

Style in Conducting
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INTRODUCTION

We all start from the same black notes on the white page – the symbols the composer has left us of the music he conceived – and yet no two performances are the same.

The poet and the playwright likewise leave us with black symbols on the white page. If each of the gentlemen in this front row were to read from the same page of, let us say, *Much Ado About Nothing*, they would be speaking the same words, and placing them in the same context. Each of their performances would reflect a distinct character though which derives from them – from the performer.

We are all the same, and yet we are all different. Thank God. It is those subtle differences among humanity which transform the merely mechanical into human art. It means that in art there is no definitive performance. Thank God. If there were such a thing as a definitive performance, a masterpiece of music could be played once, perfectly. Then there would be no more need to do it again – and we'd all be out of jobs.

We can be true to the composer's original intention, and we must, and still remain true to ourselves as we must. As a conductor and interpreter of music, it is our professional responsibility to search in the score for the clues the composer has left us to understand his music – the black symbols on the white page.

Part I – CONCEPTS (I) – 1.1 – The power of music – The most abstract of the arts

Sound, created in an instant, * dies in the same instant. The only way we can perceive music therefore is through the exercise of our memory, and our imagination. We savor what we have heard; we anticipate what is coming. It appeals to our intellect, and it plays upon our emotions.

As there is nothing to feel, smell, taste or see, but only to hear, music is the most abstract of all the arts. Being completely internalized, it is the most personal, and the most powerful of the arts. As great music deeply engages both the head and the heart, and touches our soul, it appeals to the most highly developed and sophisticated segment of civil society.

Music was considered by the ancient Greeks to be one the seven liberal arts and sciences – with grammar, rhetoric, logic; mathematics, geometry and astronomy. Music though is the only one which we learn participatively, in ensembles, rather than competitively. As such, it is the only academic discipline which fosters social harmony.

If every future citizen from 8 to 14 were singing or playing in one of our ensembles, the nation would be a far saner, safer place.

1.2 – The pyramid of music – A great, dynamic, interactive continuum

The pyramid of music comprises five sections, set like building blocks one upon the other in a great, dynamic, interactive continuum. The foundation of that pyramid is the audience. These are the people who listen to music live or recorded as an occasional part of their lives, turning to music to lift them from the mundane concerns of daily routine.

From the audience come the students, students of any age, who comprise the next section of the pyramid. Students are listeners who have made musical study an active part of their lives. From the students come the amateurs, the heart of the structure. Amateurs are former students who have made music a continuing part of their lives.

From the amateurs come the professionals, former amateurs who have moved music to the center of their lives. As teachers, coaches and conductors, we cement together the interlocking sections of the pyramid. And from the professionals come the great artists who have developed international careers – maestros. The greater are the maestros, the more they inspire and lift that structure.

But the strength of the entire pyramid of music comes from the audience, the foundation on which it rests.

It is important for us to understand this interactive structure. The distinction between the central three levels of performing musicians – students, amateurs and professionals – is essentially a matter of mission. It is not qualitative. There is a considerable overlap of performance standards, and there are examples of great excellence among all three.

1.3 The mission of music – The relationship of preparation and performance

The mission of our ensembles may be described in terms of the relationship between preparation and performance; that is, of the relative emphasis on rehearsal and concert.

Those of us who work with professional orchestras, concert bands and choruses know that the entire focus of professional activity is on the concert. Those expensive and irreplaceable rehearsals are merely the means for preparing concerts.

The most businesslike professional ensembles are those that schedule just enough rehearsal to prepare the program at optimum performance level, so that non income-producing rehearsal time is not spent needlessly. The conductor's primary responsibility is to make professional rehearsals efficient and effective.

An amateur or community ensemble has a different mission. Their central purpose is to come together regularly on a recurring basis for the pleasure of making music together. That takes place during the weekly or fortnightly rehearsals. The concert is the dessert.

