

EIGHTH CHAIR

By Tyler Leeps

Characters:

Maestro: Male in his 60's

Cellist: Male in his late 20's

Setting: A cello player and his conductor are on a stage before the orchestra starts.

CELLIST

I'm not really sure if you know who I am, but I'm the eighth chair cellist.

MAESTRO

An 8th chair you say. Do you know who I am?

CELLIST

You're the Maestro.

MAESTRO

Yes I am the Maestro, he who can decrescendo crescendos, he who makes harps sound like they are being played by baby angels.

CELLIST

Of course sir.

MAESTRO

Then you should know that an 8th chair has no business talking to the maestro.

CELLIST

But that's what I wanted to talk about.

MAESTRO

What could you want to talk about that would possibly interest the Maestro

CELLIST

8th chair.

MAESTRO

What about 8th chair?

CELLIST

I don't want to be 8th chair.

MAESTRO

I can bring in a 9th chair.

CELLIST

I don't want to be 9th chair.

MAESTRO

What do you want?

CELLIST

To be 7th chair.

MAESTRO

7th chair?

CELLIST

7th chair.

MAESTRO

Do you comprehend the magnitude of what you're asking of me?

CELLIST

Yes sir. I have the perfect skills to be-

MAESTRO

Moving an 8th chair to 7th chair is an unbelievably fast tempo change. I will have to ponder this after the season is over.

CELLIST

After the season is over?

MAESTRO

After the season is over.

CELLIST

After the season is over. I know what that means. That is code word for cool your pedals cause it's not happening.

MAESTRO

How dare you talk to me in that tone?

CELLIST

(Interrupts)

At first I thought off beat girl got seventh chair over me because of her looks but that was you keep promoting different people ahead of me. Oh and when are you going to make chair 2 get his neck fixed. It's obscene, were not in a pit. And the way you twirl around you baton is distracting- no more than that it is disenchanting. This isn't Hogwarts, waving your wand doesn't make everyone sound better. I'm sure I could just wait a few more tours because half this orchestra could bite the dust at any moment. Do you go looking for talent at the hospice? I mean come on!

MAESTRO

I am the Maestro he who-

CELLIST

(Interrupts)

Well you know what sir. I- I am the cellist, the one who makes all other strings sound perfect, the one who has notes as crisp as crackers and the one who does uh other musical things, yeah-

MAESTRO

I see...

CELLIST

The few friends I have think I'm crazy for obsessing over chair seven when they wouldn't be able to see me any better from there anyways-But everything changes when you go up a chair.

MAESTRO

How?

CELLIST

From seventh chair you are so close to the song you can just reach out and touch it. You can become one with the song in a way most people just don't understand.

MAESTRO

And you think you are ready for such a task?

CELLIST

I realize that when you go up a chair the pressure magnifies. That pressure that is on you that if you miss place your finger a just once everything that the composer has written is ruined and the audience never gets to experience the magic of the orchestra. I want that pressure. I want that feeling. I would do anything to get that feeling.

MAESTRO

Ok.

CELLIST

Ok, what?

MAESTRO

Request granted.

CELLIST

Why?

MAESTRO

Why?

CELLIST

Yeah, why? I thought for sure you were going to fire me or make me play the triangle.

MAESTRO

I don't care what chair you play in.

CELLIST

You don't?

MAESTRO

I don't.

CELLIST

If you don't then-

MAESTRO
(Interrupts)

Because I am the Maestro, I play people like fiddles.

CELLIST

But you said that-

MAESTRO
(Interrupts)

The Maestro has a reason behind every string he plucks.

CELLIST

This is great, thank you. Oh uh, sorry I'm getting a little too fired up. The only time I talk this much is when I'm talking to the cello. Oh like you don't whisper sweet nothings to your baton at night.

MAESTRO

What type of Maestro would I be if I did not talk to the instruments? I am he who can make one instrument play a harmony.

CELLIST

I don't think-

MAESTRO

I can hear everything that is wrong with a song and when I flick my wrist I can make it right again.

CELLIST

Oh ok. Well anyways I guess I'll just go set up my stuff now. Actually, since I am moving up to seventh chair, I feel that I can now ask you this.

MAESTRO

What is it 7th chair?

CELLIST

What piece are we going to be working on?

MAESTRO

Well, 2 score years ago I was at the peak of my musical career. And I decided to conduct a piece very few have ever tried before.

