



*Justin Locke spent 18 years playing with the Boston Pops, the Boston Ballet, and all the other many freelance gigs in New England. He is now an author and speaker, and in his musical memoir, “Real Men Don’t Rehearse,” he shares a first hand look into the amazing world of professional music. He also shares some truly outrageous and hilarious gig disaster stories. “Real Men Don’t Rehearse” is now in its sixth printing. You can see more at his website, [www.justinlocke.com](http://www.justinlocke.com).*

## A Pops Tale

My bass teacher, a long time member of the Boston Symphony and the Boston Pops, swore that the following events actually took place, but he was such a loud liar we'll never know for sure.

This all supposedly happened back in the 1950's or 60's, in the days when the Boston Pops was conducted by Arthur Fiedler.

Before proceeding I should quickly mention that, while Arthur Fielder was beloved the world over by everyone else, several of the musicians in the Pops didn't like Arthur very much. There was one musician in particular, a Pops

percussionist, who was always looking for ways to torment Arthur—without being so obvious about it that he would get fired.

Anyway, according to the story, the Boston Pops was playing a concert in a relatively small town somewhere in the middle of Massachusetts, with Arthur Fiedler conducting. They eventually came to the final piece on the program, which in this case happened to be Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. The orchestra began to play the piece, just as they had played it hundreds of times before.

At first, everything was going along just fine. But then, about 20 bars into the piece, this percussionist (i.e., the one who liked to torment Arthur), well, I'm not sure how else to put it:

He threw up.

Mind you, he didn't throw up in the dressing room, and he didn't throw up off-stage.

He threw up . . . *on* the stage.

Obviously, this is not something you would want to have happen at any elegant event, much less an elegant event like a Pops concert, but orchestral musicians are human beings, and human beings, on occasion, do such things.

One would hope that this percussionist at least had the sense to do this behind a set of chimes, but wherever he did it, it was in full view of Arthur Fiedler, who immediately started to yell at this guy (quite audibly, by the way) to get off the stage. In response, the percussionist waved an apologetic hand motion to Arthur, and then he did indeed walk off stage.

At this juncture it is important to note that, in the world of professional orchestras, once you start playing the *1812 Overture* (or any other piece of music, for that matter), you *do not stop*—for *anything*. So the rest of the musicians kept right on playing, in spite of the gastronomic malfunction and labor/management dramatics that had just transpired.

With the percussionist now safely off stage, things returned somewhat to normal, or at least, as normal as they can be in such circumstances. But about 50 bars later, that very same percussionist came back out onto the stage . . . carrying a mop and a bucket. And he proceeded to clean up the mess he had made.

At this point, Arthur was turning three shades of indigo with veins popping out of his forehead. All the while the percussionist was making more of his little hand-waving

signals, expressing his sincere apologies for having thrown up on stage in the first place—all this, in the middle of 1812. And of course, while all the other musicians in the orchestra were experiencing internal hysterics, every single one of them did what professional orchestral musicians must always do in these situations: they kept right on playing (beautifully, I might add), pretending that nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

The percussionist got everything cleaned up, went off stage again, put everything away, and then, with a completely straight face, came back out to play his part in the big ending with all the chimes, cannons, tympani, cymbals, and snare drums. How could you fire him? He hadn't missed a single note.

I wasn't there, so I can't say that this story really happened, but given my experience with professional

orchestral musicians, I have no reason to disbelieve it either.

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*“‘Real Men Don't Rehearse’ paints a lively picture of what goes on behind the scenes at a major symphony orchestra. Anybody who thinks that all classical musicians are stuffy and lack a sense of humor will be set straight by this rambunctious book.”*

- Peter Schickele, exponent of PDQ Bach





Above: one of the infamous nine-minute intermission bass section parties backstage at the Hatch Shell. (Author is center, wearing jacket) video: <http://bit.ly/ccw389>

## Bass and Viol

When on tour, as soon as the concert ended there was always a rush to get out of the venue and back to the hotel as quickly as possible. Part of the reason for this was that the instrument trunks and everything else all had to be loaded onto a truck, which had to travel all night to get to the next venue in time for tomorrow night's show. The main reason we wanted to get out, though, was that hotel rooms, bars, saunas and pools are just a whole lot more fun than the concrete perdition backstage at an arena.

