



During his long tenure as Music Director of the Gewandhausorchester in Leipzig. Herbert Blomstedt guided not only professional musicians but also senior executives through many an orchestral arrangement. Over the years, in the context of an initiative called "The Management Symphony", Blomstedt would regularly spend three days with musically gifted corporate leaders, orchestrating their playing and ultimately conducting a performance of the piece they had rehearsed. Music makes you humble, says Blomstedt and the notion immediately appeals to Mads Øvlisen, the long-standing CEO of the Danish healthcare company Novo Nordisk. The two agree on the urgent need for reintroduction of culture and the arts to school and university curricula - in the interests of promoting creativity, a desire to experiment and a sense of responsibility. Øvlisen, however, is having none of the over-taxed comparison of conductors and corporate executives: in his view, too many CEOs flatter themselves that they can orchestrate the activities of their companies in virtuoso style.

Herbert Blomstedt: Mads Øvlisen, you are well known as an art collector and you acquired many works of art for Novo Nordisk, the Danish healthcare company that you led for more than 20 years. What role did art play for the company?

Mads Øvlisen: I used it as a kind of management tool, thinking that the physical surroundings make a powerful statement about the kind of company you want to be. To me it was natural to use architecture and the visual arts to send out a signal about innovation and experimentation. I had a naive belief that artists, like scientists, try to find answers and expand horizons. I also used art to provoke people a little, because without a continuous debate on what we're doing, the company would stagnate. This was my way of trying to remind people that it is important to experiment, even if that means you may not get all the answers right. So in a way I was exploiting the educational potential of art. But what about the musical side of the picture: Plato once called music the best form of education. As a conductor, would you agree with that? Blomstedt: I certainly would. Music has a very powerful impact on people of all ages, because it combines our



"The one thing that brings happiness to us, is to bring happiness to others."

emotional means of communication with the intellectual stimulants that we all need. Not all types of music do this to the same extent – there is music that is made just to dance to, and that is wonderful. But the music I'm talking about is the kind that also offers an intellectual challenge. It must have an emotional appeal and stir our sense of moral responsibility, which is a very important part of education. So if I had to define a basic catalogue of educational content, music would certainly make up a large part of it. What do you think?

Øvlisen: Well, for some time now in Denmark I have been advocating a point of view that sees musicians and artists playing an increasingly important role in sensitising people to things in a way that no amount of analytical learning could do. When I sit in the Royal Danish Theatre and watch Peter Konwitschny staging "Lohengrin" in a Hamburg classroom, and when I hear the story of the Holy Grail, I'm sitting there crying like a baby. To me that's a great example of how music teaches you something social. I learned something about this story in a new light; I learned something about people. So yes, music is incredibly important in increasing our sensitivity and awareness.

Blomstedt: Would you say it is even more important than fostering intellectual capabilities?

Øvlisen: The remarkable thing about listening to music is that it doesn't have a predetermined outcome. Many things we learn in business school are derived from past experience, and unlikely to inspire new ideas. Music can teach you to go back and find the courage to think differently, intuitively, and challenge accepted views.

Blomstedt: That, in my experience, is what gives it the power to shape people's personalities. There is a great need for strong personalities across all layers of society and I somehow feel that there are fewer today than there were a couple of generations ago. Building personalities has not been high enough on the educational agenda. Instead, the widely perceived purpose of education seems to be to implant knowledge, which may teach you how to push buttons but doesn't teach you how to make good and responsible decisions.

Øvlisen: Music is a very special means of communication. Once we had an international meeting, and it was very important for me to make people understand that, if they really worked together, they would achieve something great. Instead of making an opening speech, I took a choral of Joseph Haydn's and everybody sat there listening to this superb blend of voices and orchestra. I could have spent hours talking about teamwork, but the music I played was so much more eloquent and evocative. To me there was no way words could describe what happens when people who have the same vision do something together and inspire each other.

Blomstedt: Another interesting thing is that playing music in a group significantly lowers the output of the hormones that trigger aggression and fear. The reason is that, when you play together, you have to listen to each other. Going your own way and insisting on your own ideas doesn't work. You have to know what you want and at the same time be ready to listen, and only if you can coordinate your ideas with the ideas and possibilities of others, can you really achieve something.

Øvlisen: That is my experience exactly.

Blomstedt: Have you ever tried sitting in the middle of an orchestra? The ability of the musicians in the different groups to listen to each other is absolutely incredible. But, tell me, you also teach at the Copenhagen Business School: do you sense that there is a new openness among teachers and students towards a more liberal approach to education that involves the arts?

