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## INTRODUCTION

A former student from China wrote to me recently after attending an orchestral conducting course, and suggested that the technique of conducting strings is very different from conducting wind, brass and percussion. I disagree. Clearly the response to the ictus of our beat from, say a xylophone, a harp, a solo violin, a large string section, a flute or a trumpet will all vary, but I believe that our approach to the technique of conducting remains constant. For example, the type of beat which we give to a string section for a Brandenburg Concerto, a Mozart Serenade, a Tchaikovsky or Dvorak Serenade or a Stravinsky Concerto for Strings will vary enormously according to the response we expect or hope for, but the rationale is the same, the beat will, we hope, indicate the quality of sound, the dynamic, the attack and weight, the phrase which is to follow, and also the speed. Similarly, the attack, or lack of it, from a 19<sup>th</sup> century wind and brass chord, will be very different from that of the 18<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century, so our problems are the same whatever the group, whether strings, wind, brass or percussion, whether student, amateur or professional.

The thoughts in the following pages are mainly aimed at helping the tyro wind ensemble conductor to escape from being a wind band director, but many of the ideas should find echoes in your approach to orchestra, brass band or even percussion ensemble. Felix Hauswirth always hoped that all of our gestures would be entirely natural – no room for conductorial posing - and certainly there is no *right* or *wrong* way to conduct; the language of gesture that we develop must spring from our musical feeling, our knowledge of the score, of the composer, of the style, of the Zeitgeist, and not from a technique imposed by some book or conducting course. Sir Charles Groves, first mentor of the conducting courses at the RNCM, always maintained that conducting was an art that could not be taught. There is however a technique of directing, of study and of rehearsing that can be developed, but perhaps the most important elements are up to you. Probably our first task is to develop as flawless technique of direction as possible; our second is to put that at the service of the composer, to identify physically and mentally with the music and to begin to conduct.

Tim Reynish June 15, 2010

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## TECHNIQUE OF DIRECTING

*The best conducting technique is that which achieves the maximum musical result with the minimum of effort.*

Fritz Reiner

*Technique is “the immediate and precise response of the hands to the direction sent out by the mind”.*

Ivan Galamian

### INDEX

Technique – directing or conducting

Posture

Types of Beat

Controlling the Rebound

The French & Italian 6

Role of the Left Hand

### TECHNIQUE

Technique is not beating time; you can only demonstrate technique by conducting music which needs musicality to be shown. Just as the preparation for the first note will show the pulse, dynamic, attack, quality of sound, weight, immediately that you have conducted the beginning of that note, your baton is already preparing the next beat; will the beats be legato, will there be a crescendo or diminuendo, is there an intensification or diminution of tension due to the melodic line, the harmonic movement, the orchestration, how is the phrase developing, what sound do you need from the players, light, dark, heavy, airy, thin, thick, what emotion are you expressing?

There is clearly a technique of direction to be studied and developed – what cannot be so easily taught is a technique of conducting, the physical transference of the thought processes into musical terms through gesture. The least we can offer our orchestras, bands and ensembles, is a clearly defined beating pattern which does not get in the way of the music, a language of gesture which can be easily understood by everyone. If we can turn direction into conducting by making the beat convey every aspect of the music, then we begin to conduct ..... and if we achieve that, we may end up as conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic.

### POSTURE

1. Stand erect, feet 5/6” apart	1. Extend arms fully, bring hands in to create angle of slightly more than 90 degrees
2. Knees straight but not locked	2. Elbows should be approximately between 4 and 5 o'clock and 7 and 8 o'clock
3. Shoulders back but not rigid	3. Forearm should be normally a little lower than elbow
4. Head high but neck relaxed	4. Hands and stick are a continuation of forearm
5. Move naturally	5. Hand with palm facing downwards

The control of the knees, the trunk, the shoulders and the head is intended to concentrate our players on the stick, or the hand. These other parts of the body might come into play for particular emotional and dramatic purposes, but our basic aim is one of control.

Video as many rehearsals and concerts as possible; watch the video and ask:

1. Am I over-conducting, can I be more economical?

2. Am I confusing my players with un-necessary movement of head, elbows and fore-arm, trunk, knees or bottom?
3. Do I indicate the speed clearly?
4. Do I indicate the exact point of the beat?
5. Am I giving clear messages of what my feelings are about the piece?
6. Where is this phrase going or coming from?
7. Do I have eye contact with my players, or am I glued to the score?

Then, go through the video frame by frame and check carefully:

#### PHYSICAL POSITION

- 1 Balanced stance
- 2 Back straight, back of legs firm
- 3 Arms away from body, hand & baton centred
- 4 Head out of score, maintain eye contact
- 5 Tempo, melos, beat pattern, style, dynamics, density, colour, rhythm, should all be clearly in mind and transmitted into the baton

NB this ideal is probably only reached by anyone in front of the mirror with a CD of the Vienna Philharmonic, so do not be too down-hearted – Kleiber and Giulini come close to this – so aim high.

Check that:

- Stand is high enough for you to refer with your eyes but not your head
- Feet are slightly apart, well balanced
- Knees are supple but not bent
- Elbows are without restriction but not flapping
- We have a good line of arm/wrist/finger/baton
- Bottom and head are still most of the time; don't conduct with them
- Stand tall, even if you are tall
- Face muscles naturally relaxed, registering emotions where necessary – show appreciation of good playing
- Eye contact throughout with the main musical line or a section that needs our attention
- Score in head, not head in score

#### TYPES OF BEAT

- a Preparatory
- b Expressive
- c Passive

#### A – PREPARATORY BEAT

Should include the quality of the sound, which you expect, and the type of attack. The first preparatory beat is the only one which starts from stillness, and normally takes one beat of the pulse you are setting.

The preparatory beat needs to convey

1. The tempo
2. The dynamic level
3. The articulation style of the opening
4. The precise beginning of the first note

Successive beats need to convey all of these musical matters plus the architecture of the phrase, the section and the movement

Try to get your players used to react to a more subtle beat. Do not count them in; counting in cannot give a clear idea of these elements. Also your players must learn to concentrate on your baton.

