

Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic 2011

Title: "The Art of Conducting"

Clinician: John W. Knight

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Oberlin Conservatory of Music

Oberlin, Ohio 44074

Location: Hyatt Regency McCormick

Room 185

Date: December 16, 400 pm

The conducting clinic is based on interviews with Maestros Pierre Boulez, Herbert Blomstedt, Christoph von Dohnanyi, Richard Hickox, Kurt Masur, as well as interviews with professional musicians Michel Debost, flute, and James DeSano, trombone, who reminiscence about playing under the baton of these great Maestros.

"Conducting is, after all, a difficult business, one has to be 70 years of age to realize this fully." Richard Strauss

Outline:

I. Interpretive Conducting Gestures

A. Fundamental Prerequisites (Quick review of The Craft of Conducting)

“Conducting is 90% art form and 10% Craft.”

B. “All the knowledge of conducting comes from the score. If you have a precise idea of the score and an inner representation of the score, then the gestures will come about automatically. Conducting gestures come from the music: the gestures do not make the music.” Pierre Boulez

C. “The best conducting technique is that which achieves the maximum musical results with the minimum effort. The only general rule is to infuse gestures with precision, clarity, and vitality.” Fritz Reiner

D. Technical control is indispensable to artistic mastery. Technique is style’s liberator.” Charles Ives.

E. “There are no cadenzas for the baton.” Arturo Toscanini

II. Rehearsal Technique (What the ensemble expects from the Conductor.)

A. “There must be an artistic collaboration with the ensemble to have the freedom of give and take so that they can share in the creation of the music.” James Desano

B. “The first rehearsal should be a discovery time for the orchestra to establish the musical line and phrasing. Listen to the orchestra for at least the first half of rehearsal before you break it down.” Michel Debost

Debost

C. “Have a clear concept of what you want to hear, but be ready to adjust to what actually comes from the orchestra” Herbert Blomstedt

D. “Develop a musical vision to bring inspiration, instruction, and imagination to the composition.” Michel Debost

E. “A conductor should know enough about the instruments to realize how loud or soft they can play in each register.” James DeSano

III. The Art of Conducting and Interpretation

A. “The art of conducting is completely different from the craft. It is the ability to influence artists in an orchestra to do what you want them to do and to respect the music and the composer. It’s psychological.”

Christoph von Dohnanyi

B. “An interpretation is not something we get from God or from outside revelation. It comes from studying and struggling with the score. If the struggle is successful, it can be a revelation that will return us to God.”

Herbert Blomstedt

C. “The art of conducting means to inspire an orchestra with such a convincing idea about the piece that all these outstanding musicians believe you.” Kurt Masur

D. "If a conductor's personality is unable to fulfill the spiritual demands of the works he conducts, his interpretations will remain unsatisfactory, although their musical execution may be exemplary."

Bruno Walter

E. "All musicians are my equal until we reach the second note. The written note is like a strait jacket, whereas music, like life itself, is constant movement, continues spontaneously, free from any restrictions." Pablo Casals

F. "Good interpretation transforms the crowd into one level of receptivity...the mass into one single listener. A spiritual enrichment has taken place. For the interpreter, this is the highest reward, the highest step to which interpretation may ascend." Serge Koussevitzky.

IV. Elements of a Great Performance

A. "From the heart may it go to the heart." Beethoven

B. "An inspirational collaboration between the conductor and the orchestra that produces an overwhelming emotional impact to the audience." John Knight

C. "Music that is heard so deeply that you are the music while the music lasts." T. S. Eliot