

Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic
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Revealing Expressive Conducting Technique

Re-Thinking How We Teach and Learn the
Art of Conducting

A Layered Pedagogy:
Architecture, Harmonic Rhythm, and Laban to Develop Kinesthetic
“Thinking” and Response to Sound

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Revealing Expressive Conducting Technique

I. Do we REALLY teach conducting technique?

- How do we learn technique on instruments?
- What is essential in developing conducting technique?

II. Unlocking the Mystery: Mirror Neurons and Why Research Demands that We Teach and Learn Conducting Differently than Our Current Pedagogies

There's something strange about the range of actions mirror neurons respond to. They don't respond to pantomimes, or to meaningless gestures, or random animal sounds. They seemed specially tuned to respond to actions with clear goals—whether those actions are perceived through sight, sound, or any other sensory pathway.

—Ben Thomas
in *The Scientific American*
November 8, 2012

Organisms make minds out of the activity of special cells known as neurons. Neurons share most of the characteristics of other cells in our body, and yet their operation is distinctive. They are sensitive to changes around them; they are excitable (an interesting property they share with muscle cells). Thanks to a fibrous prolongation known as the axon, and to the end region of the axon known as the synapse, neurons can send signals to other cells—other neurons, muscle cells—often quite far away. Neurons are largely concentrated in a central nervous system (the brain, for short), but they send signals to the organism's body, as well as to the outside world, and they receive signals from both. (p. 17)

Minds emerge when the activity of small circuits organized across large networks so as to compose momentary patterns. The patterns represent things and events located outside the brain, either in the body or in the external world, but some patterns also represent the brain's own processing of other patterns. The term *map* applies to all those representational patterns, some of which are coarse, while others are very refined, some concrete, others abstract. In brief, the brain maps the world around it and maps its own doings. Those maps are experienced as *images* in our own minds, and the term *image* refers not just to visual kind but to images of any sense origin such as auditory, visceral, tactile, and so forth. (p.18)

To explain why neurons are so special, we should consider a functional difference and a strategic difference. The essential functional difference has to do with the neuron's ability to produce electrochemical signals capable of changing the state of other cells. (p. 37)

—Antonio Damasio
in *Self Comes to Mind*

- Mirror neurons are specific to “task.” That is, gesture is bonded to sound. Gesture in general is NOT TRANSFERABLE to other sounds or textures! GESTURE IS MAPPED TO SOUNDS THAT OCCURRED IN COINCIDENCE WITH THE GESTURE.
- We must re-examine our own pedagogy for teaching conducting with regard to new neurological functioning information with regard to mapping and mirror neurons
- Consideration of a Layered Approach to teaching conducting skill:
 - Spiritual “work”
 - Architectural mapping
 - Gestural building block via Laban pedagogy
 - Building technique through sound bonding with harmonic rhythm
 -

III. Essential New Discoveries in Body Mapping: Eliminating ALL Technical Problems for Both Beginning and Advanced Conductors

Note: Visual re-mapping is essential.

Resources: *The Anatomy of Conducting* DVD, James Jordan and Eugene Corporon (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2008; contained in *Evoking Sound*, Second Edition, 2009)

- Joints of the arms
- Correct map of the “shoulder”
- Rotations
- Correct map of the wrist

IV. Laban Essentials

Resources: *The Conductor’s Gesture*, James Jordan (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2011)
Evoking Sound, Second Edition, James Jordan
(Chicago: GIA Publications, 2009): Ch. 24

The distinctive feature of brains such as the one we own is their uncanny ability to create maps. Mapping is essential for sophisticated management, mapping and life management going hand in hand. When the brain makes maps, it *informs* itself. The information contained in the maps can be used nonconsciously to guide motor behavior efficaciously, a most desirable consequence considering that survival depends on taking the right action. But when brains make maps, they are also creating images, the main currency of our minds. Ultimately consciousness allows us to experience maps as images, to manipulate those images, and to apply reasoning to them.