#### B – EXPRESSIVE BEAT

Continues the quality of the preparatory beat and is itself a preparation for the next beat

PREPARATION is the space between the ictus of one beat and the ictus of the next

DYNAMIC is indicated by the size of the preparation

QUALITY is indicated by the shape of the preparation

ATTACK is indicated by the speed of the acceleration and the force of the ictus

ICTUS is the point of rebound

REBOUND is a flexible reaction to the ictus

#### C – PASSIVE

Does nothing more than indicate a bar or beat with no musical result – it is useful in recitative or accompanied cadenzas but do not use it merely on a long note – say in bars 7/8 of the Holst 1<sup>st</sup> Suite – keep the tempo and tension, whether releasing or increasing – a musical phrase is never static.

#### BEATING

Preparation

Ictus or point

Rebound, which then becomes the preparation for the next beat

Penultimate beat placing

Final beat placing

#### PREPARATION

Make this as natural and simple as possible – think of the back swing to a golf shot or tennis serve, think breathing, for wind strings and percussion. Normally it will take a beat in the upcoming tempo. Keep shoulders relaxed, body and legs supple but focused on the baton

#### ICTUS

The normal placing will be central to your body, but that might be to give a tutti mf A to the woodwind – the actual placing will depend on the orchestration, the intensity and depth or lightness of sound, the place in the phrase, so the actual ictus and its preparation are part of a constantly slightly shifting series of planes, depending on the music.

#### REBOUND – MUST BE CONTROLLED

#### THE REBOUND SHOULD NEVER BE MORE THAN 1/3 OF THE BEAT

Many conductors utilize a big rebound, which takes them back to the plane of conducting in which they started. This, in my view, dissipates energy, and releases control. Those players sitting on the side cannot differentiate between the beats clearly unless there is a strong lateral element. (See comments by Gunther Schuller)

#### PENULTIMATE BEAT PLACING

Because of the limitations in flexibility in the beat to the right for the penultimate beat of the bar, make sure that the previous beat is more to the left, and if necessary, allow the shoulders and trunk of the body to follow through to give the space you need.

### CENTRE YOUR LAST BEAT

It is particularly important to centre the last beat in the bar. Do not think of it as an upbeat, because it is here that so often rubato occurs, it is here that you set a new slow or fast tempo. The speed of the preparation from the ictus of the last beat in the bar to the ictus of the next first beat, gives the new pulse and type of beat.

### BEATING PATTERNS

- 1 Control the rebound. It should never be more than one third to one half the amplitude of the original beat except in 1 in a bar
- 2 Use horizontal planes after the first beat rather than vertical. It is difficult for players on your right and left to differentiate otherwise.
- 3 In general, in moderate dynamics, keep the ictus within the plane of your stomach – keep the ictus low. Draw the players to you, so that you can always extend when you need. Do not over-conduct.

### COMPOUND TIME – FRENCH AND ITALIAN SIX

I prefer in a slow 6 to employ an Italian pattern, of Down – left – left Right – right – centre (and up) If I am going to move gently into 2 beats in a bar, or if I want to keep a slight subdivision of two going, I would employ a French 6

Down – right – right Centre – right – left, the last two beats going up like a Christmas tree.

The advantage of an Italian 6 is that it follows my basic premise that the penultimate beat will always be out to the right.

The advantage of the French 6 is that it is very flexible for moving into compound 2 with the rebound of the first beat flattening out to the right.

In compound time, practice making your beat take up the space of the subsidiary 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> beats,

REMEMBER that the players on either side of you have a very different view of the beat from those in front. Duple time is particularly confusing

We should always anticipate the next event in music

We should guide and lead the players

We should always indicate phrasing with the beat

### SUBDIVIDING

In slow music, or with small note values, 16<sup>th</sup> or 32nds, you may need to show a subdivision of the beat. Just put a smaller beat after the rebound.

Normally I recommend going in the same direction to avoid confusion with other main beats

### SIMPLE DIRECTION

Make every gesture as natural as possible, clear, easily understood and meaningful.

### COMPLEX RHYTHMS

The more complex the metrical and rhythmical tissue of music, the clearer should be the bar's indication by the conductor.

### LEFT HAND

Most conducting teachers insist that the left hand does not mirror the right. How many professional conductors follow this advice? I believe that you should conduct with both, ensuring that the left is as strong as the right and you are able to be balanced. Then you can

develop various exercises to free the left up, and the most useful routine might be to take 16 or 32 bars of a video of your conducting, and conduct only with the left hand, not beating time but indicating the phrasing. Take more time, we all tend to rush the left hand in phrasing and cues. Like a good string player, save the beat or bow. With your video, try dozens of different ways of demonstrating sound and phrasing.

The role of the left hand is revealed in assisting, sometimes duplicating, the right hand and showing together with the right hand:

1. the dynamics
2. the sphere of expressiveness in the broad sense of the word
3. the indication of cues to different instruments
4. the indication of syncopation
5. the correction of various mistakes which may arise

## CHOICE OF REPERTOIRE

*We must learn to teach music – not band, not orchestra, not chorus, but music itself... Choosing music is the single most important thing a band director can do, and is the only thing a band director can do alone, made more important because of the substandard repertoire continuously being published. So many publishers in the business today are printers who don't care about quality, but only about what will sell. We must not allow them to give the band a bad reputation nor to make our decisions for us, since the music we choose today can affect students for ever.*

Frederick Fennell

## LINKS TO INFORMATION

No lists of repertoire here – as I am reminded by WASBE colleagues, one man's meat is another man's poison – or cheese! I do however think that some of the British music written for school and amateur bands is more varied and interesting than some better-known commercial works in USA and Europe. My website will have various personal views, and I would recommend that you look also at the WASBE Schools network, possibly purchasing the WASBE 2003 Conference CDs of easier band repertoire from [Mark Custom](#). If you have difficulty in locating material, contact Jim Cochran of [Shattinger](#). The repertoire lists by Felix Hauswirth give an international view; those books published by GIA edited by Richard Miles give an essentially American view but are invaluable linked to compact discs.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Choosing the best literature for our players is our greatest responsibility. The band world is essentially commercial; there are publishers who are set to make big money out of bands by getting their composers to write standard formula pieces which have nothing to say musically except start together, loud – soft – very loud wait for standing ovation! They and their composers are salesmen, and we must, as musicians look at other non-commercial repertoire to see if it will teach our players more, and entertain our audiences in a more satisfying way.

