The Roots of Modern Orchestral Conductors:
As a background for the sociology of conductors

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ABSTRACT

The conductors of classical music dedicate themselves to the communication of ongoing sound. In other words, the ideological aspects of music strongly appear in a conductor's activity. Furthermore, classical music is peculiar to modern western society. Therefore, research about conductors is related to the issue of cultural production and consumption in modern society. This is the concern of my sociological research of conductors.

In this paper, the history of early conductors is traced. Its purpose is to explore the basic images of conductors as the background for the research mentioned above.

In the European era of absolutism, composers, who were employed by royalty or the church, conducted their music-band by playing keyboard instruments. They were the precursors of conductors, but they also were instrumentalists themselves.

With the coming of modern civil society, the public concert began to be held, and the composers became relatively independent from religious and secular power. The composers in the Romantic period (e.g. Berlioz, Wagner, etc.) ceased playing instruments by themselves, and developed conducting techniques to realize their musical intention perfectly. These composers were individuals who stood at the center of stages and had a larger influence with making music at the concerts, and they embodied "creative individuality" in the concert hall. This was the rise of modern conducting.

In the late 19th century, conductors became separate from composers. These conductors, rather than composers, also embodied the image of "creative individuality". This became the basic image of conductors, and this image will continue to be dominant in the civilized and autonomous art world of classical music.

Key Words: conductor; modern society; faith in individuality