The concert marks the conclusion of the time spent together enjoying the traverse through the musical program, and it offers an occasion to share the music with friends and

families. For an amateur activity, the main emphasis is on the rehearsals. The conductor's primary responsibility is to make amateur rehearsals engaging and entertaining.

A student orchestra, band or chorus has a still different mission. Again the focus is on the process, here the process of learning, which takes place during the course of the rehearsals. The concert too is an educational experience, and an occasion to prove the learning to families and friends.

So for a student activity, again, the focus is on the rehearsals. The conductor's primary responsibility is to make student rehearsals exploratory and educational, helping the players assimilate well formed concepts and techniques in order to develop as performing musicians.

Part II – CONCEPTS (II) – 2.1 – The dimensions of music – The starting point of music

The aural structure of music is defined by the acoustical dimensions of tempo, pitch, and volume. Accordingly, all music is circumscribed within the simple parameters of slow to fast, low to high, soft to loud; and delineated by such annotations as *andante* and *allegro*, *do re mi*, *F-sharp* and *B-flat*, *pianissimo* and *mezzoforte*.

Our professional responsibility begins with studious scrutiny of the combinations and permutations of those mechanical details in the score, in order to determine the style and character of the interpretation – of our interpretation.

2.2 The levels of music – To touch the heart as well as the head

The great Pablo Casals was once asked “Maestro, if you had to sightread a concert, how would you prepare?” To which he responded, “Scales, my boy, I would practice scales.”

The basic level of music, as in all art, is the level of technique, the command of scales and arpeggios, metric and rhythmic patterns, dynamics – the tools and elements with which we work. But technique without expression is merely mechanical, and dry as the dust.

There is an essential second level at which the notes become animated with expression to touch the heart as well as the head, and thus to become music.

I long thought that art had two levels, technical and expressive. A few years ago I finally came to the realization that there is good expression – and there is bad expression.

The application of discretion and taste makes a profound difference in art. And so the final level of music is the level of interpretation. And that is where we come in. It is precisely the element of interpretive taste which allows a work of music, a work of art, to become timeless and universal, and thus to be considered great.

Part III – AT THE WORKDESK (I) – 3.1 – Considerations of tempo – Finding the flow

The symbols which the composer has left us include not only the black notes on the white page, but also indications describing the characteristic speed of the music, the first element we have to set.

The bulk of our repertoire comes from a period when composers used such terms as allegro, andante and adagio to indicate tempos in the range from slow to fast. How can we decide what is allegro? How can we determine what is allegro to us, as we did when we intuitively settled on the pace in our reading from *Much Ado About Nothing*? How do we find our allegro, our andante, our adagio?

Of course these were not foreign words to a musician of the time, nor are they to us, since they are in the language of music, which we have borrowed from Italian. If we were to ask an Italian, "what does allegro mean?", he would respond that it means cheerful, happy, merry. So how fast is cheerful, happy, merry?

As music is a human art, every element of music is reflected in movement of the human body. If I'm going someplace when I'm happy, I'm charged up, and I reflect that charged mood by walking energetically like this. This is my allegro. Does it mean that precisely this tempo is allegro? Is it allegro for everybody? Are there shades of allegro?

You, Sir, are you feeling happy? Will you kindly walk over there for me, cheerfully please, so that we might see your allegro? And you, Madam, over there? And you, young man, over there, with a nice merry smile?

We can see, so long as the cheerful, happy, merry character is preserved, there is a certain tolerance too to allegro. [Thank you.] Tempo is not a mechanical thing at all. It relates to who's doing it, and where. We take more measured tempos in large halls than we do in small halls, where the reverberation is shorter and the response quicker. We also tend to take more measured tempos as we mature, and our perception of time becomes based on a longer elapsed memory.

All tempos find their natural flow in movement of the human body. Largo, for example, is best shown with motions that are broad, generous, large.

But while tempo generally reflects the movement of the human body, it specifically relates to mood. Andante, for example, reflects a different mood and a different pace from allegro. Its Italian meaning is going, flowing. So how fast is going, flowing? If I'm going somewhere when I'm relaxed, not charged up, I reflect that casual mood by walking like this, andante.