Our essential thinking must be whether a work has a musical function or not. Selections from “Phantom” or “James Bond Themes” or “Michael Jackson Thrillers” may well have a valid place in your repertoire for social reasons, but you must ask whether the arrangements and pieces you choose are musical, whether they will give your players a valid experience, will they

provide material for you to conduct, or will you just be a time-beater. Don't de-sensitise your players.

#### TIME – MITE – EMIT

#### TIME FOR MAKING MUSICAL, INTELLECTUAL, TECHNICAL AND EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

I believe that we need to challenge our players, choosing repertoire which is musical, intellectual technical and emotional, and yet bridging that often too wide gap between composer and audience. For me music is essentially an emotional language, and I hope that any work I conduct, whether contemporary or traditional, will reflect this for both players and audience. If you look at my [library list](#) on my website you will see up-to-date details of all of the repertoire books. There are several published by Manhattan Press, edited by Bob Margolis. The simplest way to compare hundreds of works at American Grades 1 – 4 is to invest in *Teaching Music through Performance in Band* published by GIA and now in five volumes. With each you can also order CDs of the entire easier repertoire.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Felix Hauswirth	1000 selected works for wind orchestra and wind ensembles (Emil Ruh, 1998)
Felix Hauswirth	333 easier selected works for less experienced bands (Emil Ruh, 2000)
Cipolla & Hunsberger	The Wind Ensemble and its Repertoire (University of Rochester, 1994)
Jonathan Good	British Literature for Symphonic Winds
Keith Kinder	Best Music for Chorus and Wind (Manhattan Beach Music 2005)
Holland, Rundell, Reynish	British Wind Music of Four Decades (RNCM, 1991)
Rodney Winther	An annotated Guide to (conducted) Wind Chamber Music (Warner Bros 2004)
Norman E Smith	Program Notes for Band (Program Note Press, 2000)
Wallace/Corporon	Wind Ensemble/Band Repertoire (Univ of Northern Colorado, Greeley, 1984)
Dvorak/Grechesky/Ciepluch	Best Music for High School Band (Manhattan Beach Music, 1993)
Editor Richard Miles	Teaching Music through performance in Band (GIA Publications, from 1997)

We should always question:

- 1 Can we teach musical values through this piece, not only ensemble and dynamics, but phrasing and balance, good tone and intonation, a sense of structure and architecture, sensitivity?
- 2 Will this work challenge, and entertain, the players and the audience?
- 3 How can this work lend itself to musical interpretation?
- 4 Would I choose this work to play in my diploma examination?

As David Whitwell puts it in his admirable book, *The Art of Musical Conducting*, WINDS 1998:

*Because in English all music is included under one word, "Music", some musicians make the mistaken conclusion that all music is therefore somehow equal.*

William Shakespeare:

*I count it but time lost to hear such a foolish song.*

Henry Cleveland, 1840:

*Music must be made popular, not by debasing the art, but by elevating the people.*

Felix Weingartner:

*A good performance of a poor work is of no artistic consequence. And regrettable both because it furthers bad taste and because it means time and labour unprofitably squandered.*

Robert Schumann:

*When you grow older, avoid playing what is merely fashionable. Time is precious. It would require a hundred lives merely to get acquainted with all the good music that exists.*

Contesting can be an excuse not to extend our players. The best bands make marching band and contesting part of the overall musical experience. Sight reading, initiating new repertoire, trying out variety of programming, taking your audiences with you on a voyage of exploration of new international repertoire, these initiatives will give your bands enrichment and will develop their musical skills.

## PREPARATION

### RECOMMENDED

Guide to Score Study for the Wind Band Conductor – Frank Battisti & Robert Garafalo  
Meredith Music Publications

### ANALYSIS AND SCORE MARKING

Below is my personal method of tackling any score; some elements of it might be useful to you. The system of phrase analysis is very much part of the teaching in Vienna and St Petersburg, and I always like the comment by, I think it was, the pianist Rudolf Serkin, who said that he always liked to know how far a phrase was going to go when he entered it. Some conductors do not mark a score at all – those are the ones with a good memory or good eyesight, or both. I have neither. So I:

1	Analyse the phrase structure and put the length at the beginning of each phrase as a number in a circle. (I do not recommend marking heavy bars to split up the phrases)
2	Mark important lines, the Hauptstimme, and key leads (in red)
3	Mark important subsidiary lines.
4	Mark metrical changes, usually following a plan of houses and triangles.
5	Mark general dynamic levels and speed changes (in blue)
6	Analyse the key structure and pencil in main changes if necessary. (I tend not to do this to most composers (lazily) unless the tonal centre is structural very important, Sibelius or Bruckner)
7	Decide on a structure of dynamic levels; change dynamics to achieve better balance if necessary.
8	Remind yourself of changes of pulse and tempo.
9	Use a metronome to check on ideal speed, but then be flexible to needs of the ensemble and the hall. (I don't bother much about exact metronome speeds – Wagner reckoned that a good musician should know the speed by looking at the music)
10	Anticipate problems of ensemble, intonation, balance, and think of ways to avoid them. <b>BUT THEY MAY NOT HAPPEN WITH EVEN AN INEXPERIENCED GROUP SO KEEP FLEXIBLE</b>

## DYNAMICS

*It is at that very highest level of performance that a wealth of interpretative choices and decisions become available at least to the really sensitive intelligent and imaginative recreator. It is in this realm that there is not one pp, but many subtly different pps; not one f but many different kinds of fs, and not one slur but many different kinds of legatos etc. etc. The more basic point however is that it is pp not a p or an mf.*

GUNTHER SCHULLER

*Diminuendo signifies forte, crescendo signifies piano.*

Von BULOW

*For me an orchestra's lack of discipline is always reflected in a feeble dynamic range....  
Something I do very often... is to push the dynamic register to the absolute maximum until it reaches what I think are appropriate levels for a given work.*

PIERRE BOULEZ

## ANTICIPATING THE PROBLEMS

I believe that you need to have a game plan, which you then switch according to the players and their reactions. You must be reactive to their playing, their musicality and technique, you must listen, and balance leading and following.

In the wind orchestra we do not have to work hard at making a lot of noise.

We must work hard to:

- 1 Control all dynamic levels AND
- 2 Anticipate dynamic events

In general:

*Crescendo* must start quietly

*Diminuendo* must start loudly

*subito piano* is more effective if preceded by a crescendo

*subito forte* is more effective if preceded by diminuendo

The first *fortissimo* is the smallest

The last is the biggest

In a *tutti forte* or *fortissimo*, make sure that you keep the excitement to the end. Build an architecture of dynamic levels in your phrasing and in your whole concept of the piece.

