Tokyo and he is trying to get you some little concerts in Japan, and finally, you get bigger concerts in Japan. After that, you are a conductor that works all on Asia... It’s a big work before you get to that. It requires a lot of navigation and sacrifices for family life and all. In that case, it is not possible to pursue an academic life at the same time, because you’re never there. You are asking about the academic and the



artistic life, but there is the family and personal life, which are equally important. So, I think that there should be a balance.

I was lucky enough to be in this institution where I had freedom to postpone some lessons, to leave a week off and say: “I will be back, and I will give you 2 more lessons”. I didn’t do that that much, but I used to do it a little bit, and I had to, sometimes. On the other hand, I used to try to put some of my concerts in the free weeks at Christmas, or in the summer, every time that was possible. Also, I was free to put my schedule the way I wanted. So, I did my teaching on some days, and I could leave for some other days to go conduct, and I changed the days sometimes. Therefore, to me it was possible to manage both, but if I have been teaching in an institution that is very rigid, I could not have the opportunity.

The other answer to this question is that, in some medias, being a professor is something that hinders an artistic career, and you are considered somebody “lesser” than a real performer. I don’t really care about that. They can think that if they want, but I do my life the way I like it.

And about the academic life, I don’t like to call it “the academic life”, because I was never an academician, for example.

It’s funny because there was an article 5 years ago, when we did the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the orchestra that I founded (because I was obliged to), the big article had my picture with a title “*Le grand allumeur*”, that would be “The great Igniter”. I thought it was actually flattering, because it’s the way I consider myself. I consider that my dedication and my passion for the way I love the music and the people, is, I hope, going to influence all these young people to do as the best as they can in the music, you know? And I can see already that some will not be ready to do music 24 hours/day and 7 days/week in their minds. Some are lazier than others, but some are so passionate! I can feel it.

In a way, my passage, which is almost finished in the University, I don’t feel it was an academic life, and I never asked some subventions, and I never wrote a book. I’m not like that. I’m a former. I’m a “doer”.

But there’s one very important thing, and it’s more a philosophical one. Our passage on this beautiful earth, which is not so beautiful these days and has lots of problems, is very quick. And I’m older than you guys, but I can testify... I’ve been working like crazy every second of my life and dedicated so hard! Still, I’m already 65, and it goes so quick! So, it’s an illusion to think that we are

doing things in life for us. In a way, we're doing them to the next generation. That's why we do kids, by the way, and many people would be tempted to ask, "why to do kids?". First, we're 7 billion now on Earth, second, the earth is in difficult situation. So why to do kids? Well, we do kids because that's the only way that humanity goes forward. We are not finished with ourselves. We are just a passage to the next generation, and in many generations, we're still there. I mean, our little part will continue. So, that's why I teach, in fact.

I always thought that teaching is just giving what I received from so many dedicated and nice people, including my mother, and including my teachers and my friends and my colleagues. Then it's my turn to give as much as I can. So that's why you teach. It's not an academic life. I hate those who pursue a career where they want to have as many articles published as possible, and as much money of subventions obtained. Then their *curriculum vitae* is made of how many articles they publish, and how many money they raised.

I'm very proud to say that when I founded the orchestra 31 year ago, I never realized, but now we think we have had about 2.000 young musicians who went through that, and most of them work in the music *milieu*. So, that I'm proud of that, much more than articles and subventions.

**EL, AO: However, nowadays the universities are actually requiring both profiles to hire a conductor/professor.**

**JFR:** They are. But there is a way around. My university was requiring that, too. But I was lucky, I guess. Okay, I was lucky... My university made it very clear when I was hired that our work was divided in 4 different parts: teaching, researching, radiating for the university in the *milieu*, and contributing to the function of the administration of the faculty. Fine. But it's the balance of those things that is different from one person to another. Somebody can be a 100% researcher and doesn't teach. Somebody can be a 100% teacher and never plays a concert. Somebody can be like me, mostly concert and teaching, but not much researching. But that is my university statute. Some other universities will be more rigid on that, and it's too bad for the teacher.

**EL, AO: In your biography note, in the I Musici de Montréal website, there is the following affirmation: “Jean-François Rivest firmly believes that the next generation of musicians must rely on performers that are also active as pedagogues”. What elements lead you to believe in this possibility?**

**JFR:** Well, I think it's the same question, no? I think that I believe that, as a performer my work is better because I teach. And as a teacher, my work is better because I'm a performer. Well, both help each other.

But perhaps there's one last thing I want to add to this. It's funny, because we started with a more biographical aspect at the beginning, and there's one last biographical aspect I want to finish on: is that I started my life as a young, talented violinist, and I played a lot. Then I moved on to chamber music in small string ensembles, where I led from the first violin. And then, all the big evolution to orchestras and model companies came after. Now, at this period of my life, I've had a fantastic privilege to be asked to be the conductor of I Musici de Montréal, which is a chamber string orchestra. I Musici de Montréal is quite famous. It has more than 40 recordings on Chandos, has done tours all over the world, and it had had only 2 conductors before me, so it's a very big honor for me. I've been their conductor for 2 years, and now I have signed for another 4 years, so I will be there until 2027. Also, it is a 16-piece string orchestra - 5, 4, 3, 3, 1 - sometimes with some winds, sometimes with a harpsichord, but it's a string orchestra. And I have the feeling that, after having experienced all the Shostakovich symphonies, and everything, that I'm back to my main love, or my main substance as a violinist, you know? And I must say that I've had some experiences in the last 2 years with them which I've never had before with any orchestra. They are so good, and they are so experienced! It is like they do telepathy. I've never seen this: I can just move my hands a little bit that the color of the sound changes drastically. They are amazing!

So it's been like a big circle, where I come back to the strings. That's not the end. But I mean, after having done all those companies, I find it funny.

**EL, AO: Finally, could you say to the conducting aspirants, specially to those younger students, an encouraging word about the musical career as a conductor?**

**JFR:** Yes, sure! Well, it's not going to be just one word. But let's say that what I would like to

say to them is: work as hard as you can to become the best musician possible. And then, be yourself as much as possible as a conductor. And what is yourself? It is trying to become a better person, then you will become a better conductor and musician. That's all, you know? We spent our whole life becoming a better person, and then therefore, we become a better musician.

Don't try to imitate anybody.

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