

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

MARIN ALSOP INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Marin Alsop
American Conductor
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Total Running Time: 50 minutes and 15 seconds

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Marin Alsop
American Conductor

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INTERVIEWER:

I wanted to start out talking with you a little about your family and your upbringing? What was it like?

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MARIN ALSOP:

My upbringing was very unusual, I think. I certainly felt... never felt that I fit into the other families on the block. My parents are both professional musicians so our days were really defined by what gigs they had.

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And of course, every evening they went to work. When everyone else's family came home, my parents went to work. So, it was pretty... it was pretty unusual. I grew up in Manhattan for the first five years of my life, and then we moved out to Westchester, so my parents commuted to New York to work. So it was... it was a lot of time spent apart.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Marin Alsop & Her Mother

INTERVIEWER:

What impact did having two professional musicians as your parents have on you? Were you happy with that being different or?

MARIN ALSOP:

I think as a child that you're not really, it's... You don't judge it so much, it just is the way it is.

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And the... In retrospect, looking back, I think having parents who were professional musicians... was an incredible advantage in many ways, because

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I think as artists they lived their lives in a very free form. They... they saw possibility always. And they're self-starting people, I mean maybe they're even unusual for musicians, but they're people who get an idea and then actualize it.

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So, not only are they musicians, my father likes to build houses, but that's something he didn't really know how to do, so he would build houses around us and we'd have to adapt. And my mother is, besides a cellist, she's an incredible potter so she makes all of our plates. Then she's a weaver and she's a... You know so, I think it was just a intensely artistic environment to grow up in.

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But, I think the greatest thing it gave me was a sense of... possibility that if you get an idea, all you have to do is start and you'll figure out how to achieve it so that nothing is out of one's realm.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there a moment that you remember when you knew that music, for you too, would be a driving force in your life?

MARIN ALSOP:

Well, as a child of professional musicians, there was never a moment that I didn't think music would be part of my life.

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My parents started me on piano when I was two, and violin when I was five or six. So, music was always... It was always implied... it was always part of everything we did. It was just you know who you were. And I think for me, a defining moment really came when I was nine years old and I saw Lenard Bernstein conduct, because that's the day I decided I must be a conductor.

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So I remember that quite vividly and that feeling never left me. I had that everyday of my life. My father took me to a young people's concert and we sat very close to Leonard Bernstein and he... I didn't really know who he was. I didn't have a preconception at all but, this guy sort of ran out on stage and jumped on the podium and he was very... he cut an incredible figure. You know, I think he was wearing a turtleneck.

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I think that seemed to break all the rules and he was young, he was handsome, he... And the thing that impressed me the most was that he kept turning around and talking to us. And I was convinced that he was talking just to me. And... his charisma, his enthusiasm for the music. Ya know clearly his passion about what he was doing spoke to me. And I remember... You know, I can't remember the pieces to this day, but I can remember turning to my father and saying, "Oh! That's what I want to do. I want to be a conductor." So...

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INTERVIEWER:

How did your parents and your father react?

MARIN ALSOP:

As long as I went into music, they didn't mind what my instrument would be, even the orchestra. But... it was interesting because this was the first... the first moment where I felt I was defining myself. You know, prior to that I was doing what my parents wanted me to do, I think. And this conducting appealed to me on... I think intrinsically on many different levels.

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I wasn't aware of it at the time, but I think this sense of leadership and galvanizing people. I think that came through and spoke to me through Bernstein. But when I told my violin teacher at Julliard—I was in the Julliard pre-college—she told me that, "Well conductors, you know, you're too young to be a conductor." And this was the news that was the most shocking. She said, "And girls don't do that."

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And so, I was devastated. I never... This... I never even considered this possibility. And so I went home. and I said, "You know, Ms. Pardee said that girls can't be conductors. What's up with that?" And my mother was so angry. She said, "That's ridiculous. I'm gonna call her up right away and tell her you know, 'You should never tell...'"

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So, clearly my parents were supportive of the idea and, and I think that the outrage my mother expressed was extremely helpful and validating for me.

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And she didn't say, "Yeah. well you know maybe you shouldn't," she said, "Absolutely not. You can do anything you want to do and you can be anything you want to be." And my father, who's much quieter because my mother's very gregarious, he... he went... And when I came down for breakfast that week, I don't know if this was the next morning or a few mornings, there was a long wooden box and I opened it up and it was filled with batons.