If my mood is completely at peace with the world, I might be just strolling along at ease, adagio, like this. That's different from *lento*, slow. What is our mood when we walk slowly like this, *lento*? Pensive, we might say, or sad. At the other end of the scale is *presto*, quick, like this, the way we hurry along with quick steps when we are pressed for time.

3.2 – Considerations of meter – Feeling the pulse

Beat patterns of a number of beats per measure are derived from those regular pulses within tempo. I sometime observe young conductors waving the wood as if every pulse bore the same weight. If all the pulses carried the same weight, the music would of course feel like one, one, one, one.

Sometimes it does. That's what Beethoven instructed us for the scherzo of the ninth symphony, which he wrote in 3/4 time, conducted in one to the bar. *** But that one to the bar scherzo is special. Most of our repertoire comprises music in metric units of two or more pulses, in which not all the pulses are of the same weight.

Beethoven wrote in quattro battute in that scherzo, indicating that the measures were grouped in periods of four. He did not write the music in 12/4, as he could have, uniting every four measures into a super measure. He had good reason. If he had, the relentless drive he sought for his powerful scherzo *** would have been transformed into the lighter feeling of a dance. ***

It is not enough merely to project the pulse; we must also portray the characteristic shape of the meter. Do you show this in your conducting? Do you feel the different weight of each pulse? Those subtle inflections in the metric pattern allow us to distinguish the march *** from the dance *** and from the song. ***

But there is more to meter than its characteristic shape. The musical phrase flows between the beats within the metric unit, as in the Beethoven scherzo. *** But it also flows between the measures, crossing the barline and connecting the metric units. ***

If there is problem with young players seeming to be bound up in the music, more often than not it's an unthinking reaction to the barline. There it is, periodically poking up through all the lines and spaces and visibly taking extra space in the process, irrespective of the musical phrase.

Some phrases benefit from defining and containing those metric units, but most phrases flow differently. Romantic music is made to feel more persuasive and inevitable by flowing through the barline, connecting the metric units. Imagine the Tchaikovsky fifth without that flow; it would sound like this. ***

3.3 – Considerations of rhythm – Deriving from the pulse

Rhythms are based on the pulse or beat, and there are only two complementary aspects of rhythm – beats may be linked, and beats may be divided. Half notes, dotted notes and syncopated notes all bridge the pulse. Eighth notes, quintuplets and 32nd notes all divide the pulse. This is not rocket science. Still, rhythmic problems creep into our rehearsals.

Sometimes, like the phenomenon of the intrusive barline, misreadings stem from the way

the music is laid out on the page. Publishers like to fill the printed page efficiently by giving less space to a whole note than to a string of 32nd notes, each of which they reason the player has to read clearly. In some printed music though, what the eye sees is so contrary to the flow of rhythms that players have to take time to figure out beats and subdivisions and mark them into their parts. With all the pencil marks, the brain has to do double duty under pressure to ensure that they play correctly, so those passages remain danger points in performance.

I think this is wrong, and we have to compensate.

If the aural flow of the rhythms were reflected in the graphic image of the notes, with every measure in the meter approximately the same length, the eye could travel at a uniform rate across the line. Certainly, players would have to look closely at pitches in a fast passage where the notes are printed close together. They normally practice that kind of a passage anyway though, and after getting it down solid they no longer pay attention to individual notes.

Regardless of the vagaries of the printed music, the final responsibility for the quality of the performance lies with us. When the conductor projects variations in the flow of rhythmic patterns visually in the travel of the baton, it is helpful to the players both mechanically and interpretively. ***

Part IV – AT THE WORKDESK (II) – 4.1 – Considerations of sonority – To ensure tonal beauty

Producing a beautiful sonority from the orchestra is the hallmark of a great conductor. After setting the tempo (which we do with the upbeat), our main mission is to shape the sound of the orchestra. That sound is certainly influenced by a judicious choice of tempos which allow the sonorities time to sound, inflect the pulse and energize the rhythms. Whether the music is soft or loud, it must have energy to be expressive. Without energy, there is no expression. But sonority transcends pulse and rhythm.