Øvlisen: One of the reasons I'm proud to be associated with Copenhagen Business School is that they have as many philosophers as they have bookkeepers. We need to have people who ask unusual questions. For my part,

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I frequently refer to the arts as challenging all our assumptions. So yes, there is a new openness, not least because the role of business is not restricted to business any more.

Blomstedt: You're talking about social responsibility? Øvlisen: Yes, given the complexity of this world, I think that business has to play a major role in the big issues like inequality or global warming. We're not going to live up to our challenges if we only think in Wall Street terms of what business ought to do. Neither governments nor supranational organisations can resolve all such issues. We will only find a solution by developing new partnerships across business, science and the arts. You have to be able to listen to what underprivileged people in other parts of the world need, otherwise you will not be able to help. You can't learn things like that at business school. You need to be out there and have the emotional capacity to take what you hear on board. So I was interested to follow your involvement with "The Management Symphony", as an initiative that draws on the emotional side of executives. Was it difficult to conduct people who normally see themselves as "conductors"?

Blomstedt: Not at all. When they play they forget they are executives, because there is a higher authority they all love: the composer. And then there is his prophet, the conductor, and if he is in harmony with the composer, it's even easier for them to subordinate their individual wills to this greater idea. I think that in God's ears we are all amateurs, but of course, those executives' level of effectiveness as musicians is not as high as that of professionals. You need more patience, but this patience is rewarded by their enormous enthusiasm and love of music. And I think they each go away from these three-day sessions a different person.

Øvlisen: In what respect?

Blomstedt: They are mindful of the fact that they have to listen to other people; that the boss can only be the boss if he knows what the others need; that they are not God, the composer is the god. I may have the solo in this bar, but in the next bar it's someone else who has the solo. There has to be a natural give and take, which is one of the joys of making music together. The full range of your musical power is something you only experience when you play together

Øvlisen: I used to accompany my daughter who played the flute, and while it often sounded awful, the joy we got out of it was incredible. When I went to school, every morning we lined up in the hall and somebody sang with an ensemble and friends of mine played their instru-



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ments. But that incredible enrichment has disappeared. Our daughters now have young children at the same school; they are dying to play an instrument, but they are told they are too young. To me that is an example of an outdated educational formula. Instead of urging young people to be creative, they burden them with more and more of that analytical knowledge that has nothing to do with creating intellectual openness. As a conductor, are you always aware that you're not just making music but that what you do has a broader impact?

Blomstedt: The more you learn about art, the more open you become and understand how you have to work with others in order to get results. The joy of conducting an orchestra derives not from telling everyone how to play, but from stimulating others to express themselves freely. Only then can you make music that is full of life. And the audience has an instinctive feeling that something is happening, which creates a unifying experience for everybody. They leave the concert hall thinking that they have encountered something ideal that they want to continue when they get home or to the office. That said, it is important that the music is challenging. Much music has an element of propaganda, in that it aims to lead you in a certain direction. The music that I mean is open to interpretation and serves many good purposes.



Øvlisen: There is one use of music that I hate, and that is when it becomes mere decoration, like at receptions where they use classical music to build some atmosphere. I may be a little puritanical but I think it is important that, when you listen to music, you allow yourself the luxury of being engulfed in it. Perhaps this has to do with the sense of humility I get when I listen to music.

Blomstedt: In the face of great music, any conductor and orchestra should be humble. One key purpose of art is to send out a message that there is something greater than ourselves, call it God or whatever you like. We are not the centre of the universe, even if we have a special position in the universe and a special responsibility. If success becomes the main purpose of making music, the opposite happens; we become proud or eccentric. As you said, art can be just a decoration or, even worse, a sort of conscience-balm that lets us say "I know I make a lot of money, but I also do something for the arts."

Øvlisen: Humility is so important. Every business leader has a tremendous influence on how complete other people get to be, on their dreams and aspirations. If you don't approach that opportunity to help people realise their potential with the greatest humility, you must be less than human.

Blomstedt: Would you say that art and music can help executives to stay in touch with reality and keep their own success in perspective?

Øvlisen: Absolutely. I always react very physically to good music: it either send shivers down my spine or I burst into tears. To me, art has always been a way to show people that emotions are not something you leave at home when you go to work. They form a huge reservoir that you can also draw upon at work. Business people should also be able to look at a painting and start a discussion that has nothing to do with "do you think we are going to make tomorrow's budget?" Art helps you realise or remember that there are other things in life. Sometimes it's important to allow yourself the luxury of being carried away and forgetting about budgets and just thinking, wow, this is great art. I think the role of the manager has evolved a bit in that direction, although not enough. Would you say that the role of the conductor has changed over recent decades?