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And it was very... very touching. I still have the box and I think that kind of both extroverted and quiet support of me was really what enabled me to persevere. Always.

INTERVIEWER:

What was the message it said to you?

MARIN ALSOP:

Oh, I mean, you can do anything you want to do. And that's the kind of life they led. They're people who... I mean not just in music, they just, "Look you wanna do something, just figure it out. It's not a big deal."

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INTERVIEWER:

What about your other teachers? How encouraging were they? Were there many more moments of, like, sexism where you were pushed to stay with the instrument as opposed to conducting?

MARIN ALSOP:

No. I don't... I think that was the... that's really the major moment I remember but maybe because it was the first moment, it stuck out in my mind, and also I was so... I was in such awe of my teacher and really revered her opinion.

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So I think that was shocking but...

INTERVIEWER:

What did you think when she said that?

MARIN ALSOP:

Well, it started a long... a long term thought process for me because I... I really had never considered that girls couldn't do something. I mean, I... the concept was completely foreign to me, but of course as I looked around I noticed, "Oh. Maybe she's right." And I think it, you know, that comment combined with society—especially in those days—

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The lack of women in leadership roles in society, I think... it probably inhibited me a little bit from pursuing this or overtly pursuing this, as I wished I could. But also, the barrier to being, becoming a conductor is youth. Or was in that day. Today it's not. You see on the Internet three year old conductors and everything. But in those days it was thought you really couldn't even get into conducting till your twenties or thirties.

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So that was an additional obstacle... to overcome because I was, you know, still just not even a teenager yet. So... But, what I would try to do is... take every opportunity and try to study and learn and figure out what the conductors were doing. So when I played in the orchestra at Julliard, I would bring the study scores. My father would buy them for me. So I would have the whole score and I'd be you know playing along with my violin, but I'd also be studying the score as it went and try to figure out...

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So... it became a... a passion, sort of a hidden passion of mine to try to figure out how I could become a conductor, and how would I conduct this piece, and what can I learn from this person.

INTERVIEWER:

I read that you used to hold parties? So that you had some people to practice on? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

MARIN ALSOP:

When I came back to Julliard after I went to Yale, I would invite friends over to my studio apartment, and I'd say, "Ah, you know... I'm gonna have pizza and beer," and that was a big draw.

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And I said, "Oh, and do you mind bringing your instrument and maybe play through a Mozart symphony or..." So, I would have friends come over and you

know, they would tolerate it once or twice, and then I'd have to move to a new group of friends to have them come over. And we had some fun... I would conduct them. They'd play for me and they'd... We'd talk about conducting and music and, of course when you're young and really passionate about something...

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And we'd play chamber music and other things. But I do remember one evening where I had... a very good friend of mine play the saxophone. He was sort of from another... another branch of music entirely and another friend of mine who is an incredible classical guitarist, so I had a saxophone, a guitar, and then traditional orchestral instruments... an oboist and a violinist. And it was the funniest Mozart symphony I've ever heard with these people sort of, you know, guitaring along. But it was great.

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It was about making music and... and these friends eventually... became, in many ways, my teachers. Because I decided finally that the best way to become a conductor would be to start my own orchestra, and so of course I called all my friends and they all became part of this sort of larger effort.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Marin Alsop

Juilliard School of Music, 1974

INTERVIEWER:

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So you never really stopped, from that moment, wanting to be a conductor?
You continued to study an instrument?

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MARIN ALSOP:

I went to high school, and then I went to Yale as an undergraduate, and then I went back to Julliard to get my masters. And my masters was in violin performance so I was a violinist. I would seize every opportunity I could to try to attend the conducting classes or play for the conducting orchestras at Yale and at Julliard. I didn't feel equipped to really even audition yet for a program. Eventually I did audition for the Juilliard program a few times and I never got in.

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But I got pretty close, and I thought that was quite an accomplishment considering I'd never actually conducted.

INTERVIEWER:

What did you think when you didn't get in?

MARIN ALSOP:

Well, that led me to the conclusion that I was... perhaps, barking up the wrong tree, that maybe going to school for conducting wasn't the best methodology for me. And instead... You know, it's the realization. Conducting is very different from playing an instrument.

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As a violinist, I could practice ten hours a day if I wanted to. But as a conductor, you can't practice. You don't have an instrument. So, there's such a steep learning curve. You know, because you go from being... I was a very good violinist, you know, really top of your field, to being an amateur, but in charge of everyone. You know, it's how do you gain that experience and how do you... how does one figure what works, what doesn't work?