The symbols the composer has left us include a set of dynamic markings indicating the range of volume from soft to loud for any given passage or instrument. And again I pose the question, how can we decide on the quality of mezzopiano, for example, as we did intuitively in our reading from Much Ado About Nothing

If I should be conversing with a small group of friends like these three nice people in the middle of the front row, I would speak comfortably. And since the exchange is just within our circle, there is no need to project. This medium dynamic without projection is mezzopiano, the level of a private conversation. If I wish to address a larger group within the room, I would simply project my voice so they could hear me comfortably. This medium dynamic with projection is mezzoforte, the level of a projected conversation. Mezzopiano; mezzoforte.

The character of piano reflects a different human situation, one calling for gentleness. I

think of it as talking to a baby or a lover, soft enough so that it would be overheard by others in the same room only if they were listening. This is piano, soft. The character of forte is akin to calling. I think of it as loud enough to attract attention in the room from people outside the group, even if they were not listening. This is loud, forte.

To me, the interesting thing about those four basic dynamic levels is that they all reflect normal human situations without special energy. There are at least two further dynamic levels in either direction, extending the range of sonority energetically to very very soft, and to very very loud.

The character of pianissimo suggests to me a secret exchange between two people keeping their voices down. It might be overheard in the same room only if someone were listening attentively. This is pianissimo. The character of fortissimo is akin to yelling. I think of it as an argument loud enough to attract attention from others outside the room, even if they were not listening. This is fortissimo.

Tchaikovsky may have over-romanticized by writing several p's more, but I certainly acknowledge pianississimo, very very soft. I think of it as the dead quiet of two conspirators exchanging a dread secret, very carefully keeping their voices in a whisper so soft that even the other has to listen attentively to hear it. This is pianississimo. And to counterbalance, there is fortississimo, very very loud. The sonority must also possess much energy, as we use when shouting to a distant person, like this. Fortississimo.

Excesses sound mechanical and dehumanized. The essential distinction between these extreme musical dynamics and the disintegration into noise is control.

Tchaikovsky used as many as four f's, fortissississimo, in his scores, and an even greater number of p's. Verdi wrote *con tutti forza* for intensely dramatic scenes in his operas. I didn't include these theoretical levels in my earlier comments on dynamics. I didn't think I could demonstrate them alone, and I couldn't think of apt words to characterize them. Obviously they would require very very great energy to produce and to control. But they are dangerously heroic, and they stray towards a realm that is not beautiful.

Moreover, those composers never experienced the virile playing of American brass players today.

4.2 – Considerations of balance – To proportion the instruments

Brass players can play louder than other players. Should they? How can we make a reasonable adjustment to balance together different instruments (not forgetting also the human voice)? How much louder is a brass instrument than another instrument?

Rimsky-Korsakov gave us a very simple formula, a rule of thumb for considering the relative weight of disparate instruments; it's in his *Treatise on Orchestration*. Two string instruments, he wrote, are roughly equal in weight to one woodwind instrument. Two woodwinds are roughly equal in weight to one horn. And two horns are roughly equal in

weight to one brass or percussion instrument.

My instrument was the tuba, which I played in the Montreal Symphony, a fine orchestra. It was not difficult for me to match the sonority of a pair of our horn players. They in turn could easily balance the sonority of all four bassoons. And our bassoons could hold their own against the sonority of the entire section of eight contrabasses.

Applying Rimsky's rule, and listening to the sound of a good orchestra, it seems clear that eight accomplished contrabasses are indeed a proper number to balance naturally with one healthy tuba.

A brass section of a dozen players would balance very nicely with a string section of 80. Theoretically. Since most orchestras do not field so many strings, it is the responsibility of the brass players to tone down their sonority to fit into the general orchestral texture.