Blomstedt: Absolutely. A hundred years ago, the conductor was a demi-god. He could do what he wanted in front of the audience. He could engage musicians without asking the orchestra. If he happened to be a great artist, the orchestra would even forgive him for being rude. Today, the normal conductor is more businesslike. He's a professional, like the musicians, and he's a leader, but a leader who has to be a great team player, working with everyone on stage towards a common goal. No doubt you see parallels to the business world in that.

Øvlisen: I would argue that most businesses are even more complex than orchestras and the activities involved are more widespread, from research to bookkeeping, but the important thing is to make everyone share a vision. I see myself as somebody who tells a story that other people then illustrate, so we are all working on the same book. The important thing is to make certain that everybody makes their own unique contribution as we try to achieve the vision that unites us. I suspect that is somewhat different from what you do. So while I think conducting is a beautiful way of describing what a CEO would love to perceive himself as doing, he is deceiving himself if he believes that he can really conduct.

Blomstedt: Could I ask you about your commitment to the Royal Danish Theatre? What kind of role can a business executive play there?

Øvlisen: To me it was an incredible gift to be asked to chair this wonderful place. But one thing was clear from the outset: I may have an interest in art, but I have not been blessed with being an artist. The artistic directors have sole responsibility for deciding what we perform. My very rewarding role has been to try and create a space where the creativity of these people can expand.

Blomstedt: It's good to see people like you working against the erosion of culture that we see in the Western world. There are so many pessimistic trends, a lessening of responsibility on all levels. Young people are more interested in pushing buttons than being actively involved in learning an art or craft. There could be so many more talents flourishing, if the surroundings and climate were more fruitful. For instance, I think it is a grave mistake that music as a subject has disappeared from the school curriculum.

Øvlisen: I think it's slowly coming back again.

Blomstedt: Perhaps a broader public awareness is growing that something is missing – it is certainly high time that such a feeling spread. Music and culture in general should be on the curriculum at all our schools. Why not have two lessons a week simply dedicated to civilisation – not just conjugating latin verbs or looking up dates in books, but acquiring a knowledge of art, of our heritage. That will make us more responsible. Many young people have never even heard of Goethe or Beethoven.

Øvlisen: The absence of art from our curriculum is a problem of great magnitude, because it deprives children of the opportunity to become intimate with creative expression. Instead, we grow up learning that art is something we must approach in awe, because it is an intellectual exercise. I hope we will see a resurgence of culture, because I think there is now a great need for the arts to flourish. With reference to the cultural conflicts we experience today, it would help if we stopped hiding behind our cultures and instead used our national heritages as bridges.

Blomstedt: I'm the son of a missionary and I've been a missionary all my life. I've always fought for the things that I thought valuable, perhaps because they are not so easily accessible. I think there must be some sort of missionary spirit in uniting people, not in pursuit of some corporate goal, but to bring those people happiness. After all, the one thing that brings us happiness is to bring happiness to others. It is when we aim only for our own happiness that we so often fail to achieve it.

RESUMÉ Herbert Blomstedt



Career: Born in the USA in 1927 to Swedish parents, Herbert Blomstedt was educated at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm and the University of Uppsala. He studied conducting at the Juilliard School in New York and in February 1954 made his debut as conductor with the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. He has been chief conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic and the Swedish and Danish Radio Orchestras. From 1975 to 1985 he was chief conductor of Staatskapelle Dresden and from 1985 to 1995 of the San Francisco Symphony. As guest conductor, he has performed together with many leading orchestras, including the Berlin and Munich Philharmonic.

Credo: We are not the centre of the universe, even if we have a very special position in the universe and a very special responsibility.

RESUMÉ Mads Øvlisen



Career: Mads Øvlisen was born in Denmark in 1940. He began his career with Danish healthcare company Novo Nordisk S/A in 1972 and was appointed CEO in 1981 and Chairman of the Board in 2000 (until 2006). He is Chairman of the Board of the Royal Danish Theatre and Chairman of the Board of Directors of LEGO A/S. Prior to joining Novo, Øvlisen was an attorney in private practice. He received his LLB from the University of Copenhagen in 1966 and in 1972 earned an MBA from Stanford University. Mads Øvlisen was made Knight Commander of the Order of Dannebrog in 2004 and holds the Italian Order of Merit. In 2003, he was appointed adjunct professor at the Copenhagen Business School.

Credo: We will only find solutions to the big issues by developing new partnerships across business, science and the arts.