## BALANCE

Composers usually write one dynamic mark for the entire vertical scoring involved. They expect performers to adjust their instruments' relative strength according to the primary or secondary importance of their roles.

*There is one fundamental physical law that bears repetition, since so many musicians are unaware of it; a sustained note is always stronger than a moving voice....* There is so much to be decided by the conductor who cares for a balanced performance that no amount of detail can possibly cover the permutations presented by such considerations as types of instruments (and players), size and acoustic of hall, seating arrangements, types of scoring....

ERICH LEINSDORF on approximating the timbre of different periods

*Preparing scores for performances, the conductor will discover the differences between a wind choir of 1810 and 1910 to be so great that any resemblance is almost co-incidental... The dynamics of brass instruments must be adjusted, especially on long-held notes*

## ARTICULATION

James Croft quotes the great Revelli as insisting on non-legato notes “not quite touching”  
Melodic articulation – Very often we gloss over the little breaks in legato lines, making the whole line sound legato. Very often there will be a counterpoint of possible commas or Luft-pausen, or the accompaniment will be tenuto while the melody is more broken up. I believe that clarity of articulation can bring variety and life to our lines. Think how a singer would articulate, or how a string player would bow.

Accompaniment articulation – So often wind and string writing will be underpinned by slow moving block chords in lower wind or brass. If they are slightly detached and phrased, it will keep the pulse alive.

*Staccato* – differentiate between staccato crotchet, quaver and semiquaver (1/4, 1/8 or 1/16)  
it will be longer in a dry acoustic, shorter in a generous acoustic  
it might be longer in crescendo, shorter in diminuendo  
it should grow longer in ritardando, shorter in accelerando  
it might grow longer at the top of a scale leading into another event

*Staccato* might be longer in lyrical romantic music, shorter in jazz idiom or neoclassic

*Legato* – Too much wind music (and orchestra music) is played too smoothly without due regard for the cut and thrust of the phrasing. Often detail is lost, counterpoint is confused, and harmonic progressions are blurred. The careful articulation of phrasing, and even exaggeration, is essential to clean performance.

#### PHRASING

*A phrase lives essentially through the distribution of energy*

Pierre Boulez

*Boulez is incapable of phrasing. It's as simple as that*

Hans Keller

*In my view, the only way to conduct is to conduct with a purpose. If I hear something that has remarkable moments but no special design, it leaves me unsatisfied.*

*A melodic phrase needs to be articulated. If we're talking about phrasing in general, let's talk about articulation, because articulation does indeed relate to a particular phrase, but also to a rhythm, to a form or a segment of form. It also related to the delineation of timbre and the delineation of polyphony.*

Pierre Boulez

We do not need to conduct the beats – the players should be encouraged to develop a corporate feel for the pulse.....try even with a schools group to leave them to play by themselves.

We do not need to conduct the dynamics, except to control – the players should respond to the printed page but we need then to indicate balance.

We do need to conduct the phrasing and the overall architecture – we have the responsibility of co-coordinating the phrasing, organizing the balance and constructing the architecture. No player can know exactly what his or her part in the structure of the movement is at any one time, only we, with the privilege of the score and our study, can develop this.

Phrasing is our most important job.

#### PREPARATION FROM THE PODIUM

ERICH LEINSDORF

*Indispensable partners of knowledge are imagination, thoughtful intelligence, and ultimately the willingness to forget ourselves in the service of what we undertake to represent – the composer and his music.*

CHARLES MUNCH on score correction – *One may examine the score and correct physical errors*

GUNTHER SCHULLER on analysis:

*Analysis is to me the thorough study of the score, of its specific notation in all its elements: melodic/thematic, harmonic, rhythmic/metric, structural, textural, “orchestrational”, formal, etc. Analysis in that sense is an all-encompassing retracing of the steps of composition, yielding the fullest possible understanding of what went into the piece in the first instance and what therefore needs to be realized in performing/re-creating it.*

BOULEZ on contriving a good balance:

*There are times when respect for the musical text alone does not serve much purpose. You may have a secondary part written for a relatively weighty instrument, and a principal part written for a much lighter instrument. You have to change the dynamics. I have no qualm about doing that. As a fellow composer, I say to myself, “That’s what he wanted to hear, but he didn’t have enough experience to write down the exact dynamics, “So I change them, that’s all. The composer has written a certain number of instrumental lines and on the whole, he hasn’t done so just to make a general amount of noise. He’s composed those lines so that we can hear certain things, so that we can experience a certain hierarchy that’s dependant on his writing. What I try to do is to bring out that hierarchy in a very precise way, even when it’s difficult.*

GUNTHER SCHULLER on Conducting from Memory:

*The vast majority of conductors when conducting from memory.....are rarely or only intermittently aware of harmonic or tonal-function aspects, structural features, interesting counter-melodies or motives, timbral balance, intonation, unusual orchestral details.*

GUSTAV MAHLER on Interpretation:

*As a young conductor I too was in my performances of the great works artificial and erratic and added too much of my own, albeit with comprehension and spirit. Only much later did I arrive at the full truth, simplicity and recognition that real artistry can only be found through a total lack of artificiality?*

However, I think that the youthful “artificial and erratic” performance of works is a necessary phase that we all need to go through. Without temperament we can show very little music.

WEINGARTNER

*In our music, there are, thank God, moments when the conductor must let himself go if he has any blood in his veins. An excess of movement is therefore always better than it’s opposite, since at any rate as a rule, it indicates temperament, without which there is no art.*

**PRAGMATIC ADVICE**  
LEINSDORF ON THE CONDUCTOR'S TASK

- 1 Be prepared – He or she must be securely in command from the first rehearsal
- 2 Work with the librarian
- 3 Plan rehearsal time
- 4 Speak little
- 5 Stop seldom
- 6 Do not keep musicians idle
- 7 Stand to conduct
- 8 Understand players and their parts
- 9 Do not “fake”
- 10 Do not delude yourself

**CONDUCTING NOT DIRECTING**

A simple definition of the art of conducting could be that it involves eliciting from the orchestra with the most appropriate minimum of conductorial (if you will, choreographic) gestures a maximum of accurate acoustic result...Almost all of us are to one extent or another variously inept...most of us are too tall or too short, our arms are too long or too short, or too stiff or too loose, or too something.... But that physical expression is but the exterior manifestation of what we know and feel about music (the score). All the physical, chorographical skills in the world will amount to nothing if they represent an insufficient (intellectual) knowledge of the score and an inadequate (emotional) feeling for the music – in other words a knowledge of **what** to represent, of **what** to realize.