To speed things up, we bass players always kept our tuxedos in our bass trunks. The rest of the orchestra could store their concert clothes in wardrobe trunks that were placed in dressing rooms, but rather than do all that

running around backstage, the bass players would just change clothes wherever the trunks were . . . although now that the section is co-ed I don't know if things have changed. Probably not.

One night we were performing at the Wolf Trap Center near Washington, D.C. The main stage at Wolf Trap is huge, so when an orchestra plays there, walls of a smaller concert hall "shell" are lowered into place. Our bass trunks were all placed directly behind the back wall of this shell by the stagehands.

As soon as the concert ended, while the audience was still filing out, we all immediately carried our basses behind the back wall of this concert hall shell and strapped them into their trunks. Then, in our standard end-of-concert mad dash to get to the buses, we started to rip off our tuxedos. Imagine our surprise when we looked up and discovered

that the entire back wall of the concert hall shell had just magically and silently flown up into the rafters—and there we were, all seven of us, in our skivvies, in full view of the exiting audience.

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*"There are many laugh out moments... Mr. Locke has an engaging narrative style that makes this book a fun read for all."* – International Trumpet Guild Journal



Above: Boston Pops conductor Keith Lockhart, with author (right), on a Pops tour somewhere in the Rocky Mountains.

## The View from the Pit

Along with playing Pops concerts, part of being a freelance bass player was playing in the unique sensory-deprivation environment of orchestra pits.

Unlike Pops and symphony concerts, playing in the pit for a Broadway show gets to be very much like factory work. I knew musicians who would play in the pit for “Annie” eight times a week for years at a time.

Memories of playing Broadway shows tend to run all together, since each night is usually exactly the same as every other, but there was one night at one Broadway show that was truly unforgettable.

The show in question was called *My One and Only*. In one part of the show, the main characters (played by Tommy Tune and Twiggy) were trying to escape from the bad guy, and they flew off to the Caribbean in their private plane. But the bad guy sabotaged the plane, so Tommy and Twiggy were forced down on a desert island. The next scene took place on the beach of this island. To create the beach effect in the scene, part of the stage floor was removed to expose a large steel basin. This held about a hundred gallons of water for the actors to splash around in.

This steel tank was in the center of the stage, at the downstage edge (i.e., near the audience). Every night, in order to keep the water from getting stagnant and stinky, the stagehands would empty the tank, and then they would fill it up again just before the next performance.

As per usual, we were all crammed into the pit, and as is

typical in Broadway shows, the lone percussionist had a whole hardware store's worth of equipment around him. He had a big drum set, plus tympani, chimes, glockenspiel, xylophone, bass drum—the works. And all of this hardware was located dead center in the pit, under the overhang of the stage. In this case, directly under this water tank.

Well, one night we were going along playing the show the same as always, when I noticed out the corner of my eye that the percussionist was moving around in a way that was just not normal. He kept looking up and around, and it was kind of distracting. At one point I glanced over at him to see what was the matter, and in the faint glow of his stand light, I saw a little drop of water come down and . . . *plunk*. It landed right on his head.

He looked at me; he looked all around; then another drop



of water—*plunk*—fell on his head again.

If you've ever seen *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, perhaps you recall that scene where James Mason chips a little piece of crystal off a wall, which starts a small leak that turns into a flood. If you have, you have some idea of what was about to happen in that pit.

Apparently, the stagehand who had emptied the tank the night before (or maybe the one who refilled it that day) had forgotten to replace the drain plug at the bottom of the tank. It had taken the entire first act for the water to soak its way through the plaster of the pit roof, but once it had soaked through, these droplets grew in intensity until it was a genuine downpour. And it didn't stop raining for the entire second act.