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And so I decided that the best way to do that would be to start my own orchestra, and comprised of people that are supportive of me and would help with constructive criticism. So, I think I needed those, those eight, ten years of really working with my own projects and getting feedback from my colleagues and friends in order to develop my skills.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you ever doubt your ability to be a conductor especially since you're a woman?

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MARIN ALSOP:

I don't think any woman you speak to will say that being a woman brought any insecurity into the picture. Society certainly tells us that being a woman is some sort of handicap, in terms of attaining the highest levels of leadership.

But I don't think we as women ever experience that. I mean, we are who we are. I don't run around thinking, "Oh my God. I'm a woman." You know?

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I am who I am, and the gender is really just a fact of nature, it doesn't... I don't think it comes into play at all. But I certainly had moments when I thought, "I wonder if society is ready to embrace a woman in this kind of leadership role." Especially in classical music which is terribly conservative. But, I never... I never doubted that I would achieve my goal of becoming a conductor and I never... I mean, I think always... Everyone always wants to rise in one's field but I never did it for that reason and I think that's probably why I succeeded.

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INTERVIEWER:

You did it for?

MARIN ALSOP:

Because I love it. That's it. I did it because I couldn't not do it.

INTERVIEWER:

What was the moment when you realized that you were gonna make it as a conductor?

MARIN ALSOP:

I'm not sure this was a moment... when I felt I would make it, you know, it's a profession that... is very unpredictable. There's no... there's no set path to, you know, if you do this then you're guaranteed to do that and then that. It doesn't work like that.

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It's really a... rollercoaster kind of career path. I think in terms of... feeling validated... that I had something to bring to the table, let's put it that way, something important to say... It was probably when I finally became a student of Leonard Bernstein when I was in my early thirties. I was at Tanglewood and I was selected to conduct a concert with Bernstein.

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So that was a very, very special moment for me and, I think his support and again, this sense of validation, he was... very warm, very giving, but also, I think he got me. When he said, "Oh, that was a great idea. I'm gonna steal that idea," I said, "Leonard Bernstein's gonna steal something from me." I said, "Oh, please steal anything you want."

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I said, "Because, of course I stole the whole idea about being a conductor from you," and I think having Bernstein just reinforce my conviction was extremely encouraging.

INTERVIEWER:

Both times you mentioned him, your whole face lights up. What is it about him?

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MARIN ALSOP:

Well I think he was a unique... a unique individual.-

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Marin Alsop & Mentor Leonard Bernstein

MARIN ALSOP:

-I'm not sure we'll ever see anyone quite like him. He... He broke every single rule, he broke every single barrier. He was a... a bigger than life kind of person. And I guess for me it's a very simple... love that I had for him because he... he was my hero. You know, from nine years old, he was my hero, and sort of this unreachable hero, and I was afraid ever to meet him because I thought I would lose my power to speak.

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And then when I met him and I studied with him, he was even greater than I had hoped. You know so, I think it's rare to have a hero and I think it's very rare to have that hero exceed one's expectations so I am grateful that I got to know him. I'm only sorry he didn't live longer. He has these fantastic children who come to my concerts and we collaborate on things and I wish he could be around to see that as well.

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INTERVIEWER:

Is there any very other pivotal moments that you'll like to tell me about or describe in your early career of conducting?

MARIN ALSOP:

A conducting career is very... ephemeral and unpredictable. One has no idea, you have no idea where you're going to... suddenly take a detour and end up with an orchestra here or doing this here or doing that there. When I first started working in Europe, my manager said, "Well, don't have any high expectations. You know, a woman on the podium in Europe and..."

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Okay. And then I started working in the UK a little bit and it just was... this kind of trajectory, and I fell in love with the British musicians. We really connected, it was all about the music and, pretty soon I was appointed Music Director of the Bournemouth Symphony so I became the first woman to head a major British orchestra. And... I guess for me the... the interesting part about that was...

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At the time of my appointment, there was one line in the paper that said 'the woman thing' and that was it. They never mentioned it again. And so you know you start to understand that different cultures deal with this gender issue much... much differently from others. When I made my debut at La Scala—also the first woman to conduct there in 230 years or however many,

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5,000 years—and they had a big press conference, it was like the moon landing.

