



THE **FUNHOUSE MIRROR** OF CONDUCTING

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Less is more.

—attributed to architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

There is always more.

—from a Welcoming Address to an incoming legal student

Cover art:

Florent Blache, painting, in the private collection of James Jordan, Yardley, PA

THE **FUNHOUSE MIRROR** OF CONDUCTING

ARE WE REALLY AWARE OF OURSELVES
AND THE MUSICIANS IN OUR REHEARSALS?
BEING AWARE OF BEING AWARE!

CLINIC SYNOPSIS

This session was inspired by what has turned out to be an “accidental” over forty-year case study composed of students I taught in the first 8 years of my teaching career at Lewisburg High School (Lewisburg, PA), self-organized by over 100 students who came from all over the planet to do one thing: to experience the community that they feel shaped their lives. The results illuminated many truths that I believe are not taught. The students were asked to write what things from that experience were so deeply meaningful to their lives. Their statements hopefully will inspire us all to rethink how we teach conducting and how we conduct, and perhaps view ourselves in a mirror that reflects our best selves using the gifts we have been given. Often, a fear that we are “not good enough” casts shadows on our gifts as musicians and conductors. This session will advocate that in training conductors and our helping ourselves, to activate a clear-eyed vision of our gifts, beyond the music, and an appreciation and reverence of those gifts that should be fundamental to not only conducting instruction but our work day-to-day.

The inward teacher is the living core of our lives that is addressed and evoked by any education worthy of the name. The first is that what we teach will never “take” unless it connects with the inward, living core of our students’ lives, with our students’ inward teachers. The second truth is even more daunting: we can speak to the teacher within our students only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves.

The student who said that her bad teachers spoke like cartoon characters was describing teachers who have gone deaf to their inner guide, who have so thoroughly separated inner truth from outer actions that they have lost touch with a sense of self. Deep speaks to deep, and when we have not sounded our own depths, we cannot sound the depths of our students’ lives. (p. 31)

—Parker Palmer
in *The Courage to Teach*

There is no art if we are unwilling for the paint to dry.

—Makoto Fujimura

Though we do not wholly believe it yet, the interior life is a real life, and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect upon the world. (p. 3)

—James Baldwin
in Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Message*

Technique is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives.... (p. 5)

Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. (p. 10)

As good teachers weave the fabric with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens up the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that the teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning and living require. (p. 11)

—Parker Palmer
in *The Courage to Teach*

Don't explain your philosophy, Embody it.

—Epictetus

HIGH POINTS OF THE PRESENTATION

The Bernstein “Effect”

What was Bernstein’s primary method of connection?

1. Crafting and honest musical and artistic self image of ourselves.
2. Do we REALLY see ourselves and our gifts, or do we craft an image of ourselves that we THINK we want others to see – our distorted Funhouse Mirror.
3. How we view ourselves through a Funhouse Mirror, not really seeing our gifts and personhood.
4. What our musicians perceive via our conducting.
5. How “hiding” behind rehearsal technique and methods hides our real selves.
6. Sharing the shocking detail in quotes from 130 students who came together to sing again what was MOST IMPORTANT to make them travel and re-experience the community of a music ensemble
7. What we should be taught to rely upon not only as beginning conductors but throughout our careers
8. How envy of the “perfect sound” causes us to lose sight of our most honest musical selves. Sharing the complex world of envy that can derail honest and connected music making.

9. How we stay in awareness and thereby change the “air in the room.”
10. In this new world of cultural change, how we can best serve with humanity the gifts of our musicians.

The most common form of despair is not being who you are. (p. 185)

—Søren Kierkegaard
in Vivek H. Murthy, *Together*

11. Be not afraid: learning to trust your musical gifts and instincts. Discussing honestly how our fears stand in the way of what we do as artist/musicians.
12. Acknowledging the gifts of musical community in ensemble performance and rehearsal and being able to be “in” that community
13. How we LISTEN wordlessly broadcasts the best of ourselves to our musicians.
14. How to be humanly and honestly present in our rehearsals and performances.
15. Are you aware of the “right” things?

THE PITFALLS OF ENVY AND UNAWARENESS: OUR FUNHOUSE MIRROR – A DISTORTION OF WHAT IS IMPORTANT

ENVY OF...

