

# My Conducting Career? Part I

by Gordon Laird

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I think I always wanted to conduct a band or orchestra. But I started with a bad experience. In grade 3 I was invited to be one of two conductors of our Rhythm Band in Miss Whipple's class. The aged black and white photo on the school steps announces in faded white ink:



Grade 3 Rhythm Band. Conductor: Miss A. Whipple.  
B. C. Musical Festival, 1940

I stand on the left of the photo, in a complete suit: short pants, vest, jacket and tie. I remember that suit, because it had first belonged to my cousin Pip. On the right is Alice Lacey, small and cute in her white

frilly dress. We were the two conductors.

But what I remember is my first rehearsal as conductor. I was given a red wooden stick (a percussion stick from the Rhythm Band) and I swung it too wide and high. Everybody laughed. I think it must have included Miss Whipple as well. I wept. Then I alibied that I had hit myself in the eye with the stick, a blatant lie. I wept from embarrassment. In my nine-year-old mind I must have decided to not allow myself to take the role of conductor ever again!

The second event was in Grade 8, when I had begun to learn the clarinet and was very infatuated with Benny Goodman records. It was in my parent's bedroom and I announced what "I wanted to be!". A Band Leader!

My Mother proceeded to dump on this idea so thoroughly. What a bad idea. How irredeemable it was for me to think that way. My Dad, who was usually quiet, assented to her comments without comment. That did it! Never again would I aspire to the role of band leader or conductor.

Since that time I have played in a lot of bands and have experienced a lot of conductors. But never again did I see myself in the role of conductor.

The above story I wrote on February 19, 2001 and shared it closely within the family and with one musical friend. As a story it was a bit of a downer. But in the telling I did notice that I was blaming people long gone for something in my life. Was that the reason that the idea started up in me again? I think so.