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And the first question from the journalist: "Do you cook?" So, I mean you just realize, "Wow. Okay. Some people are living in the dark ages and some people are way ahead of us."

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall
Baltimore, Maryland

INTERVIEWER:

Can you tell me now, about the moment that you learned you were selected to be the Head of the Orchestra?

MARIN ALSOP:

I received a call from the Head of the Board and the Managing Director at the time of the Baltimore Symphony and they said, "Would you come to New York and talk to us about becoming our next Music Director?"

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And so, I was... I was thrilled because I had guest conducted the Baltimore Symphony several times and I thought their... I thought they were a great orchestra. I thought they could be even greater with attention and you know

discipline and someone who really cared at the helm. And so I was very, very excited about the prospect.

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INTERVIEWER:

When you first heard that, when you put the phone down, what were your first thoughts?

MARIN ALSOP:

I was excited but I was cautiously excited because I knew that the Baltimore Symphony had some big challenges in front of it. I knew it was an orchestra that had a huge debt. I knew their subscriber base had fallen off. I knew they hadn't made a record in, any recordings in about a decade. So I knew that it was a situation that was fraught with challenges.

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I had no idea how many challenges at that time. But, so, I was cautiously excited about it. Let's put it that way. The time when I started it was, it was quite exciting finally to get over all the hurdle of finally getting to... my start with the orchestra. And I mean it was exciting because there was a lot of attention brought to the orchestra, and to me, and to be the person of the week and all these things.

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I mean... That was fun but again, I guess for me the issue of gender doesn't... It doesn't really resonate with me at all. It seems... It seems like a, a rather trite

point to receive attention for. It's sort of a, a fluke of birth, not really anything I had any say in, or any... I didn't have to work hard for that position, so I always feel that... I, I always feel slightly... conflicted I guess when that's what's cited.

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INTERVIEWER:

Did you have no feeling about breaking that barrier?

MARIN ALSOP:

I think I have the same feeling when I'm the first woman to do anything, which is that I feel very proud. But, I also find it somewhat pathetic, that we can be in the 21st century and there can still be firsts for women. So, I guess I feel both things at the same time. Probably pride wins out, certainly for my parents, pride wins out.

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But, what happens I think is that when one is the first and when one gets so much attention, it creates an opportunity to... try to reach out and become... I think naturally, you are a role, role model. And that's something that I happily embrace because I think that it gives me an opportunity to create... a culture where women feel they are entitled to step up to the top levels.

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And not just in music, but in other fields. So, I do a lot of speaking. I do a lot of workshops. I've established a fellowship for talented young women

conductors, to try to create opportunities for them. So what happens is... it allows me these opportunities so I think one has to maximize every, every opportunity.

INTERVIEWER:

I want to go back to your appointment, you know, there was some controversy about it. Some of the musicians were actually publicly questioning your credentials and I'm wondering why.

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I think you were cited as calling it a 'hit and run' accident? So, can you tell me why and tell me a little bit about it.

MARIN ALSOP:

I think I stepped into a very complex situation with the Baltimore Symphony when I was first appointed. In looking back, I think that the musicians had... they'd endured many, many years of feeling... unheard and that their opinions weren't considered.

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You know, what happens in... in the not-for-profit world often, especially in the orchestra world is, you know, the management teams come and go, the music directors come and go, and many musicians spend their entire careers with one orchestra. So, they see all of these changes and yet you know nobody ever listens to them. "Well, we tried that. We knew you weren't..."

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And so I think they... they had... they were really suffering from a sense of neglect. I think my appointment was a cathartic moment for them to speak out. I don't know that it was so much about me personally, as about not being heard and I think it was very, very hard not to take it personally. But I really tried to put myself in their position, to understand what was motivating this.

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Because I certainly knew that I could bring a lot to the table but I don't think they knew me that well. And also, I don't think anyone had really stopped to try to figure out... what was unhealthy for them in the environment that they were working.

INTERVIEWER:

Was it upsetting? Were you angry, surprised, or...

MARIN ALSOP:

I was... I was all of those things. Of course. I, It was a very... I think I was shocked.

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That was my initial reaction. It did feel a little bit like a 'hit and run' accident. I didn't see it coming. And... it was protracted, it lasted a long time, it... it felt threatening to everything I had... I had accomplished. It was frightening, it was depressing, it was all of those things.

