

GET TO THE HEART OF IT: Say What You Mean

Concepts & Considerations to Inform Collaborative Conducting & Rehearsal Technique

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If we accept that music is very rarely about what is "now," but rather what will be, we must ask ourselves why our attention can so often become focused on illustrating the former, in our practice and rehearsal conducting, rather than on facilitating the latter on behalf of fully expressive musical experiences and interactions... for ALL.

1. Where the music IS v. Where it's GOING

When we focus our energy primarily on considerations such as beat, cues, entrances, and releases, we're dedicated to the here & now, or in the moment. Of course this is important, but if we don't go beyond this, we leave the process incomplete.

- a. Look back to how we TEACH conducting
 - i. Pattern-based
 - ii. RULE-based
 - iii. Use of Space
 - iv. Use of TIME in space
- b. How do the parts interact to develop the musical whole?
- c. Event-Based Score Study
 - i. Linear – Vertical – Linear
 - ii. Form
 - iii. Binding Agents
- d. Marking Your Scores
 - i. Developing A system v. seeking THE system
 - ii. Allow your system to EVOLVE
 - iii. DO IT, and then...

2. Translating into PRACTICE

The instant a conductor indicates to the musicians in their ensemble that their primary mission is to indicate time, it is exactly that on which those musicians focus. However, as soon as the conductor shares the essence and linear goals of the music as primary, the musicians assume responsibility for the former and look to the conductor for the latter.

- a. How this can manifest through GESTURE?

- b. Letting go of BEATS, when possible
 - i. Student-musicians' perception of what they need v. what they want
 - ii. OUR perception (often) of what our student-musicians need
 - iii. Releasing responsibility: SEEKING opportunities
- c. Sculpting or shaping: what do we want the SOUND to LOOK like?
 - i. Timbre/color
 - ii. Style/character
 - iii. Line
- d. Facilitating the JOURNEY makes for the most apparent/satisfying musical ARRIVAL

3. IMPLEMENTATION: How Can This Augment Your Rehearsal Technique?

The "who, what, where, when, and how" in musical scores is, without doubt, content that is crucial to accurate musical realizations, but going beyond those understandings to include those of the "why" will foster a curiosity that can also move us toward what may also be the most expressive.

- a. When WE best understand how the various musical parts interact with one another, we're better able to help our student-musicians do the same
- b. Be INCLUSIVE in rehearsal and "share" decision-making/interpretation
- c. Practice v. Rehearsal: which most accurately describes what we do with our ensembles?

P.S. There is NO minimum age or level for this application

4. TRUST

"I am frightened to death not only by concerts – but by rehearsals – the fear that I will not find the answers to what score study, my ears, and my heart tell me should happen."

~ Robert Shaw, 1953

- a. Trusting YOURSELF
- b. Trusting your MUSICIANS
- c. Control v. Facilitation

What is often our nature, as teachers, is to be nurturers. We want nothing more than to see our students be successful, but sometimes, in this quest, we get in their way as much as we help propel them forward.

5. Sentience & Collaboration

Early on, Mr. (Alan) Gilbert said, he worked to foster a more collaborative, less top-down approach to music-making with the players. Not everyone welcomed it. "Some of them specifically told me, 'Just show us what to do — we'll do that,'" he recalled. "They are very good at watching and reacting, in an incredibly fine and detailed way, to the gesture they see in front of them. But at the same time, that kind of statement a little bit shows a lack of sense of responsibility in terms of giving to the situation. It becomes an entirely reactive role."

~Alan Gilbert, upon his impending retirement from the NY Phil

- a. Sentience [SEN-shuh ns], adj. – having the capacity for self-awareness or consciousness
- b. What does it mean to be musically self-aware, and how do we nurture this?
- c. What does this “look like”? What are we trying to foster, and how?
 - i. Instincts: encouraging student musicians not only to explore theirs, but also to acknowledge and USE them
 - ii. Inquiry: one of the best ways to engage... in BOTH directions
 - iii. Developing a willingness to BE questioned, in addition to being QUESTIONING, and seeing this as a good thing, rather than a challenge
- d. Consider whether sentience is best manifested or supported through a rehearsal structure that dictates v. one that facilitates

6. The END GAME

- a. Through this, you will find not only that YOUR eyes and ears begin to perceive of music through different, more complete & colorful lenses, but so to will your students
- b. Through this, you will find that not only will your gesture become more INFORMED, but that it will also become more INFORMATIVE
- c. Through this, you will find that not only will your TRUST in your musicians will grow, but so too will theirs in you
- d. Through this, you will find that your rehearsals become more organically COLLABORATIVE, with common musical goals

My idea is that there is music in the air, music all around us; the world is full of it, and you simply take as much as you require ~ Sir Edward Elgar

THANK YOU!

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