When we want to produce a balanced, beautiful tutti from the full orchestra, the section we must address is the strings. Mahler called for a string section of 8, 10, 12, 14, and 16 players, a total of 60 strings, and this has become the established norm for a major orchestra today. That is a lot of muscle. And that's the way I think of the string section, as the muscle of the orchestra, the section from which we draw the energy for sonority.

What should we look for from the winds then, if not for volume?

Color.

The wind instruments should not give less than the energy needed to support the general dynamic character, a delicate point. What we want from the winds though is their characteristic tonal coloring, and not merely volume of sound.

4.3 – Considerations of harmony – To proportion the parts

There is still a further consideration. We must also balance the overall voicing so that the harmonies sound.

Harmony in four voices finds its purist application in the chorus, consisting of bass, tenor, alto and soprano parts. We don't normally speak of the voicing in that order, but that is indeed the order in which partials are acoustically produced in the harmonic series. A beautifully balanced chord will have a resonant bass and progressively less prominent chord members ascending to the soprano, which, because of its elevated pitch, needs only to be equal in weight to sound dominant.

Acoustical balance is enormously important. If the harmonic partials are properly balanced, the chords will naturally tend to fall in tune. If the chords are in tune, the sonorities will naturally tend to resonate. If the sonorities are resonant, the tone will naturally tend to glow. And if the tone glows, the conductor will probably become famous.

Music is ubiquitously described as consisting of melody, harmony and bass, and players are admonished to listen to the melody in order to maintain good ensemble. I have a different idea. In order to maintain healthy harmonies, I ask the players to listen down, not up.

I ask the first violins to listen to the sound of the seconds, not the other way around. The second violins should listen to the sound of the violas. The violas listen to the sound of the violoncellos, the true bass of the orchestra. The violoncellos listen to the sound of the contrabasses. And the contrabasses ... listen to God.

Part V – ON THE PODIUM (I) – 5.1 – Considerations of seating – To pervade and support the harmonic continuum

If sound is built up from the bass, it makes sense to place the bass instruments in the acoustical center of the ensemble, where the bass sonority can pervade and support the entire harmonic continuum.

During the baroque, when the basso continuo was focal to musical direction, the players of melodic instruments arranged themselves informally around the continuo group. The Vienna Philharmonic still maintains its tradition of seating the violoncellos in the middle of the string body, and ranging the contrabass section across the back of the orchestra. In most choruses today, the men are centered between the sopranos and the altos in order to achieve optimum blend of men's and women's voices.

Mahler and Toscanini both seated their orchestras (including the New York Philharmonic) with the lower strings centered between the first and second violin sections, for exactly the same reason. I love the sound of the second violins playing across from the first violins. There the part can be heard as an exposed, independent voice rather than cast in the shadow of the firsts. Exchanges between the two violin sections which normally pass unnoticed, gain delightful clarity when heard stereophonically.

The question is rather, where should we place the violas?

The violas provide the bridge between the lower and upper strings, melding the string harmony into one beautiful, perfect and complete whole. Toscanini, himself a cellist, obviously felt that the viola sound needed to be favored over that of the violoncellos. He sat the violas with their f-holes facing the audience, on his left, like the first violins. In this configuration, I like to think that the viola tone warms the sound of the first violins, and the violoncello tone warms the sound of the second violins.

Contrabasses sound best centered behind the lower strings, where their sonority can pervade and support the entire harmonic continuum. In a symphony orchestra though, the section has to move aside so that the woodwinds can see the conductor. Still they must remain, as much as practicable, sonically contiguous with the violoncello section.

In virtually every orchestra, the woodwinds, soloists of the orchestra, sit centered behind the strings, raised on platforms so their characteristic tonal coloring can be heard with clarity in solo passages. Take note that they do need those platforms, and the clarinets and bassoons can indeed use an extra bit of height above the flutes and oboes. We know from Rimsky-Korsakov that the combined weight of a full section of triple woodwinds, a dozen players, is roughly equivalent to that of less than half of the normal complement of strings.