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You know, especially to feel so... enthusiastic and upbeat about something only to have it over- almost overnight, turn into what, what felt like, you know, the end of my career in a way. And that was very, it was a very, very difficult time I would say, for me. But, it only...

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It only reinforced my... determination, really, to try to fix and find out what was going on with these musicians and the situation in Baltimore. But, I wasn't going to do it if I didn't have their support, so I came and spoke to them privately. And... I, I laid out at least my short-term vision for the orchestra and they said, "You have our support."

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And so we started a relationship and I think none of us really likes to look back on that time and I would include all the musicians in that, because I don't think it was their best moment. But I think if you look at them today, you'll see them at their best and that's what makes me proud.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you think your, breaking that barrier so to speak, meant to other women?

MARIN ALSOP:

I have the experience of women coming to concerts and talking to me afterward and saying, "You know, this was different for me. I felt I could be doing this."

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And so it... I think the experience is more empowering and more personal for many women, seeing a woman in charge and on the podium. So that's... that's always exciting to me. Or young women, "Oh. I'm thinking about being a conductor." It's great.

INTERVIEWER:

Even women who were not wanting to be musicians, you seem to galvanize them. Is that your experience? Like your appointment?

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MARIN ALSOP:

I think it's a... sense of... accomplishment whenever... I mean, when I saw Sally Ride, you know, take the space shuttle, I was excited. You know, there's a sense of, "Great. Go girl." That kind of experience. I think now, in looking at the climate... now, I am trying to really celebrate women in roles of leadership and this coming season in Baltimore, we're... our..

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Our season theme is Revolutionary Women, so we're trying to reach out to women across all disciplines and through every economic strata to participate and engage in discussions about women's issues and women in leadership roles.

INTERVIEWER:

You've watched many men lead, you know, literally in this case—the podium. How is it different for a woman to lead an orchestra?

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MARIN ALSOP:

Well, I don't think the essence of leadership differs whether you're a conductor or a CEO. I think leadership has certain qualities that are... just undeniable regardless of what, what field one is in. But, I do think because of the nature of conducting, which is gestural, so that I am...

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Depicting the music with my gestures and eliciting a certain kind of response from the musicians, I do think that it's important to, as women, to understand how society and how my musicians read my gestures. And they read my gestures differently from the same gestures from a man. That is just pure and simply factual. So that if I'm doing something that's very sensitive, delicate, it can come across as seeming... little girly, you know, or light weight.

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But if a man is doing, really, the exact same gestures, he's sensitive. I mean, it's not... I'm not trying to be facetious at all. I'm just trying to... analyze what I'm doing so that I can get the best musical result. And when I teach students, not just women, men too, I talk to them about gesture and what it means. Because I think as women, we have to think it through twice.

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We have to think about how to convey the music, but also how our gesture is perceived. So I think, that does add another layer of complexity to what we do as women.

INTERVIEWER:

I've read that you've said that you had to make accommodations because of this issue of gender and gesture. Can you explain it a little more and demonstrate a little?

MARIN ALSOP:

When one is very, very strong, you know, and you're trying to get a huge sound from the brass and the, you know, and...

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If, as a woman, if you're really too aggressive, there's something... I can't... I don't know if I can really articulate it in words but there's something that, really, can be off putting about it. Whereas when a man is very, very strong, that's acceptable. It's expected. I think maybe because it's unexpected from a woman, that kind of you know, "Come on. Give it to me." You know, I think it's important to try to dissociate the gesture from any... sort of stereotypic reactions.

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So that, I try, I've tried to sort of de-genderize my gesture. I don't know if that makes sense, but I try to... I work hard at getting a sound from the orchestra that's all about sound and not about, "Oh, you want a loud sound." You know,

so that it doesn't evoke any kind of specific response. I think one of the greatest compliments, someone... Early, it was early in my career, one of the big brass guys came up to me and said, "You know, you're great at... I never noticed you were a woman." You know, so I said, "Well, thank you very much."

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You know I didn't, I understood it was a compliment. And when you think about it, it's a terrible compliment but... I think that's the idea, that I, you know, the issue that you're a woman or a man or anything, it becomes immediately irrelevant. So, I think gesture has to be all about the music and conveying that essence of the music, and... not specific to me as a human being, me as a woman, me as anything.

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INTERVIEWER:

You're making these gestures and they do have that reaction you describe, what happens? Is it the orchestra, the audience or both?