Certainly it takes a healthy ego to develop the courage to stand before an orchestra of seventy five or eighty musicians, to impose his or her musical/interpretative will on that orchestra, to in a sense dominate those musicians, and to “dare” to interpret the great masterpieces of the Western tradition. However, the important goal for all of us is to win them to our side so that most of them think about the music in the same way as we do; we then invite them to make music with us, rather than imposing *our* interpretation.

*...It was my nature to fall in love with every beautiful detail of a composition and try to reproduce them with all of the intensity of expression of which I was capable, and thus neglect the synthesis and unity of conception which are the main points of an authentic interpretation. My enthusiasm for detail was stronger than my capacity for subsuming them under a higher order.*

**BRUNO WALTER**

*Interpretation does exist of course, you never have a totally objective reading of a work, given that you perceive it yourself and thus put something into it, and I don't think this subjectivity is necessarily detrimental to the text.*

**PIERRE BOULEZ**

*In my view, the only way to conduct is to conduct with a purpose. If I hear something that has remarkable moments but no special design, it leaves me unsatisfied.*

**PIERRE BOULEZ**

A melodic phrase needs to be articulated. If we're talking about phrasing in general, let's talk about articulation, because articulation does indeed relate to a particular phrase, but also to a rhythm, to a form or a segment of form. It also related to the delineation of timbre and the delineation of polyphony.

We do not need to conduct the beats – the players will normally develop a corporate feel for the pulse.

We do not need to conduct the dynamics, except to control – the players should respond to the printed page

**We do need to conduct the phrasing and the overall architecture – no player can know exactly what his or her part in the structure of the movement is at any one time, only we, with the privilege of the score and our study, can develop this.**

*Orchestras, like aeroplanes, do it by themselves*

**HERBERT VON KARAJAN**

### **LISTEN TO YOUR GROUP**

Toscanini once commented that at a first rehearsal a conductor should always listen with an open mind to the way solo players handle their important passages before making suggestions or criticisms.

*There is no performance of genius possible without temperament*

**FELIX WEINGARTNER**

*...the conductor's first priority is to serve the music, to be a medium, a vehicle, through which the work of art is revealed and expressed.*

**GUNTHER SCHULLER**

*...When Wagner conducted, the players had no sense of being led. Each believed himself to be following freely his own feeling, yet they all worked together wonderfully. It was Wagner's mighty will that powerfully but unperceived had overborne their single wills, so that each thought himself free, while in reality he followed the leader, whose artistic force lived and worked in him.*

**FELIX WEINGARTNER on WAGNER**

*By dint of diligent, indefatigable practice he had so infused into the orchestra his own conception of the works as to get a perfection of ensemble at that time unknown. ...The orchestra seemed to be a single instrument, on which Bulow played as on a pianoforte.*

**FELIX WEINGARTNER ON von BULOW**

*...if we have the music inside our bodies it doesn't matter if the first beat isn't straight down. It doesn't matter if the left hand doesn't operate as independently as we would like it to...Be only in the service of the music, not the service of the technique.*

**LEONARD SLATKIN**

*...the band director/conductor must possess insights into creativity, expressiveness and music, human and spiritual values.*

**FRANK BATTISTI**

**REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES**

Rehearsal disciplines

[Starting the group](#)

[Rhythm versus beat](#)

[Dynamic levels](#)

[Tuning procedures](#)

[Warm up](#)

[Plan your rehearsal](#)

**REHEARSAL DISCIPLINES**

- 1 Try just standing still, waiting for silence – clapping, shushing, shouting or banging the rostrum are unmusical exhibitions and set a bad example. Senior players will quickly start to exert a team discipline.
- 2 Play through, so that corporate spirit is developed – don't stop too often
- 3 Do not over-conduct – don't try too hard, make them respond to you
- 4 Encourage the group to play without you
- 5 Get group used to starting with preparatory beat, not by counting them in
- 6 Make sure that strings and percussion, piano and harp, **breathe** as the wind and brass on the preparatory beat
- 7 Maintain a good discipline during rehearsal by example; shouting and clapping are not musical, encourage the leaders to take the lead in discipline.
- 8 Insist that every player has a soft pencil and eraser, and that important points of rubato, breathing, balance, articulation etc are put into the parts.
- 9 Show how much you are enjoying their playing by being very positive – “that's great but let's try it a little lighter” rather than “It's all too heavy and loud”
- 10 Relax, a smile of encouragement is worth 5 minutes talking – keep the rehearsal serious but fun

**STARTING THE GROUP**

Never count the group in – this is the one moment when you can focus them all on your beat, which ideally will give them not just the start and the speed (you can do that by counting them in)

but also the attack, the dynamic, the intensity, the tone quality, the beginning of the line and phrase, all of the musical matters which you have thought about beforehand which are not helped by counting in. This is where your technique comes into play.

### **RHYTHM VERSUS BEAT**

I discourage the use of loud metronomes and foot-tapping in rehearsal. These are devices to maintain a beat and have nothing to do with the musical phrasing and ensemble of a band or wind orchestra, which must be supple and flexible. Get the band to develop a corporate pulse by leaving them to play by themselves. Invite them to be sensitive to the slightest nuance of pulse in your beat, keep a balance between their corporate view of the pulse and your view of the phrasing. In your warm-ups, vary the pulse, the intensity, the attack.

Insist that they look after the smallest note values in a bar  
Warn them against small note values rushing, long notes being late  
Invite them to listen to each other, so that a section might subtly change the pulse.  
Don't worry about lyrical music being a little slower, energetic music a little faster.

Listen to the great pianists and string players and analyse the flexibility of their rubato and phrasing.

### **DYNAMIC LEVELS**

In the wind orchestra we do not have to work hard at making a lot of noise.