Maps are constructed when we interact with objects, such as a person, a machine, a place, from the outside of the brain toward its interior. I cannot emphasize the word *interaction* enough. It reminds us that making maps, which is essential for improving actions as noted above, often occurs in a setting of action to begin with. Action and maps, movements and mind, are part of an unending cycle.... (pp. 63-64)

—Antonio Damasio
in *Self Comes to Mind*

Understanding of Laban must be a form of kinesthetic learning that activates mirror neurons previously associated with life movement.

Laban Efforts in Combination to describe movement.

| ACTION VERB | LABAN (ELEMENTS) | QUALITIES MOVEMENT EXAMPLES |
|-------------|---|---|
| FLOAT | indirect (S) light (W) sustained (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> treading water at various depths |
| WRING | indirect (S) strong (W) sustained (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> wringing a beach towel |
| GLIDE | direct (S) light (W) sustained (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> smoothing wrinkles in a cloth, ice skating |
| PRESS | direct (S) strong (W) sustained (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> pushing a car |
| FLICK | indirect (S) light (W) quick (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> dusting off lint from clothing |
| SLASH | indirect (S) strong (W) quick (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fencing serving a tennis ball |
| DAB | direct (S) light (W) quick (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> typing tapping on a window |
| PUNCH | direct (S) strong (W) quick (T) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> boxing |

V. Bonding Gesture to Sound: The Miracle of Harmonic Rhythm to Develop Expressive Conducting Technique

Resources: *Conducting Technique Etudes*, James Jordan
(Chicago: GIA Publications, 2013)

As I have argued in *Musical Languages* and elsewhere, there can be no musical language without syntax, and syntax has two essential roles in any language: first, to organize information, that is, to provide the means for structure, and second, to mediate the tensions and resolutions of the music through its compositional techniques. Tension is a musical essence, and the composer's control of musical tensions in their multiplicity, their arising and subsiding, their blending and converting from one kind to another, their semantic interactions, their resolution or even annihilation, stands at the center of musical art. (pp. 187-188)

—Joseph Swain
in *Harmonic Rhythm*

- Harmonic Rhythm vs. Harmonic Progression
- Breath to initiate Laban Effort that may move sound forward of the harmonic rhythm

- Score preparation – Make multiple Laban choices to HEAR how gesture IMPACTS SOUND
- COMPLETE DENSITY GRAPH – histogram that visually indicates the SONIC DENSITY OF CHORDS
- Teaching conducting with harmonic rhythm WITHOUT melody and text – The building of gestural vocabulary and IMPRINTING MIRROR NEURONS. Remember that gesture immediately is mapped with sound. Specifically, gestural mapping for conductors should be bonded to harmonic rhythm, not tunes.

VI. Making Technique Adjustments and Corrections: MAPPING TECHNIQUE

- Mirrors only!
- Immediate iPad-focused excerpts “immediately after the moment”
- Evaluation scales for other conductors in quantity (breeds familiarity)

Annotated Pedagogical Conducting Bibliography

Billingham, Lisa. *The Complete Conductor's Guide to Laban Movement Theory.* Chicago: GIA, 2009

This book is a thoughtful and practical introduction to Laban's life and theories, perfect for conductors seeking to better connect their understanding of a musical score to their actions on the podium. The book also contains a "kinesthetic toolbox" to further enable conductors at all levels to bring the most meaning to their musical expression.

Damasio, Antonio. *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain.* New York: Vintage Books, 2010

This landmark book details the relationship of mirror neurons and how mirror neurons imprint all that we do as musicians. Should be required reading for all conductors and teachers of conducting.

Hartley, Linda. *Somatic Psychology: Body, Mind and Meaning.* Philadelphia: Whurr Publishers, 2004

This landmark book details how and why we develop and use body maps.

Jordan, James, Giselle Wyers, and Meade Andrews. *The Conductor's Gesture: A Practical Application of Rudolf von Laban's Movement Language.* Chicago: GIA, 2011

This volume details the historical roots of Laban's movement theories in addition to detailing a route to study and understand the Laban Efforts in Combination and gain an understanding of the geometric organization of the body.

Jordan, James. *Evoking Sound (Second Edition) with Anatomy of Conducting DVD.* Chicago: GIA, 2009

This text details basic elements of conducting technique in a sequential manner. Special chapters on Saito Conducting Technique, Breath, and Laban provide technique development information. The enclosed DVD is invaluable at mapping new conductors or re-mapping experienced conductors.