CELLIST

What happened?

MAESTRO

Alas. We were on stage and all of the notes fell out of tune. The viola's began to sound like violins.

CELLIST

The horror!

MAESTRO

I kept waving my baton but I thought my wrist could snap off at any moment.

CELLIST

The chaos!

MAESTRO

We were... We were... We were pedestrian.

CELLIST

Anything but that!!

MAESTRO

We barely made it out of the pit in one piece.

CELLIST

How did you managed to go on after that?

MAESTRO

By planning my revenge. And now I plan on trying that same piece again, and avenging those notes I lost 2 score years ago.

CELLIST

What piece is it?

MAESTRO

For forty years, I the maestro have been conducting forsaken songs by easy composers like Albrechtsberger, Dobrzyński and Butterworth.

MAESTRO

But for forty years I have planned to make war on the horrors of the deep, and once again conduct Stravinsky' Le Sacre du printemps!

CELLIST

Stravinsky' Le Sacre du printemps!

MAESTRO

Stravinsky' Le Sacre du printemps!

CELLIST

If we tried playing a piece like that, we could be committing sound-a-side

MAESTRO

When I think of this life I have led; the desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of the Maestro's exclusiveness. And for 40 years I have felt nothing but-

CELLIST

Are you quoting Moby Dick? That's what this is! This is your Captain Ahab moment. To slay the beast that is Stravinski's Le Sacre du printemps.

MAESTRO

Aye!

CELLIST

You could bring the whole orchestra down with you. This is only a 60 piece band and you're the only conductor.

MAESTRO

I am not a conductor I am the Maestro.

CELLIST

But it takes at least three extra conductors to tackle a piece of this magnitude.

MAESTRO

I am the Maestro. I am he who combines horse hair and maple wood to create a bow so sharp and balanced that it will crescendo over any piece that dares to lay upon its music stand.

CELLIST

That won't be enough!

MAESTRO

Well I must go sharpen my baton before the war starts. I will see you on stage 1st chair.

CELLIST

1st chair?

MAESTRO

1st chair.

CELLIST

I can't move all the way up to first chair!

MAESTRO

This conversation has proved to me that you would be perfect for 1st chair. You can be the one that helps me slay Stravinski's Le Sacre du printemps.

CELLIST

What if my notes are too flat?

MAESTRO

We will be fantastic

CELLIST

What if I am off key?

MAESTRO

We will be stars!

CELLIST

What if my strings snap?

MAESTRO

And I will finally get my revenge!

CELLIST

You know I'm really not that good. Actually I'm awful. My notes aren't all that crisp. Actually they are downright soggy. Yes, my notes are soggy. And you the Maestro can't possibly have a 1st chair out there with soggy notes.

MAESTRO

I am the Maestro, I am he who can make your soggy notes no longer soggy.

CELLIST

I just don't think I am ready for 1st chair against such a song. I could choke.

MAESTRO

Nonsense. After this piece, the critics will treat us like composers.

CELLIST

The critics! I can't go out in front of critics. If the song doesn't rip me to shreds the critics will.

MAESTRO

All the critics care about is how good the Maestro is.

CELLIST

The critics only care about the 1st chair. I can't be first chair!

MAESTRO

The critics will write five stars. That Maestro is the best maestro-er to ever maestro in the history of maestro-ing.

CELLIST

The critics will write one star. That cellist doesn't even deserve 1st chair at the dinner table.

MAESTRO

Five stars, how can a Maestro move his wrist with such grace? His hands are moving like he's waving to the queen and she is waving back.

CELLIST

One star, how can a 1st chair's hands shake so much? His hands are moving like he has-insert any insensitive remark.

MAESTRO

Five stars. This paper cannot fit the number of stars I want to write.

CELLIST

One star, if I could dismember this star into pieces, I would give the Cellist the bottom left point of the star, and that's out of pity.

MAESTRO

Every time I take a step outside their fanatics with my photo in hand and they will shout, "Wow you're that Maestro that mastered Stravinski's Le Sacre du printemps".

CELLIST

Every time I go outside an angry mob with pitchforks in hand will shout, "Wow you're that 1st chair cellist that almost died playing Stravinski's Le Sacre du printemps".

MAESTRO

Well, I think we are on the same sheet of music.

CELLIST

Sir, maybe you should just consider that we are not ready for a piece as fierce as this one.

MAESTRO

Now is the time to strike. It is time we gather up all arms and go to battle. .

