



Conducting Masterclass



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The moment you see an emotion expressed on someone's face — or read it in their gestures or posture — you unconsciously place yourself in the other person's "mental shoes" and begin to sense that same emotion in yourself (Carol Kinsey Goman)

And that, perhaps, is the most important function of a conductor — pacing. i.e. distributing music on the axis of time (Esa-Pekka Salonen)

IMPORTANT GESTURAL CONCEPTS

- The breath is the vital connection between the imagery and the manifestation of the external gesture.
- Any external motion *not* motivated by the breath impulse will be “disconnected” — disconnected gestures NEVER communicate feeling or emotion.
- The TORSO is the visual manifestation of the support mechanism that either sustains or collapses the breath support system of your students. Posture is just as important for conductors as players!
- The *size* of the gesture does not determine its importance. Rather it is the information and intensity the gesture carries that will determine its significance.
- The way the conductor moves the baton/arms through the air is analogous to the way you want performers to move the air through wind instruments, move the bow against the string, or strike the mallet to bar, or stick to drumhead. The “quality of the motion” equates to the quality of the sound.
- The way the conductor prepares and touches the “beat plane” (ichthus point) defines the articulation type/style/weight. “What goes up must come down”—height on the up reflects weight on the down.
- When tempo is constant, keeping the internal pulse together is the responsibility of the players (regardless of ensemble ability level) — freeing the conductor to focus on conducting the music's expressive content rather than just the beat. The *music* generates the gesture — not the meter!

THE FACE

- The face is primary in communicating human emotion.
- The eyes are the most revealing “window” to the soul.
- The face can only effectively reflect musical/expressive meanings that are “internalised” (felt within). N.B. Emotions felt within are not automatically reflected on the face—they need to be “projected” externally.
- Multiple research studies shows that building rapport and trust with another person requires your gaze connect with theirs 60 to 70 percent of the time. Timid contact less than 30 percent is rarely “trusted.” N.B. In a musical ensemble (as opposed to a casual conversation), the conductor can leave the player in charge of when to break the conductor’s gaze — so maintain eye contact as musically appropriate!

CLARITY & PREDICTABILITY

- There is no substitute for gestural and communication clarity (including technique) — especially with developing musicians who haven’t developed a “static filter”(!)
- Our body has conducting “hinges” that support clarity when used appropriately (fingers, wrist, elbow, shoulder). We also have hinges that often detract from clarity (knees, neck, waist, mouth, eyebrows, etc.). Smaller hinges = smaller gestures and help provide gestural “contrast.”
- Gestural predictability requires clear beginning & end points, a predictable line path (usually linear or circular), and a constant speed or acceleration/deceleration).

SENSITISING YOUR ENSEMBLE

- Making sure your ensemble watches you, understands what you want, and responds in sound is an important part of effective ensemble teaching. Warm-ups, etc., are especially useful for developing this.
- Things that can “desensitise” a group: counting them in; repetitive beat pattern gestures; allowing them to be unresponsive or inattentive to gestures; lack of clarity in gestures; gestures that are contradictory to the music.

FREELY AVAILABLE RESOURCES FROM THIS SESSION

- Many resources, materials, and information on teaching aids demonstrated/used in this session are **FREELY DOWNLOADABLE** from the *Maryborough Music Conference* link on my home page at: www.robmcwilliams.com

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