Jordan, James, Mark Moliterno, and Nova Thomas. *The Musician's Breath.* Chicago: GIA, 2011

This book details the philosophical, anatomical, and spiritual implications of breathing for conductors, and the effects of that breath upon sound.

Jordan, James, Blake Henson, and Gerald Custer. *Conducting Technique Etudes: Harmonic Rhythm Rudiments and Laban Effort Rudiments.* Chicago: GIA, 2013

This book (workbook) uses etudes that were composed to develop conducting technique to be imprinted with harmonic rhythm. Exercises are in all meters and vary in length. The book also contains multiple copies of conducting observation scales and multiple copies of etudes to study possible Laban movement choices. Examples can be sung or played by instrumental ensembles.

Laban, Rudolf. *The Mastery of Movement.* Revised by Lisa Ullman. Boston, Plays, Inc., 1950

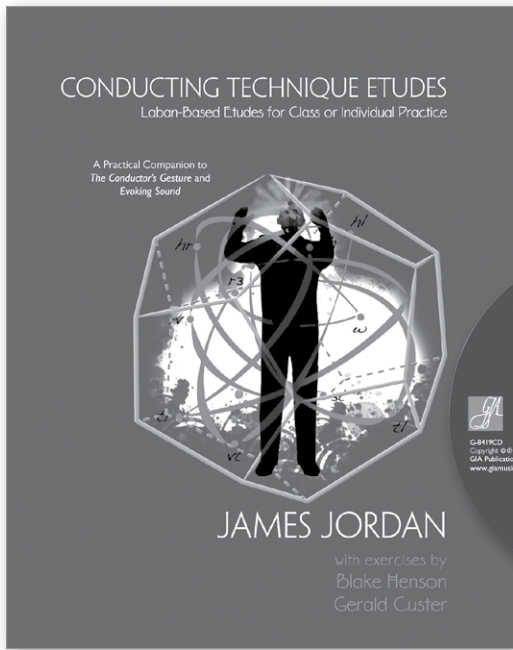
This is the original source of Laban Movement Observation and Effort Shape Language.

Moore, Carol-Lynne, and Kaoru Yamamoto. *Beyond Words: Movement Observation and Analysis.* London: Routledge, 2012

This revealing book details Laban's insistence that the only way we can learn to move is through SKILLED movement observation.

Swain, Joseph P. *Harmonic Rhythm.* London: Oxford University Press, 2000

This book details the importance of understanding harmonic rhythm and the effects of that understanding upon music performance.



Conducting Technique Etudes

Harmonic Rhythm Rudiments and Laban Effort Rudiments

James Jordan

with exercises by Blake Henson
and Gerald Custer

A companion to *Evoking Sound* (Second Edition)
and *The Conductor's Gesture*

Examples recorded on included CD



In this volume of etudes for conductors, James Jordan details a ground-breaking pedagogy for the development of conducting skills. This method is based on a sequential harmonic process to inform and define conducting gesture.

This book is revolutionary because it employs a process of score study to develop what Dr. Jordan calls “kinesthetic/harmonic audiation.” Conductors of all skill levels will profoundly benefit from these new ideas.

While instrumentalists and keyboardists for decades have had books of daily “etudes” for the development of technique, conducting pedagogy has not had the benefit of such a rigorous technical course of study.

This book teaches conductors to make gestural decisions based upon harmonic rhythm and uses the gestural vocabulary of Rudolf Laban as the beginning “vocabulary” from which a conductor can make decisions. This book of etudes differs from other approaches because it views harmonic progression as the primary vehicle by which to learn conducting technique. This volume contains:

Harmonic Rudiment Exercises for acquisition of the Laban Efforts of Float, Wring, Press, Dab, Glide, Slash, and Punch

Exercises that can be used in both Choral and Instrumental Classes

A sequential and extensive series of Conducting Etudes—in all meters and articulations that ask conductors to explore changes in Harmonic Rhythm—without influencing melody

A review of the most important parts of the conductor's anatomy that are vital to expressive technique

Etudes that teach conductors to make gestural decisions based upon an audiated and kinesthetic understanding of harmonic progression

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