CELLIST

But our bows are not sharp enough.

MAESTRO

There may be some casualties. It's not personal 1st chair. It's strictly show business.
(break 4th wall)

CELLIST

(Interrupts)

Sir, I've got a career ahead of me and the possibility of kids to think about. I won't make it out of there alive if I'm in 1st chair.

MAESTRO

And I will finally be the Maestro, he who stabbed Stravinski's Le Sacre du printemps through the treble clef with my oak shafted baton.

CELLIST

But you don't have to make such a decision already. Maybe sleep on it for a little bit, before the next rehearsal.

MAESTRO

Why wait. We are going to be rehearsing now!

CELLIST

Rehearsing now?!

MAESTRO

Rehearsing now! Musicians!

(The tech come on stage, 4 from stage SL and 4 from sr standing at attention)

CELLIST

I can't rehearse now.

MAESTRO

Musicians grab your instruments and mann your chairs

CELLIST

I haven't warmed up. I haven't done my lip trills, I haven't even tuned. (talking to herself)

MAESTRO

Have a seat in 1st chair, 1st chair.

CELLIST

1st Chair!

MAESTRO

1st Chair!

CELLIST

1st chair. I can't play from first chair just yet.

MAESTRO

Musicians! (all musicians stand)

We are at war Musicians. Against such an evil the world has never seen before and will never see again. Stravinsky's Le Sacre Du Printemps! (Musician gasps) You must send our entire army of notes to aid your Maestro in the preservation of not just ourselves, but of our children. Send the notes for the preservation of liberty. Send your notes for justice. Send them for law and order. Send them for reason. But most importantly, send our notes for hope. Hope that a Maestro and her orchestra have not been wasted to the pages of history. That their courage bonds us together. That we are made stronger by their actions, and that your musical choices today reflect our bravery.

RANDOM TECH MUSICIAN

Uh, Is the maestro quoting 300?

MAESTRO

THIS IS ORCHESTRA!!!!

(Raises baton above head and Sparta kicks a music stand)

CELLIST

CELLIST
Maestro sir.

MAESTRO
Yes 1st chair?

CELLIST
I want 8th chair back

MAESTRO
8th chair?

CELLIST
8th chair.

MAESTRO
Perfect. 8th chair is exactly where you belong.

CELLIST
Wait, wait, wait. You were never going to move me up to 1st chair?

MAESTRO
Of course not. What type of Maestro would I be if I moved an 8th chair to 1st chair?
(The musicians slowly push the cellist back to 8th chair)

CELLIST
You played me like a fiddle this whole time. Well hello 8th chair. Here I am back, where I started. I guess this is where I belong.

MAESTRO
Good. Everyone is set. Ok prepare to play Benjamin Britten's Canadian Carnival.

CELLIST
Benjamin Britten's Canadian Carnival?!

MAESTRO
Benjamin Britten's Canadian Carnival.

CELLIST
But that's the easiest piece there is!

MAESTRO

Indeed.

CELLIST

So we are not going to play Stravinski's Le Sacre du printemps?

MAESTRO

This orchestra, play Stravinski's Le Sacre du printemps?!? We are not ready for such a piece. I'm not insane!

(Begins talking to his baton as he walks off stage)

Extra idea

CELLIST

(sits on the stage)

Back to 8th chair. But I had 7th chair. I had it. I felt like my dream was finally coming true and then like a game of musical chairs someone ripped that chair out from under me. And too make things worse now I have to play Benjamin Britten's Canadian Carnival. Benjamin Britten's Canadian Carnival. That piece of garbage. Yes. Even I could write a piece better than that... Wait that's it. That's it! That is how I win 7th chair, by composing our next piece. The maestro will be forced to move me to 7th chair after I produce the perfect song. The song to end all songs.

(suddenly gets out sheet music and begins to write a piece. The light fade in and out to show the passage of time. On the last fade up, the Cellist is curled up, fast asleep on her cello case)

MAESTRO

(re-enters, seeing the Cellist on the floor)

8th Chair. 8th chair. 8th chair! What are you doing!

CELLIST

(Suddenly awakens)

Wait... What... Oh I must've been up all night.

What have you been doing.

Yes it is. But its not for your orchestra.

Oh no. You are not worthy of such a piece.

How dare you, I am the maestro. I-

A maestro who conducts pieces like Benjamin Britten's Canadian Carnival.