We must work hard

1 Controlling lower levels      2 Anticipating dynamic events

In general:

Crescendo must start quietly      diminuendo must start loudly

Subito piano is more effective if preceded by a crescendo subito forte is more effective if preceded by diminuendo

The first fortissimo is the smallest      the last is the biggest

Build an architecture of dynamic levels in your phrasing and in your whole concept of the piece.

### **TUNING PROCEDURES**

With a less experienced group or a large band I usually tune to a low f

1 easier to tune to a low note

2 f is a good note for majority of instruments

I never use an electric tuning machine. I think they are useful for an individual player to check his/her internal intonation, but in the ensemble, I think tuning devices are unhelpful. They encourage players to use eyes rather than ears, and we must get all of our players to listen and hear the bass line. Also the tuning machine takes up time, is very boring for everyone else, does not account for the variables in instrumental colour and tone quality, or variables in humidity and temperature. It is quite a good idea to have a tuning machine available in your rehearsal room for students to check against privately, but get players to tune to each other and keep flexible. Even within the less experienced orchestra, use Bb/F or Bb/Eb for brass.

**VARY YOUR TUNING PROCEDURE** – the essential job here is to get them to listen; concentrate on different groups each rehearsal, but start in general with tubas, baritones, trombones, horns, bass wind, saxophones, clarinets, trumpets, oboes, flutes and piccolo

However, in one session you might work with the tubas and clarinets on chording, in another with the double reeds, or trombones and trumpets,

Encourage decision-making

Tune and listen from below. Tune octaves, then fifths, then thirds – often a change of balance can sort out intonation

Encourage section leaders to assume responsibility for balance and tuning within their section

Even when under pressure, take time over tuning procedures. Until the group is making a good sound, there is little point in playing any music

Spending a lot of time on tuning at the start may be counterproductive if they are not all warmed up – perhaps you need to tune, then play for 5 minutes and then re-tune more carefully.

We must stress

a the importance of the whole band using their ear

b the flexibility of even a school instrument on most notes and the need for the player to be able to vary pitch with careful use of embouchure, breath pressure, placing of reed, hand, alternative fingerings etc.

## **WARM UP**

long notes      scales      exercises      chorales

Use this time to refine your technique and get the band to concentrate their attention on your use of the baton

## **ENCOURAGE SINGING**

Experiments show that bands that sing play with better tone and intonation

## **PLAN YOUR REHEARSAL**

**START** with warm-ups long notes in unison, scales, chords, and chorales

**PROGRESS** to something easy that all can play well, rehearsed in your last rehearsal

**IN MIDDLE** tackle more taxing material, so that your more gifted players are challenged and they then pull the less talented players along with them

**END** with easier material giving everyone a feeling of success and ensuring an enthusiastic finish to rehearsal.

## **SCORE STUDY**

Please forgive repetition from earlier pages. I need to be reminded of so many aspects until they become second nature, like reactions when driving a car.

## **CHOOSE YOUR SCORE CAREFULLY**

My first advice is to pick carefully what you are going to play with your band. Ask yourself, “Would I, as a solo player, want to work on this music AND PLAY IT IN A RECITAL? Does it satisfy me in terms of emotional content, melody, harmony, form, orchestration, or am I using it because it is in the library, cheap, or it just fits the social and entertainment side of the concert we are planning?” I know that that the band does have a social function for ceremonial, entertainment and education, but I do believe that as far as possible, we owe it to our players to try to find the best arrangements, and to explore new music which will tax us musically. Don’t just accept what the publisher is selling. Search around.

Try to pick music without too many clichés. All too much commercial music has formal, melodic and harmonic clichés which we would not be allowed to get away with in our University classes, and we do our musicians no favours by exploiting this repertoire. Again, it may be just what is useful, but try to get a variety of styles and moods.

### SCORE STUDY – ANALYSIS

The first thing I do with any score is to analyse the phrase structure, and I put at the start of each phrase a penciled bar-count in a circle. Schnabel, the great pianist, used to reckon that when he started a phrase, he wanted to know how long it was. Much of the time it will turn out in 2, 4 or 8 bars, so when I am conducting, even if I don’t know the piece very well, I can start with confidence and keep the eye contact for 2, 4 or 8 bars before glancing down to see what is happening next. If a phrase is 5 bars, or 7, or in the Berlioz **Symphonie Funebre et Triomphale** 15 or 18, then I need to really learn that structure, and maybe look at the harmonic procedure also.

(And make sure the desk is high enough – I think we should have it low enough so we don’t wreck our batons, but high enough so that we can glance down to refresh our memory without the whole band thinking “(s)he does not know the score”!)

### GUIDE TO SCORE STUDY

A great book to help you in your score preparation is Guide to Score Study by Frank Battisti and Robert Garofalo, published by [Meredith Music Publications](#). It is based on Grainger’s **Irish Tune from County Derry** which happens to be one of the simplest pieces in the repertoire analytically: 8+8+8+8 and 8+8+8+8.

But look at the Milhaud **Suite Française**, a work that needs very careful planning, and the phrase structures are full of variety. The second movement starts with a 1 bar/measure intro, followed by a 5, or 3+2, and another 5. The little plaintive oboe melody is also in 5 but here in 2 X 2 1/2 bars, as is the flute and clarinet line at bar 27. Checking with the original song source will show that this is phrased in 2+2+2 quavers rather than in 6/8, and this gives a marvelous flow. Similarly, *Ile de France* is often in 5 bar phrases, sometimes with a 4 bar phrase as a counter-melody, and we have to try to balance the heavy brass fortissimo with the high woodwind fortissimo.

Frank Battisti and Bob Garofalo give us an Analysis Checklist:

Melody – Harmony – Form – Rhythm – Orchestration – Dynamics – Component Flow Charts

This is the ideal, but even now in retirement I don't have time to check through all of this. I get the phrase structure done first, from which the form becomes usually pretty apparent. The Harmony I rarely have time for, partially because I don't have a good aural sense, and partially because a lot of my thinking in harmony is instinctive, and I ask my players to try to think the same. I might invite them to crescendo an inner part, not because intellectually it is such and such a progression, but because emotionally the chromatic movement demands that.

### **BRUCKNER & SIBELIUS**

There are two composers whose music I conduct very rarely, but when I do I analyse every harmonic procedure – Bruckner and Sibelius. I need to know exactly where I am in those massive harmonic procedures – with most of the others, in most of their music I concentrate on the rest of the package. This is what I do, but anyone else might find it irrelevant.