MARIN ALSOP:

You know, I can only see it in other people. It's very hard to see it in one's self. But I can see when students are... too pushy and the sound of the orchestra closes down, or you know their attitude gets a little bit, "Ugh, she's such a you know what," "Oh why is she harping on us? Always a nag..." You know all these sort of, "Oh..." Or if you get too excited, "Oh, she's hysterical."

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It's very typical. It's the same things that are said in every field about women who are expressing themselves in a very overt way. You know, this is somehow not acceptable. And I think as a leader, you have to be willing to, probably the biggest quality I think that one needs to have, is a sense of self and a sense of humor about one's self. You know? Because we all come across less than appealing at certain moments and I, I think we're the ones that have to own that.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Performance
2006

INTERVIEWER:

One thing, I want to go back to your first performance here. Can you describe that first performance and the standing ovation you got?

MARIN ALSOP:

The first time that I conducted in Baltimore after my appointment and all this controversy, I just walked out and the audience stood up. I didn't even do anything yet. It was very, very welcoming and very heartening and, I felt good. I felt connected right away to this community. It was great.

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INTERVIEWER:

Did you ever consider walking away during the controversy?

MARIN ALSOP:

Oh, absolutely. I, I considered walking away several times. This was funny because I called my parents and I said, "Oh. I'm so excited, you know, I think I'll take over the Baltimore Symphony." "Oh! That's great news." Couple days later, "I hope you won't be disappointed, I've decided not to take the job." And I call back, "Listen, I might take the job after all."

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You know, so, my parents came to the place where they said, "Listen. Whatever you do, we're okay with it. You know, you need to be happy and be in a place where you can make great music." So, I definitely considered not taking the job. I also considered... I took the advice of many people in the industry, some of them leading people in the industry who, who advised me to run, not walk, as fast as I could away from this organization.

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Because of the way it was handled, but also because of the problems that I was walking into. But... I weighed it carefully myself. And I think again, part of being a secure and good leader is being able to take... take, take in everyone's advice and then make one's own decision you know based on everything and follow your instinct. And my instinct, I think, was always right. I always thought this was a great orchestra.

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KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

I always thought the musicians were wonderful people, even during this difficult time. And... I don't think I could love an orchestra more and I certainly never thought I'd be saying that.

INTERVIEWER:

And they, you?

MARIN ALSOP:

Well. Listen, you'll have to ask them. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you consider what message it would send if you walked away?

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MARIN ALSOP:

I did think to myself, "Well, you know, to be the first woman... to had, a full time American orchestra and then to chicken out, and walk away... not a good choice." You know, so that did play a role in my decision.

INTERVIEWER:

Why do you think that there were so few women conducting when you were the first as a major orchestra?

MARIN ALSOP:

I think it's both a complex and a simple answer, to a complex and simple question.

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I think that... it's not about... I think it's about comfort level. This is what I've decided. I think it's about... society being comfortable with something. And I've come to that by gauging my own personal responses to things.

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Like, I got on a United flight and I looked to see who was flying the plane and there were three women in the cockpit. And I said, "Oh my God. I got to get off." I said, "Oh my God. I've got to get off this flight." You know, I mean instinctually, I just thought there's something wrong. I mean, it was a fantastic flight. It was smooth, beautiful, calm. But I started thinking about my reaction to that. That it was just out of my frame of reference.

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It was out of my comfort zone. When I watch television, when I watch the television news, I remember when there were two men anchoring the news, but I'm not comfortable anymore with two men anchoring. I like one woman and one man, because that's where we are now. That's my comfort level. I just started assessing how I view the world, and it's a slow progression to becoming comfortable with a different set up, with a woman or more women doing certain things.

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So, I think it's a matter of conditioning, and this is something that I really adhere to in terms of my fellowship for women conductors. What I'm trying

to do is create as many opportunities for many women to be seen on podiums. You see I think we have to... And what concerns me is that I, I want to absolutely avoid being the only one, because then it becomes about me specifically, rather than about women in general.

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So we have to have, and you know, I don't want orchestras to think, "Well we have, we have the woman conductor, now we don't have to do that anymore." You know, tick that box. So, I'm very keen to create as many opportunities around... particularly around America, for women to be seen on the podiums of our orchestras. Because I think as we gain comfort with that, then the opportunities will come.

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I also think when we have a woman president, things will change dramatically, because I think that will... I think that's what happened in Britain, and that's why there isn't the same kind of... surprise and discomfort with a woman in the ultimate authority position.

