



Friday, December 20, 2024
8:30-9:30 am
McCormick Place West, Chicago, IL
W 183

A Connected Conductor: The Nexus of Artistry, Technique, and Emotion

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James W. Robinson High School Symphonic Band
[Andrew Loft](#) (he/his) Director

Overview

An uninhibited imagination combined with practical tools and authentic communication can enhance the connection between conductors, ensemble musicians, and audiences. Partnered with the James W. Robinson High School Symphonic Band, this session is presented in two parts: description of beliefs related to preparation, practice, and implementation, and demonstrations of five topics with live musicians using excerpts from the selected pieces listed below. Content is applicable to conductors who work with varied experience-levels and ages.

Beliefs

- All bodies and personal relationships to sound are unique.
- There is no one way to move effectively and expressively.
- The goal of score preparation is the shift from learning printed details to exploring and imagining the sound, essence, energy, timbre, architecture, and meaning of a piece.
- A personal point of view should be strongly influenced by the composer's intention and historically informed information.
- Practicing body mechanics outside of score preparation will enhance gestural vocabulary and will increase the overall communication with ensemble members.
- A vivid sound imagination and deep engagement with the music score will impact gestural vocabulary.
- Conducting is different from Instructing.
- A willingness for the conductor to be authentic, open, and direct with their ensemble musicians will increase the emotional loop between all.
- Conducting is a listening art; our gestures should aim to inspire, guide, and encourage the greatest possible sounds from all members of the ensemble.
- Being a conductor is a privilege and a lifelong pursuit.
- Today's session focuses on just a few topics for consideration.

Five Topics Demonstrated

1. Body Language and Preparatory Gestures
 - Musical aesthetic and character embodiment - “Don’t start the ensemble, start the music.”
 - Breath and Torso as it relates to Gesture
 - Strong impulse of will
 - Instructor vs. Inviter–Collaborator
2. Pulse and Momentum
 - Responsibility of establishing tempo and maintaining steady pulse
 - Hinges - “Where is the beat?”
3. Pattern Adherence and Deviation
 - Musical ideas motivate pattern design
 - Barlines are for visual organization of the notation
 - Gesture and pattern melding must be done with internal rhythmic integrity
4. Articulation and Style at Tip of the Baton
 - Specificity with baton tip encourages clarity and precision
 - Relate natural motions to baton gestures
5. Facial Communication and Imagination
 - Vivid internal musical affect or emotion
 - Eye contact as ‘window to the soul’ and Eyes–Tip–Eyes

Excerpts from Select Pieces

[Rocketship!](#) by Kevin Day [2017] (4’30)

[Our Cast Aways](#) by Julie Giroux [2018] (4’30)

[Conga del Fuego Nuevo](#) by Arturo Marquez, arr. Nickel [2001/2011] (5’00)

[Three Ayres from Gloucester](#) by Hugh M. Stuart [1969] (5’00)

Exercises for Practice

Arms Together and Arms Separately

Stand with grounded and balanced posture, ensure motions from feet to hands have no fixed muscle contraction or ‘locking,’ practice breath expansion in/connectivity to the torso, and with a metronome at varied tempi, try the below (inspired by Malko Conducting Exercises

[Demonstrated via YouTube](#) by Ms. Elizabeth A.H. Green):

- Move arm/s horizontally and vertically, starting from the center outward, with even flow of time between beats - 4 count, 6 count, 8 count, 12 count.
- Move arm/s in diagonals/triangles, starting from the center outward, with even flow of time between beats - 4 count, 6 count, 8 count, 12 count.
- Move arm/s in semi-circles, starting from the center outward, with even flow of time between beats - 4 count, 6 count, 8 count, 12 count.
- Improvise alternations of above three motions (ex: left arm horizontal, right vertical) - 4 count, 6 count, 8 count, 12 count.

- Continue varying the above (with a metronome) while moving your feet/walking around to different tempi—it is preferred that walking be at a different tempo than metronome to enhance independence.

Baton Alone

Establish natural baton grip and hand position, work to get action at the tip of the baton by moving with natural motions then correlate those motions to music articulations, phrase shapes, and sound (consider [Laban's Efforts in Action](#) originating from Rudolph Laban, dance artist and movement theorist), and with a metronome at varied tempi, try the below:

- Move baton in downward motions (1s) to effort actions.
- Move baton in traditional conducting patterns (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc.).
- Mix and change effort actions to different points of the traditional pattern (ex. in 4/4 pattern: beat 1 = slash, beat 2 = float, beat 3 = press, beat 4 = flick).
- Connect the effort actions to articulation actions.
- Continue varying the above (with a metronome) while moving your feet/walking around to different tempi—it is preferred that walking be at a different tempo than metronome to enhance independence.

