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Crescendo

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Crescendo

Herr Franz Hoffner stood ramrod straight atop his conductor's platform. The epitome of *hauteur*, he glared down at his assembled orchestra from this majestic altitude. He felt like a flamboyant rooster with a bevy of hens. His orchestra looked to him for guidance and direction, and he enjoyed their dependence.

With a snap of his wand he brought them to attention. Violins and violas were obediently shouldered and cellos were tucked more firmly between knees. All bows were poised, except for one. Only the lone bassist defiantly returned Hoffner's baleful, unwavering gaze. As though he were flipping a switch, Hoffner flicked his wand, and the music began, a Telemann concerto in 4 movements. By nature, a concerto's movements alternate *legato* and *presto*, and this first movement was accordingly slow and rhythmic. Hoffner got well into his stride, swaying to and fro, eyebrows waltzing across his brow. He leaned forward over his score sheet, delicately prodding the violins with emphatic face and descriptive gestures. His hands danced aloft, signifying a *crescendo*, and finally crashlanded as the second movement began.

Hoffner began to dance from one foot to the other, wagging his head and shaking tendrils of white hair across his eyes. The music grew steadily faster and faster, building up to a trill, which Hoffner indicated by vibrating his wand. As the music carried on its stirring rhythm, Hoffner stiffened in anger. The bassist was two beats ahead! The imbecile! Already nearby cellos were attempting to modify their pace to catch up with the

faulty bassist. Hoffner fixed the bassist with a murderous glare. The bassist did not heed. Desperately, as the changeover into the third movement began, Hoffner stabbed his wand at the offender. In doing so, he overturned his music stand, and it toppled gracefully into the middle of the orchestra horseshoe, scattering pages like dead leaves. The orchestra was on its own. Confused and minus their leader, the majestic rhythm grew distorted. Hoffner, his face purpled, attempted to correct matters. The fractious bassist remained two beats ahead, and Hoffner leaned further and further over his platform, until he was nearly leaning on the nearest cellist. The bass player ignored him, and a slight smile toyed with his lips.

The fourth movement began, and the rhythm ran away from Hoffner, whose anger was focused on the insolent bassist. As he flailed his wand in desperation, it slipped from his grasp, and landed on the head of a startled cellist, who promptly dropped his bow onto his stand partner's foot. As he reached for it, he overturned the music stand, which set off a domino effect, knocking two other stands into the laps of viola players, who were taken by surprise. The lower string section became disjointed, and an instrument was shattered on the floor. Elbows jabbed and toppled further music stands, one of which rendered a viola player unconscious, as it hit the surprised musician on the left ear. Pandemonium took over, with only the violins left relatively unaffected. Recriminations began to be shouted.

The violins desperately played until rosin dust was thick as fog. Herr Hoffner watched this nightmare with a

stiff body and white face. The violin's fractured rhythm mingled cacophonously with the crashing of wood and steel, as Herr Hoffner collapsed on his platform in an apoplectic fit. And through it all, steadily playing two beats ahead, the bassist prevailed.

Leigh Humm, '94