

benoit rolland designs

A new concept for the conductor baton:

“In early 2016, a young music director from Philadelphia, Mr. Robert Whalen, Head of a music program at the Barnes Foundation, came to my studio with an unexpected question: would I redesign the conductor baton into an object better fitted to music command and more comfortable to handle?

The question was most interesting and in continuity with my work on bows, in a quest to connect the tools we use for music more closely to the artist's intimate musical intention.

It always intrigues me how we take the objects we use the most for granted, no matter how imperfect they may be. In the case of the baton, the conventional bulb in existence since the early 19th century, stresses the hand, at times painfully pressing on sensitive points in the palm. As the hand tenses, not only would muscles and ligaments suffer, but nuances in the musical commands to the orchestra may at times stiffen or be lost. Be it made of cork, wood or resin, be it small or big, an ovoid grip is not suited to the human hand nor mind.

Many years working with musicians on bow handling, taught me that simply molding a handle after the hand cavity would not be good enough. Conducting an orchestra implies elaborate education of the muscles and complex nerve commands. A proper instrument for this type of performance has to present a combination of ergonomics/physiology and musical purpose. It has to serve a composed musical intent, help express it clearly and with ease.

I soon found myself sculpting handles based on several conductors' hand imprints captured *while* they were practising. The dynamic concept of an educated hand at work had to be embedded from the start in the new baton concept. And it had to be pleasing to the eye because the interpretation of music calls for beautiful instruments.

Diving back into new technologies, a world familiar to me since I invented the early carbon fiber bows, I could formulate a technique that allows me to closely control shape, weight, durability, and appearance. After almost two years research and multiple prototypes, a baton was born that I could propose as a new standard. In line with my work on personalized bows, I would also offer limited series customized to conductors' hands and musical dynamics.

The new baton was put to the ultimate test when Maestro Andris Nelson uncompromisingly used it to direct the Boston Symphony in Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*, in concert, on July 16th 2017 in Tanglewood. Witnessing his stunning work, allowed me to further perfect the baton, although he deemed the experience to his liking. I finalized the concept in the following months and made it available to all musicians, hoping it serves well their individual artistic expression.”

– Benoît Rolland Studio, Boston, November 2017