Analyse the phrase structure and put the length at the beginning of each phrase, a number in a circle - (I do not recommend marking heavy lines to split up the phrases)

Now why go through this phrase analysis job?

#### **CONDUCT THE PHRASING**

1 We need to conduct the phrasing and the internal dynamics. The players have the dynamic bare bones, but they don't know where the music is going to or coming from, and they might not understand their particular job at the time, either playing the main melody, the counter-melody, the harmonic backing, or giving a rhythmic or harmonic twist. The great conducting teacher, Ilya Musin, used to stop our students time and time again to ask where was the phrase going – that is the secret which you have from your study of the score, and which you need to transmit in your conducting.

2 The work becomes smaller, manageable, (even a Mahler Symphony) and the mechanical business of memorising is the first stage towards knowing the piece completely. I am not suggesting that you need to conduct from memory, and in fact I think conducting with a score is harder in many ways, but ideally you do need to know where the piece is going, the balance of the phrases, the balance of the sonorities, the slight changes of tempo, the architecture of the whole movement and then the whole work.

In our score preparation of whatever work at whatever level, I believe that we need to isolate two, three or more instrumental groups and their function.

- 1 The leading part, Schoenberg's Hauptstimme.
- 2 The secondary part, or counter melody, Schoenberg's Nebenstimme
- 3/4 The accompaniment

In general, we should conduct the Hauptstimme, follow the line, show the phrasing, and indicate its relative importance. However, it may be that the subsidiary part is of equal or more importance – perhaps at the cadence, perhaps on a repeat, perhaps because of the scoring.

With both lines, it is of vital importance to energise the characteristic of the line, to give the melody or countermelody its own rhythmic vitality, and to insist on imaginative and clear phrasing, giving a proper diction to the phrases and sentences.

The harmonic movement also needs clarity; the phrasing of the harmony may well contrast with the main lines, chromatic movement may need an *espressivo*, chords will need placing so that without being jerky and accented, they still indicate a pulse.

#### DYNAMIC LEVELS

**In the wind orchestra we do not have to work hard at making a lot of noise.**

We must work hard

- 1 Controlling lower levels
- 2 Anticipating dynamic events
- 3 Crescendo should start quietly - diminuendo should start loudly

*If one has crescendoed too much too early, it leaves no room to crescendo further. If one has arrived too early at the top of a crescendo curve, one has no choice but to remain in that dynamic plateau and await the point where the crescendo really should have peaked.*

Gunther Schuller

#### CONTRASTS

Remember:

- subito piano is more effective if preceded by a crescendo
- subito forte is more effective if preceded by diminuendo
- the first fortissimo is the smallest, the last is the biggest

#### ARCHITECTURE OF DYNAMICS

Build an architecture of dynamic levels in your phrasing and in your whole concept of the piece, and insist in all of your work that one of our biggest problems is CONTROL. Many of our performance halls are too small, much of our repertoire is too loud, the sound of a smallish wind ensemble is often too brilliant, and many of us encourage this brilliance with our conducting gestures.

One of the most common faults among young learning conductors, for example, is to conduct with huge emotion-laden beats, when the dynamic the composer has written is, say, *p*. No orchestra in the world will play a true *p* when the conductor is belabouring it with three-foot-long beats or huge flailing motions. What is even worse is when the conductor then criticises the orchestra for playing too loud!

Gunther Schuller

Generally, due to problems in control, bands tend to use a rather narrow range of dynamics, ignoring those of lesser weight. Also, young players naturally tend to feel that a dynamic indication is a fixed quantity. They must be taught that dynamics must be considered in relation to the composer, the tempo, and the type of music. They must realise that a forte in a Haydn minuet is quite different from a forte in Wagner's Tannhauser March.

*The purpose of dynamic change is to sustain interest on the part of the listener, as well as to create a mood. Obviously, the wider the dynamic range of the band, the better prepared they are to do both. In the name of good taste, we should caution young players that no dynamic indication, no matter how many fff 's' requires the absolute maximum of sound that can be gotten from an instrument.*

Walter Beeler

### BALANCE

*It seems that it rarely occurs to conductors and their apologists, if it is a question of balance or dynamics, to occasionally make the other parts play softer.*

Gunther Schuller

### FORTE IS A LIGHT DYNAMIC

One of the biggest problems with the wind band is one of its greatest strengths, its brilliance, produced by all of these dominant colours. There are pastel shades, low flutes, bassoons, some saxophone, horn and euphonium scoring, but on the whole we are lucky to have a glittering range of bright colours, which can and often does get very tiring to the ear. I believe that our biggest job is CONTROL of this brilliance.

The band colours are primary, and need that lightness of touch. Persuade your players that their first entry, after applause and silence, need not be enormous, that the first forte or fortissimo fanfare must be treated as the lightest forte or fortissimo in the piece. Our job is to make the effect with the minimum effort. How often do we hear a piece which ends loudly, but not very loudly, and the audience is not sure whether to clap or not. Reserve the biggest fortissimo for the end, and make sure that the previous music is leading up to it.

### INTERNAL DYNAMICS

The great band will have a great internal balance, lower harmonic parts telling and clear but balanced with the melodic material, that alto and tenor register stronger than the treble. A few comments below from some of the great conductors:

*Another kind of balancing problem arises from conventions of classical scoring. Composers often wrote one dynamic mark for the entire vertical scoring involved. Rare are the instances of graded dynamics in scores prior to 1850 they expected the performers to adjust their instruments' relative strength according to the primary or secondary importance of their roles.*

Erich Leinsdorf

*Most writers will leave the dynamic balance up to the conductor or the performers. The fortissimo that goes up and down the score is rarely how it should be played. We have to explain what fortissimo means. It means different things where it occurs in the score, whether it is in the melody or support areas. Too much of the loud nullifies any attempts toward musical climax.*

Walter Beeler

*It is at that very highest level of performance that a wealth of interpretative choices and decisions become available at least to the really sensitive intelligent and imaginative recreator. It is in this realm that there is not one pp but many subtly different pp's; not one f but many different kinds of f's not one slur but many kinds of legato.*

Gunther Schuller

*The smallest voice in the texture determines the dynamic. Nothing is constant. If the brass are playing against the woodwind, it is the woodwind who define forte. **The brass cannot play like "brass" but must think of themselves as "brass players who are balancing woodwinds***

Walter Beeler

## TONE

*The problem is that we hear a band and say "that's a great sound but it is like a steady diet of chocolate caramel ice cream – rich, thick beautiful, full and boring. I like to create different timbres within the parameters of a good sound. Sometimes those sounds may be on the brink of "not so good", but they are interesting, and even demanded by some contemporary compositions.*

James Croft.