This meteorological phenomenon was limited to the space

occupied by this percussionist. Everyone else was bone dry, but bit by bit, this guy and his tuxedo had become completely drenched. Sopping wet, utterly miserable, he played the whole second act in this indoor deluge. He tried to rig up a xylophone case as a poncho, but it didn't do much good, since he couldn't hold it in place while he was playing. His drums were all soaked, and everything made of wood was ruined. He had to occasionally tip his snare drum over to drain the water out, and when he hit the suspended cymbal, little droplets of water were sent up in the air, so much so that one could briefly see a rainbow in front of his stand light. Up above, Tommy Tune and Twiggy sang and danced the night away, while down in the pit we were all torn between genuine pity and hysterical laughter as we watched this poor guy doing his best to play the rest of the show in a monsoon.

It's not very often that you get caught in a downpour in an

orchestra pit. But if you do, well, no matter—the show must go on.

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“You're guaranteed to find yourself laughing out loud while reading ‘Real Men Don't Rehearse’.”

—Strings Magazine



Above: Author with Henry Mancini, on the infamous “Mancini tour.”

## Look, Kids, Now He's De-Composing

I am as eager as the next person to speak in highly idealized terms about arts education and bringing the beauty of Mozart into the life of every child. But . . . The unspoken reality is that most musicians have a certain feeling of dread about playing what are affectionately (or maybe not so affectionately) referred to as “Kiddie Concerts.”

Everyone wants the kids to have fun, and carry away with them a lasting impression that orchestras are fabulous and wonderful, but the thing is, being in the audience for a symphony concert by definition requires sitting very still and making no sound for an hour or more at a time. For children, having to sit so still for so long a time can

actually be psychologically painful. In many households, it is used as a form of punishment. Everyone always has the best of intentions, but in their standard form, symphony concerts and children are not always the best combination. Like many other aspects of musical performance, if one does not respect the inherent difficulty, the whole thing can blow up in your face.

I played a lot of children's concerts in my playing days. Some of them were very very good. But I am shocked, shocked, to have to report that others . . . were not. Part of the problem is, the typical symphony orchestra just isn't in that line of work, and the economics of the average small orchestra concert being what they are, there is usually little or no money in the budget to do a big visually-engaging event for a concert hall filled with bussed-in school children. So out of sheer financial necessity, some of the orchestras I played in would just do

a one-hour version of an adult concert, with the assistant conductor giving a little lecture on some fine musicological point. The players would always just try to get through it while ignoring the buzz of distracted noise in the crowd, and everyone would just hope that the audience was somehow, despite their general lack of interest, soaking up a cultural experience. Of course, with kids, anything can happen, and sometimes things went way beyond the worst of our expectations.

There was one time we were going to do a kiddie concert at the Boston Ballet. We were in the Wang Center, and so we had 5,000 high school kids in the seats. For every hundred kids there was maybe one teacher on guard duty—whatever it was, it wasn't enough. It was during the school day, so attendance was mandatory for everyone, and for this audience we were going to perform the entire *Sleeping Beauty* ballet. Three hours. No lecture. No

changes from the regular show. Here goes.

Well, other than the usual drone of chit chat in the audience, this went along okay for the first act. But then, at intermission, someone in management decided to make a little extra money by opening the concession stand to all these kids. Not necessarily a bad idea, but the trouble was, when the audience came back for Act II, they were all armed with M&M's. Eventually, some whiz kid in a box seat way up in the second balcony by the proscenium made the necessary trigonometric calculations, and he managed to land an M&M right on top of the tympani heads in the orchestra pit. Encouraged by this small success, more followed; with their sugar-coated mass multiplied by their gravity-induced velocity, each M&M made a very satisfying "boing" noise with every accurate hit. Once the kids had the range, they fired for effect. Down they came. Boing, boing, boing. These misshapen



confections bounced in every direction, including up on the stage. With green, red and brown quasi-ball-bearings all over the stage, you never saw ballet dancers look so terrified.