The brass are another matter. Knowing from the same source that a dozen brass players can swamp the sound of the string and woodwind sections combined, I really do not want to find a row of trumpets and trombones poised on the highest platform of all, their bells aimed directly at the audience. That doesn't make good sense. Certainly, fine musicians can temper their playing so they don't cover other instruments. But they sound best when they can play without having to hold back unnecessarily.

The horns I prefer to place on the left behind the violas on one side of the woodwinds, and the balance of the brass on the right behind the violoncellos on the other side, thus distributing the power of the brass section to both sides of the orchestra. The players may need to be raised, but only on platforms just high enough to see the conductor. And I canter the platforms at a 45 degree angle so that the brass bells point in toward the center mass of the orchestra.

Percussion instruments articulate the rhythms propelling the ensemble. Accordingly, I prefer to place the timpani dead center at the rear of the orchestra. For the rest of his entourage, I simply leave it to the timpanist to distribute the instruments symmetrically on each side.

These same basic principles apply to concert bands equally well. Center the lower instruments, place the percussion behind, divide and canter the brass, and disperse the upper instruments stereophonically.

5.2 – Considerations of pointing – Directional acoustics

Due to the directional nature of the trumpet and trombone tone, it matters not only how powerfully the players play, but also how they point the bell. I ask the section to play with all their bells at the same height, not staggered according to personal comfort. It not only looks good (and it does), it sounds best.

Moreover I ask brass players not to raise the bell of the instrument above the stand, for two reasons. First, I believe the direct brass tone is not beautiful; it gains warmth and lustre from the ambient resonance of the surrounding space. Second, I want to preserve the meld of tone within the orchestra fabric. Even in tutti forte, regardless of the vigorous dynamic, I don't want the orchestra texture to sound like a trumpet concerto.

There are special places though where that particular projection is merited by the

prominence of a soloistic passage. The first trombone plays a prominent if fragmented solo in Mahler's third symphony, for example, and the first horn plays a haunting series of solo horn calls in Shostakovich's tenth symphony.

There is of course another way to enhance the projection of a solo instrument, any instrument. When in your artistic judgment it seems called for, you can ask the player to stand.

There are advantages to having a solo passage played standing. The standing player is free to breathe, and free to sound. And since it is obvious to all, musicians and audience alike, that his part is truly focal to the music, it conditions the playing of all the supporting parts.

In the Mahler symphony I don't ask the solo player to stand for the big solo, but in the Shostakovich I do, and to sit again for the final distant echo.

Part VI – AT THE WORKDESK (III) – 6.1 – Factoring – To proportion the rehearsals

Our professional calling obliges us to develop an overall plan for a series of rehearsals, and a detailed plan for each rehearsal. The productive portion of a rehearsal excludes all the time taken up by the announcements, tuning, breaks and delays which beset every gathering. For our calculations, a two and half hour rehearsal would give us perhaps 120 minutes for music, not 150. Five rehearsals for a major program, as we had in Montreal, would give us a total of approximately 600 minutes to prepare the performance.

My concert recording with the Japan Philharmonic includes the Midsummer Night's Dream Overture, Symphonie Espagnole and the Eroica Symphony, a rather lengthy program comprising some 90 minutes of music. A little calculation gives us an average of $6 \frac{2}{3}$ minutes of rehearsal per minute of music on the program.

The Beethoven symphony lasts 45 minutes, the Lalo concerto 33, the Mendelssohn overture 12. At $6 \frac{2}{3}$ minutes per minute, that computes out to 300 minutes' rehearsal for the Beethoven, 220 for the Lalo and 80 for the Mendelssohn, a total of 600 minutes.

But the symphony is not only longer, it is more demanding than the concerto. The concerto is a bit more complex than the overture. Accordingly, the rehearsal factor needed to be adjusted to compensate for the relative difficulty of the works. I bumped up the Beethoven to 360 minutes of rehearsal time, a factor of 8 minutes per minute, not $6 \frac{2}{3}$. The Lalo at a factor of 5.5 got 180 minutes, and the Mendelssohn at 5 minutes per minute got 60. That's 600 minutes well used.