“The Perfect” Sound

Beautiful Sound

The Abilities of Others

Musical Perfection

Connection to Others

The Community that Music Inspires

The Artistry of Other Conductors

The Sounds of Recorded Sounds

Excellent Intonation

Great Ensemble

“Good” Rhythm

“Good” Ensemble

“Good” Sectional Sounds

Applause and Appreciation

RESOURCES USED IN THIS SESSION

THE MUSICIAN'S SOUL

THE MUSICIAN'S BEING

THE MORAL ACOUSTIC OF SOUND

The Human Resonances of Musicians

TOWARDS CENTER

THE MUSICIAN'S TRIANGLE

The Embodied Architecture of Connection

Coming Spring 2026

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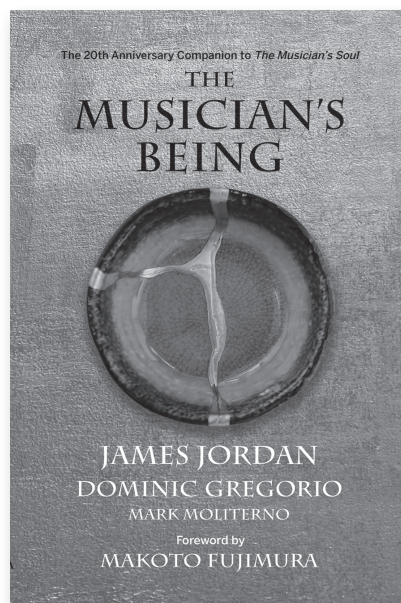
James Jordan is a GRAMMY-nominated Emeritus Conductor of Westminster Choir College and the 7th conductor of the renowned Westminster Choir. He is an acclaimed author of over 60 books on rehearsal pedagogy, Laban Effort Shape applied to conducting and conducting pedagogy and philosophy. As a recording artist, he has over 25 recordings, and the most recent is Requiem: Mozart's Death in Words and Music with The Pittsburgh Symphony, Manfred Honeck, conductor. Jordan is also Director of the Choral Institute at Oxford, a conductor of the Addamus Choral Programme (<https://www.addamus.com>), and a principal with the worldwide music initiative The Nexus Arts Group (nexusartsgroup.com).

The Musician's Being

Gaining Access to Your Artistic Soul

Twenty years after the publication of his landmark work *The Musician's Soul*, James Jordan returns to themes of musicianship, human connection, and artistry—but with depth and insight only possible with twenty years of additional perspective. Jordan explores our need for humility in music making and the importance of “slow art” for all musicians and teachers in this fast information age. He reflects on the loneliness of musicians and draws on yoga concepts to explore our deepest places. And he advocates, with contributions from Dominic Gregorio and Mark Moliterno, the gift of abundances and learning to breathe “as” another.

G-10014 Hardcover, 210 Pages \$22.95

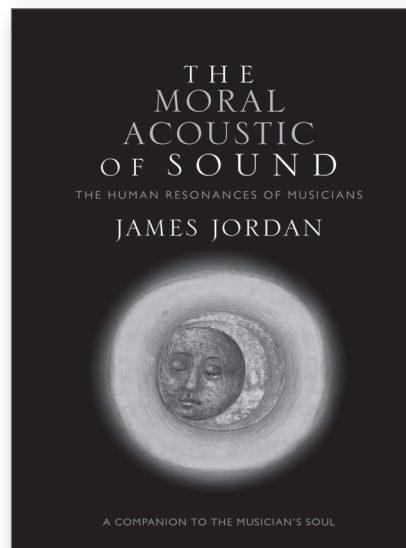


The Moral Acoustic of Sound

The Human Resonances of Musicians

This volume is a continuation of the journey James Jordan began in *The Musician's Soul*. Jordan explores and defines those factors that create a “moral acoustic”—those human resonances among and between musicians. This book delves into the nature of authenticity and honesty in choral sound and how conductors and teachers, through these new understandings, can draw forth that which is living within each ensemble of musicians no matter their age or experience.

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The Conductor's Triangle

Embodied Conducting and Connection

Wisdoms Derived from a 40-Year Case Study

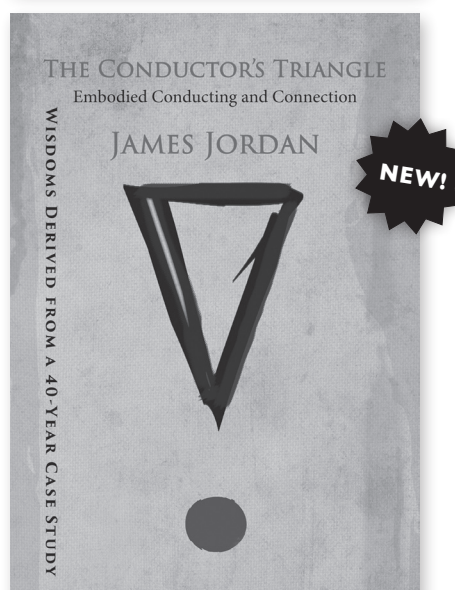
James Jordan

With Essays by Jesse Borower, Jenny Stogner-Neff

Drawing on a remarkable “accidental case study” from his first high school choir more than forty years ago, James Jordan traces how his students’ insights—and the influence of his mentor, Elaine Brown—shaped his understanding of conducting as both human science and artistic communion. In doing so, he reveals that at the heart of every great performance lies a dynamic triangle connecting **gesture, communication, and artistry**.

—COMING SPRING 2026!—

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