Fortunately, the mind tends to block out truly unpleasant memories, so I don't remember a lot of the less-than-stellar children's concerts I played. But there is one I cannot forget—it was so traumatic I can never get it out of my mind.

We were playing in one of those old, all-purpose civic-center war memorial auditoriums, better used for wrestling matches. It had a big overhanging balcony all around, and the orchestra wasn't on the stage, we were out in the center of the floor. This meant we were completely surrounded; there was nowhere to retreat in case of a massive frontal assault.

The conductor had come up with a real toe-tapping theme for this concert: it was called “Minuets Through the Ages.” (No, I am not kidding.) We proceeded to play various Haydn and Mozart minuets, and in between each one, this conductor would turn around to these 8,000 hormone-soaked seventh graders and give them a little lecture on some obscure point of musical form and composition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century regarding 3/4 time.

Well, you would think that somehow, somewhere, *somebody* would have taken a look at this idea and realized that this would *not* hold the attention of a bunch of screaming seventh graders for 60 minutes, but . . . they didn't. So we started to play, and this guy would occasionally turn around and try to talk over the rumble. Not surprisingly, the kids became more and more hostile as the show went on. About halfway through, we completely lost them. We could barely hear ourselves

playing over the talking. And, since the kids held the high ground of the balcony, we were pretty much doomed from the get-go. At one point, spitballs made out of the printed programs started to come raining down in a blizzard, and that continued to the end of the show. Thank goodness they lacked heavier caliber ammunition. In retrospect, I consider myself lucky to have gotten out of there alive.

Whenever I played a less-than-wonderful kiddie concert, it always bothered me for a more practical reason: deep in my narcissistic heart, I knew that my future livelihood as a musician was highly dependent upon effective audience development, and I hated to see opportunities to achieve that goal go to waste.

That thought was lurking in the back of my mind when one fateful day I was playing yet another kiddie concert. This one included a lot of kids on stage dancing, so we figured

all right, at least there's something to look at, this should hold the kids' attention. But alas, the story was not terribly interesting, and eventually everyone, including the orchestra, just about fell asleep. That was bad enough, but in the middle of the show (and no, I am not making this up), six little kids came out carrying a stretcher with a body on it. Turns out they were supposed to be the pall bearers at Mozart's funeral.

I'm all for grand dramatic effects whenever appropriate, but gee whiz . . . Mozart's corpse? In a show designed for five year olds? I thought it was a bit much.

After playing this show about six times, I finally went up to the people producing the event and expressed my dismay. "Mozart's corpse?" I said. "Come on, guys. Surely you could do better than that. I mean, I'm just a lowly bass player, and even *I* could come up with

something better than *that*.”

“Well,” they replied, “keeping kids focused is hard. You’re so smart, let’s see *you* do it.”

So I went home and pondered this little gauntlet thrown down at my creativity. The challenge was to create a 60-minute show that, for budgetary reasons, could use no more than four actors. It had to use music from the standard (public domain) orchestra literature. And it had to work for all age groups—including 3, 5, 7, and 13-year olds, as well as their parents. And it had to actually teach something about music. Yikes.

I thought about this for quite a while. One night I was trying to come up with some kind of comedic court case based on one of the classic fairy tales, when I just blurted out the phrase, “Peter VS. the Wolf.” At last, the Wolf

would have his day in court. This might work.

As part of my research, I sat down with a lawyer and told him the original story of *Peter and the Wolf*. The first thing he said was, “Well, it’s obvious the Wolf was denied due process,” and we were off and running. The result was a courtroom comedy based on the characters and events of the original Prokofiev story. The musicians would each be called to the stand to be cross-examined by the Wolf, and all of the instruments would be demonstrated and explained in the process.

This show was a remarkable success at its premiere. Amazingly, it worked for kids of all ages, *and* their parents.

Once *Peter VS. the Wolf* was produced in Massachusetts, I wondered if anyone else would want to do it. And

maybe pay me money for the use of it? So I sent a few flyers around. Imagine my shock when the Phoenix Symphony scheduled it!