Band tone is of the utmost and primary importance because until we get what we call "a good basic band tone" there isn't any point in going on to anything else. My ideal is to strive for a round, relaxed, soft concept. The reason I like a rather mellow tone is that I think we tire of anything too sensational. So often we hear bands with constant intensity and enthusiasm of sound, and they completely exhaust us. If a band has a general failing, it is probably that its overall tone is too brilliant and often much too hard. It's possible to do a lot of damage with brass instruments.

*To create a more pleasing sound, it helps to think of blowing a lot of air slowly through the instruments rather than a small amount fast. In other words, I think it's the speed of the air stream that creates the hard sound. I would rather the players feel that they are getting the horns filled up, but in a relaxed way.*

Walter Beeler

*Working for good colour and blend is far more crucial to intonation than making the difference of two cents in the pitch.*  
Craig Kirchoff

## ARTICULATION

James Croft advises:

*I always enjoyed Revelli's admonition, "Don't let the notes touch".*

*Some articulations are heavy, some are light. We're looking to create contrast and interest.*

Jim and Dr. Revelli are absolutely right; we must create clarity. Let plenty of air into your articulation and phrasing, as so often phrases overlap, and so often we create a continuous sludgy continuous sound. Remember that the most important note in any bar is the smallest. Look after the little notes, look after the upbeats, and lighten strong beats when you can and free yourself from the tyranny of the bar-line, but make sure that any rhythm is given its own character.

## PHRASING – DYNAMICS – TONE – BALANCE – CLARITY

These are roughly my approaches to any score. I suppose it can all be summed up in a few words, phrasing, dynamics, tone, balance and clarity.

And in my choice of music, I am trying to set challenges to both players and audiences – without alienating them

My ideal challenges in a programme are:

## EMOTIONAL – MUSICAL – INTELLECTUAL – TECHNICAL

### POSTSCRIPT

The comments from Walter Beeler are edited by Dr Mark Fonder and appeared in a WASBE Newsletter.

## VIEWS ON CONDUCTING TECHNIQUE FROM THE PODIUM

PIERRE BOULEZ on Virtues of the ideal conductor

*Restrained gestures, good taste, rhythmical accuracy, open-mindedness, exactness and respect for the music*

GUNTHER SCHULLER *The Compleat Conductor* (OUP \$49.95)

571 pp *A Philosophy of Conducting – A History of Conducting – Analysis of Performances*

In this book, little time is spent on technical aspects except to make two major points.

1 He states that there are two approaches to the functions of the hands:

a ...time-beating function is directed by the right hand, while the expression of the music and the control of the dynamics lie in the left hand.

B ...both hands may be involved in both functions, but that the right hand must in any case convey the entire character of the music as well as the beat and tempo.

- 10 The disuse of lateral beat-pattern movements, ie the avoidance of using the entire arms'-length width of the conducting zone, is probably the most serious and widespread problem among conductors from a technical point of view

Schuller recommends three books on conducting techniques

Max Rudolf *The Grammar of Conducting* (New York, 1950, 1980)

Frederick Prausnitz, *Score and Podium* (New York, 1983)

Hermann Scherchen, *Lehrbuch des Dirigierens* (Leipzig, 1929)

Hermann Scherchen, *Handbook of Conducting* (London, 1933, 1989)

Other books worth adding to your library

Jean Vermeil: *Conversations with Boulez* (Amadeus Press, Portland, Oregon, 1996; \$29.95)

Erich Leinsdorf; *The Composer's Advocate* (Yale University Press, 1981)

Elliott W Galkin; *A History of Orchestral Conducting* (Pendragon Press, 1988)

Donald Hunsberger & Roy Ernst; *The Art of Conducting* (Alfred A Knopf, 1983)

Elizabeth Green; *The Modern Conductor* (Prentice-Hall, 1982)

BUT books and methods can only teach you to direct, not conduct

*The simple fact that sound is a part of personality has, from my earliest acquaintance with conducting, made me dubious about so-called baton technique. I have always refused to teach conducting, supporting my refusal with the argument that the motions are of no consequence.*

*Gesture is of crucial importance in conducting as long as it carries a message. But that message cannot be predetermined in advance*

**LEINSDORF**

*The whole duty of the conductor is comprised in his ability always to indicate the right tempo. His choice of tempi will show whether he understands the piece or not. With good players, the true tempo induces correct expression and phrasing and conversely, with a conductor, the idea of appropriate phrasing and expression will induce the conception of the true tempo.*

**WAGNER**

*It is not necessary for a conductor to be trained as rigorously as a dancer. Still he must find the happy medium between tension and relaxation....The two extremes to be avoided are shyness and exhibitionism. EVERY GESTURE THE CONDUCTOR MAKES SHOULD SAY SOMETHING TO THE PLAYERS*

**MAX RUDOLF.**

**WEINGARTNER** *In our music, there are, thank God, moments when the conductor must let himself go if he has any blood in his veins. An excess of movement in therefore always better than it's opposite, since at any rate as a rule, it indicates temperament, without which there is no art.*

*The force of personality and artistic potency cannot be acquired; that much is nature's gift. But all professional training is of a technical order and the technique of conducting must be learnt, as any other. The Art of Conducting can be defined as follows: gesture, the conductor's one and only medium during performance, must indicate perfectly clearly the metrical course of the work; and at the same time it must convey in unequivocal fashion the varying expression and general shaping of the work.*

**HERMANN SCHERCHEN**

*Every precise and easily understood gesture is clear speaking, but every unnecessary motion is idle chatter*

**NICOLAI MALKO**

*Gesture is of crucial importance in conducting as long as it carries a message. But that message cannot be determined in advance.*

**ERICH LEINSDORF**

*To be a conductor, one must have imagination, and also the power to make an orchestra play what one imagines...I firmly believe that the essential quality of a conductor is first of all to project your imagination to other people.*

**GEORGE SOLTI**