INTERVIEWER:

Since you took over your post, what discrimination—of any—do you think you've faced because of gender?

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MARIN ALSOP:

Well, you know discrimination... This is, this is also a very difficult question, I think, to... to assess objectively what is... what is discrimination? I, I haven't felt any kind of overt discrimination. I have to say that... the Board and the orchestra and the community couldn't be more embracing so I don't feel that at all. I think the... There are moments that I wonder, but I think every woman wonders and says, "Well I wonder, would they speak to me like that if I were a man?"

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And ultimately, I usually say, "Yeah. Probably." So, I have rarely experienced what I would term discrimination. But also, you know I'm unwilling to really contemplate being discriminated against, so maybe that helps me too.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you mean 'contemplate?'

MARIN ALSOP:

That's not the place I go, ever, when something doesn't work out. I mean, I know women who say, "Oh I didn't get that job because I'm a woman. I didn't get to be... This didn't happen because I'm a woman."

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I think that's... All that results from that is you develop a terrible chip on your shoulder and it's an easy out. Instead, when I didn't get an appointment or didn't win an audition, I went back and said, "Okay. How can I be better?" So

that ultimately nobody can say you can't have the job because you're just too good. You have to have the job.

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INTERVIEWER:

Let me ask you, since taking over, what accomplishments are you proudest of?

MARIN ALSOP:

I have a couple of different levels of accomplishments that I'm proud of. I would say that there are two initiatives that I was able to get off the ground here in Baltimore that give me great joy. But this is joy that's not really connected to music making.

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It's sort of a joy in looking forward, twenty years, to coming back to visit after I haven't been here and seeing what happens with these programs and initiatives. One is a after school program we've started for kids in West Baltimore and these are minority kids that wouldn't have access to playing musical instruments at all if it weren't for this program. We started three years ago with thirty kids and we have three hundred now.

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And it's called OrchKids. O-R-C-H Kids.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Performing "OrchKids Nation"

April 3, 2011

MARIN ALSOP:

And it's a... I think, an inspired and inspiring program. And this started really from my desire to see the demographics of our orchestras change. They don't reflect the diversity of our communities right now, and that's because not everyone has access to learning instruments when they're young. So I'm hoping in ten, twenty years we'll see a lot of these OrchKids in our major orchestras.

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And more importantly, you see these kids like... like me, growing up, have a sense of possibility. You know, you start to picture yourself, "I never thought I'd play the violin. Oh. Okay. Maybe I'll do that. Oh maybe I'll fly a plane. You know maybe I'll do this. Maybe I'll teach. Maybe I'll..." And so, I feel great about that program and, also we started recently a program for adults who played instruments as kids, or who perhaps are playing in amateur non-professional orchestras now.

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And it's a program called Rusty Musicians and they come and play with the Baltimore Symphony. And we then further developed that into a fantasy camp called the BSO Academy for Adults. And we're starting our second year of that and we've doubled our attendance, we have 100 people coming to play and work with the Baltimore Symphony for a week. And I guess part of this, both

initiatives, part of motivation was to try to... enable my musicians to see how valued they are.

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So, when I see my oboist sitting next to a doctor, a lawyer, who plays the obo, who's looking at my oboist, you know, with this sense of awe and adoration... and my oboist realizes, "Oh. This person wants to be me." You know, what I mean? There's nothing more validating than having a peer say, "God. I wish I could do what you do."

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And then starting to feel good about what you do. Or in terms, or in terms of OrchKids, I'm hoping that program will eventually be a place where my musicians can perhaps after they've retired, they can use their expertise and all this knowledge to share with the young people so that it becomes a... almost a cycle of mentoring. That's what I'd like to see. So, those two programs, which aren't really directly related to what we do on stage, give me great hope for the future.

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But in terms of our musical accomplishments, I think the fact that we're one of the leading orchestras in terms of recordings, makes me very proud, especially coming from the place they were. And, our appearances every year at Carnegie Hall now, and our audiences that are so enthusiastic. So I think on every level, things are going well.

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INTERVIEWER:

They say that the audiences love you?

MARIN ALSOP:

Well, I don't know, I don't know about that. I'm not a good judge of that. But they like to holler and stuff and that's good. That's always a good sign.

INTERVIEWER:

Why do you think they take... Why do you think you're so popular with them?