That was the beginning of a remarkable series of events. Some unknown musician who played the show in one distant city would call their cousin in another city to tell them about it, and bit by bit I started to get calls from orchestra managers from all over, asking about it and wanting to perform it.

This went on for several years, until one fine day I received an email from someone in, of all places, Brazil. They told me they wished to perform my “Pedro Versus O Lobo.” They went on to say they were going to perform it in the “municipal theater” of Rio de Janeiro. Well I must admit, this didn’t sound very classy– I had this vision of the local “municipal theater” as being one of those multi-

purpose cinder block facilities with kids making ash trays at one end and a basketball hoop at the other. But Rio is Rio, so I asked them, “Well, would you be willing to fly me down and put me up?” “Sure,” they said.

Well, ash trays and basketball hoops or no, a free trip to Rio is nothing to sneeze at, so off I went. At one point I started to wonder if this would turn out to be one of those Nigerian email scams, but I had grown up listening to Antonio Carlos Jobim and Joao Gilberto singing about girls from Ipanema, and my curiosity was too much, so I took the chance.

Well . . . it turns out the “municipal theater,” or if we were to use its full name in Portuguese, *O Theatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro*, is more or less the Carnegie Hall of South America. The entire building was imported from Europe back at the height of the rubber boom, it’s loosely copied



from the Paris Opera House, and it is one of the most beautiful edifices anywhere. The sets and costumes of the production rivaled those of a Broadway show, and local heartthrob soap opera TV stars were cast in the leading roles. There were 12 sold-out performances, and they put me up in a five-star hotel right on the beach.

So there I was, day three of this fabulous week in Rio. I was sitting on Ipanema Beach, watching the *garotas de Ipanema* walking by, with a cold coconut in one hand and a *caipirinha* in another. I was trying to grasp just how the stars had aligned themselves in such a manner as to bring me to such a heavenly place. I mean, traveling the world to exotic locales is fun enough . . . but to see something of your own being magnificently staged and performed for appreciative audiences, my goodness. It's one of the biggest thrills anyone could ask for.

And all at once, it came to me:

I owed it all . . . to Mozart's corpse.



Above: Author with some of the dancers in the Rio de Janeiro production of his family concert, “O Fantasma do Orquestra.”

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We hope you have enjoyed this preview ebook of “Real Men Don’t Rehearse.” To see more excerpts or to order the complete version, please visit

[www.justinlocke.com/orderRMDR.htm](http://www.justinlocke.com/orderRMDR.htm)

(Thousands of copies sold; now in its sixth printing.)

Re: Justin Locke’s speaking appearances, Please visit the Justin Locke Productions website:

[www.justinlocke.com/author.htm](http://www.justinlocke.com/author.htm)

Also by Justin Locke: “Principles of Applied Stupidity”:

[www.justinlocke.com/poas.htm](http://www.justinlocke.com/poas.htm)

The Blog:

[www.typepad.justinlocke.com](http://www.typepad.justinlocke.com)

Facebook Fan Page:

[www.facebook.com/pages/Justin-Locke/80943243226](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Justin-Locke/80943243226)

The Complete script of “Peter VS the Wolf”:

[www.justinlocke.com/pytweng.htm](http://www.justinlocke.com/pytweng.htm)

Speaking One-Sheet:

[www.justinlocke.com/flyer777.pdf](http://www.justinlocke.com/flyer777.pdf)

Demo video:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhxT-sCVW\\_c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhxT-sCVW_c)

About the author:

**Justin Locke** spent 18 years playing the double bass with the Boston Pops. The 3,000+ concerts he played include the 1976 Bicentennial Concert with Arthur Fiedler, which is in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as having the largest audience ever at a classical music concert.

Justin is a “bestselling author” in a unique genre: his plays for family concerts have been performed for hundreds of thousands of people, on four continents and two island nations, in six languages. He is also the author of *Real Men Don't Rehearse* and *Principles of Applied Stupidity*,

Justin is an active speaker and would love to appear at your next event. Please visit his website at

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