Laban Eight Effort Actions

Float
Dab
Wring
Thrust
Press
Flick
Slash
Glide

Articulation Actions

Slur - Tenuto
Accent
Marcato
Staccato
Accent with Staccato
Accent with Legato
Slur with Staccato
Tenuto with Staccato
Tenuto with Accent
sfz

Arm and Baton

Stand with grounded and balanced posture, ensure motions from feet to hands have no fixed muscle contraction or 'locking,' practice breath expansion in/connectivity to the torso, and combine the above with a metronome at varied tempi and try the below:

- Baton hand move to select articulations in downward motions (1s first, then traditional patterns of 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) and add opposite arm to these movements:
 - Horizontally and vertically, starting from the center outward, with even flow of time between beats - 4 count, 6 count, 8 count, 12 count
 - Diagonals/triangles, starting from the center outward, with even flow of time between beats - 4 count, 6 count, 8 count, 12 count
 - Semi-circles, starting from the center outward, with even flow of time between beats - 4 count, 6 count, 8 count, 12 count
- Challenge: Alternate baton hand patterns with opposing arm counts (ex: right hand with baton conducts 4 pattern with varied articulations on each beat with left hand/arm moving in diagonals for 6 beats in one direction):

- Continue varying the above (with a metronome) while moving your feet/walking around to different tempi—it is preferred that walking be at a different tempo than metronome to enhance independence

The Face

Deep thinking and intellectual focus tends to shut down facial expressivity; consider any kind of method or practice to relax and open your face with the aim to connect more meaningfully with your ensemble members. Below are a few ideas to consider to enhance or explore:

- Remember that you are conducting individuals, you are not conducting instruments or musical parts.
 - Try looking at each musician in your ensemble as if you were speaking to them, sharing a story or idea vs. telling them what to do.
- Write an emotional word (ex: somber) or character adjective (ex: fiery) at the start of each phrase/section of the music on a Post-it® note or directly on the score.
 - Although it may seem forced or choreographed at first, the goal over time is that the face will start to naturally connect to the musical aesthetic.
- Deeply listen to the harmonic and bass motion of the music and see how that may impact your feeling of the energy between the chord changes and within the phrases.
 - After spending some time analyzing the harmonic motion, go to the piano and play the chord changes slowly and sing intervals to get the sounds internalized.
- Regarding melodic and solo lines, allow the musicians to try their expressive ideas first (and deeply listen) and then share your ideas with the goal to come to an agreement.
 - Try a variety of very exaggerated ideas of expression and see what the ensemble members think (too much, too little, just right).

Recommended Publications

Batistti, Frank and Garofalo, Robert. (1990). Guide to Score Study: For the Wind Band Conductor. Meredith Music Publications, FL.

Batistti, Frank and Rush, Scott. (2022). Inspiring a Love of Music. GIA Publications, Inc.

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McGill, David (2009). *Sound in Motion: A Performer's Guide to Greater Musical Expression*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Miller, Isador. (2024). *Becoming Talented. A Systematic Method for the Development of Ear Training and Music Reading Skills*. Musical Skills Press.

Ploger, Marianne. (2020). *The Ploger Method: Crafting a Fluent Musical Mind*.

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Schwiebert, Jerald and Barr, Dustin. (2018). *Expressive Conducting: Movement and Performance Theory for Conductors*. Routledge Publications, NY.

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Stravinsky, Igor. (1947). *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*. Transcribed by Knodel and Dahl. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Thurmond, James Morgan. (1982) *Note Grouping: A Method of Achieving Expression and Style in Musical Performance*, Meredith Music Publications.

Wis, Ramona. (2007). *The Conductor as Leader: Principles of Leadership Applied to Life on the Podium*. Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.

Zander, Benjamin and Rosamund. (2000). *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*. Harvard Business School Press & Penguin Books.

BANDS

Wind Band Conducting Workshop July 2025 in Minneapolis, MN

From Monday, July 14 - Friday, July 18, 2025 join nationally recognized master educators for demonstrations, discussions, and hands-on constructive feedback related to the art and pedagogy of conducting and ensemble teaching. Held on the stage of Ted Mann Concert Hall and in the UMN-TC School of Music, this five-day [Conducting Workshop](#) offers sessions on the art, craft, and current topics related to the work of wind band conductors and educators at varied levels. Clinicians aim to strengthen gestural communication and partnership on the podium, provide perspectives and tools to enrich and deepen music-making, broaden approaches on the concert experience and repertoire selection, and foster discussions on leadership, rehearsal techniques, advocacy, development, and service in the profession.

2025 WBCW Clinicians

[Travis J. Cross](#), Director of Bands; Professor of Conducting | UCLA | Yamaha Master Educator
Guest Clinician

[Emily Threinen](#), Director of Bands; Associate Professor of Conducting | UMN-TC
Yamaha Master Educator - Faculty Clinician

[Jerry Luckhardt](#), Associate Director of Bands; Associate Professor of Conducting | UMN-TC
Faculty Clinician

[Betsy McCann](#), Assistant Director of Bands; Director of Marching and Athletic Bands
UMN-TC - Faculty Clinician

[John Leonard](#), Assistant Director of Marching and Athletic Bands | UMN-TC - Faculty Clinician