MARIN ALSOP:

Oh I don't... You know, I don't presume to be... You know, you're popular one day, you're unpopular the next day. But, I think... I think I, I, I just am who I am. It's not... I don't look at art as an elitist experience.

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I look at art as a birthright. And... it's my responsibility to enable people to access the art form so I talk to the audience. I... I try to build programs that are compelling and an emotional journeyway. I try to be accessible. I do talks after the concert. And I think when one has... a sort of behind the scenes access to something, you enjoy it so much more.

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I know when I go to a museum with someone who really knows the art and can point out, "Oh, look at the light. Look at the perspective. Look at what he's

doing here. What's she painted, what she's sculpted." I enjoy it so much more. So that's what I'm trying to do.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you consider yourself a feminist?

MARIN ALSOP:

I don't know when feminism became a dirty word, but... I guess, I would say that I, I am definitely a feminist and proud of it.

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And always have been and following the footsteps of my mom and... so many great women who have stood up for equality. Everyone should be treated equally. I believe in equal pay for equal work. I believe in equal opportunity for every single person alive and you know, I'm... I guess I, I still reel from the fact that in America we couldn't pass the Equal Rights Amendment.

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I think that's shocking. Really I do. And I think for a country that espouses freedom and... individuality, we should be ashamed of ourselves.

INTERVIEWER:

What milestones in the women's movement do you remember? Are there any that stand out to you?

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Gloria Steinem

1975

MARIN ALSOP:

I would count Gloria Steinem among my heroines, but I should say heroes probably.

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And she's been here, the Baltimore Symphony at Carnegie Hall and... very supportive. I think that... you know, for me, I remember so many of the firsts. I've lived through them, and watching women struggle to become the first at doing so many things. And watching the feminist movement sort of be shut down gradually.

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I think it's... I think the pendulum is now swinging back though and I'm encouraged by the fact that young women today, they don't... they don't even consider not doing something. So you know I think subtly, somehow it's all coming to... to fruition and pretty soon, equality will reign. I have to believe it.

INTERVIEWER:

What's the most meaningful advice you've ever received?

MARIN ALSOP:

I think the most meaningful advice has been to keep a lot of irons in the fire.

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KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

Don't put... you know, kind of like all those parables, don't put, put all your eggs in one basket, always have a plan b.

INTERVIEWER:

What one piece of advice would you give to a young woman on building a career?

MARIN ALSOP:

My best advice, I think, is to find that which you're passionate about and never give up.

INTERVIEWER:

What about work-life balance? Having children and maintaining a career?

MARIN ALSOP:

Yeah, that's hard work. I'm not sure... listen, having children is hard work regardless of what else you're doing so, I think that...

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You know, I think you have to try to find a balance and I think remember that for kids, just being present is 50% of the game. So when you're with them, be very present.

INTERVIEWER:

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

MARIN ALSOP:

Well, probably my seven year old son.

INTERVIEWER:

What was your very first paying job?

MARIN ALSOP:

Um, I played... this wouldn't constitute a paying job but I played on the corner of 5th Avenue near St. Patricks Cathedral and I made thirty bucks.

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And that was a lot of money in those days.

INTERVIEWER:

What three adjectives best describe you?

MARIN ALSOP:

Determined. Hardworking. And I'd say, funny.

INTERVIEWER:

What person that you've never met has had the biggest influence on your life?

MARIN ALSOP:

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

I don't think there's anyone I haven't met, that has seriously influenced my life. There are many people I admire from Charlie Chaplin to Abraham Lincoln, but I think I've been fortunate to meet all the people who've influenced me.

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INTERVIEWER:

And, how has getting this appointment and breaking the, so called barrier, done for you?

MARIN ALSOP:

It's been fantastic, I think. I think it really... It's given me a huge canvas in America and... a huge platform to really, I think, change the face of the 21st century orchestra, so, I got a ways to go, so...

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INTERVIEWER:

What was the first piece of music that really-

MARIN ALSOP:

Brahms.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you tell me why?

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

MARIN ALSOP:

The first piece of music that... really made me understand that music would be my life, was a... was a chamber piece by Johannes Brahms. A string sextet in B flat. And I heard it when I was twelve years old and I was walking past someone's room, they were playing a record.

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I realized that music has the power to change lives and it's transformative, and I'll never forget that moment, and if I can bring that moment to someone else, my... my life will be worth it.

END TC: 00:50:15:00