6.2 – Freshening – To save the less demanding works

Most conductors put the longest and most complex work on the program into rehearsal first, since it demands the largest share of the time. I like to concentrate intensively on the most challenging work during the early rehearsals, and I did this with the Beethoven.

Then the pressure can be eased up in later rehearsals so that the orchestra can relax with the music.

I also like to save the less demanding works and introduce them into the rehearsal schedule one by one. In this case we began work on the concerto in the second rehearsal, and on the overture in the third. The infusion of fresh new material helps to keep rehearsals interesting, alive and stimulating.

6.3 – Programing – To balance consistency and variety

There are a thousand and one details to a conductor's responsibilities on and off the podium. In the final analysis though, our most far-reaching decisions revolve around programing. In building valid programs, there are two basic considerations. We cannot change the orchestra. We cannot change the audience.

We have to plan programs in terms of who is going to play them, and who is going to hear them. Only when these essential conditions are met can we plan programs in terms of who is going to conduct them.

Above all there is a need to maintain a balance of variety and consistency in the overall repertoire. It suggests that it is our job to develop a wide repertoire. Bear in mind though that in order to be able to do complete justice to the music, you must love any work you conduct.

Programing is the conductor's ultimate variable. I like the quatrain "something old, something new; something borrowed and something blue," not for its formula but for its approach – for its sense of balance between consistency and variety. And like every other aspect of the art, musical programs are strongest when stamped with character and a sense of occasion.

The program on my CD with the Japan Philharmonic is an example. The Eroïca Symphony reflected the scale and the Midsummernight's Dream Overture reflected the timing of the occasion. And Symphonie Espagnole among other things suggested to me the universality of music, being a work of Spanish character, written by a French composer, performed by an Indian soloist, accompanied by a Japanese orchestra, and conducted by an American conductor.

A much different concert program was prompted by the earlier occasion of a terrible earthquake in India. The Japan Philharmonic immediately agreed to perform a charity concert for relief of victims of the disaster. Since their schedule is very full with over 150 concerts a year, and since time was a consideration, we settled on a program for string orchestra.

I wanted the program to reflect two aspects of the disaster – tragedy, and hope. For the first half of the concert, just before the intermission, Shostakovich's agonized Symphony for Strings seemed to express the torment of that terrible tragedy. For the second half,

Schubert's optimistic *Death and the Maiden* offered welcome relief from the troubled tension. And to capture the mixed emotions at the opening of the program, what better than Barber's melancholy *Adagio for Strings*?

Part VII – ON THE PODIUM (II) – 7.1 – Considerations of the field – To perceive the body language, the arc of the baton, and the animation of the eyes

It has taken a fair portion of our hour together to breeze through some of the concepts which lie behind decisions we make on the podium. That's not what you want to do though in front of your orchestra, band or chorus – at least not in major chunks of precious rehearsal time.

Rehearsals are probably effective in inverse proportion to the amount of time tied up, talking on the podium.

When the orchestra is stopped, the time which could have been used for playing is lost. Lost also is the time spent listening to the comments and absorbing the instruction. Then there is the time spent repeating the aberrant passage to correct and to check it, time when new material could have been covered instead. It is therefore at least three times more efficient to show a correction or adjustment visually – that's what the left hand is for – and so to continue the playing uninterrupted.

What you show is another topic (but remember that suggestion often can be more effective than demonstration). My concerns are rather that you be able to make corrections visually rather than verbally, whenever you can, and that the orchestra be able to see your visual signals easily and clearly at all times.

I like to keep the music stand pushed down below the field of vision, and flat, only high enough that I can turn the pages comfortably. Yes, I use the score; and yes, the score is in my head; that is not the issue here.

I want to leave the conducting field clear for communication. That field embraces the breadth of the body, and the sightline from naval to eye level. Within that field, the players of the orchestra can most easily perceive the body language, the arc of the baton, and the animation of the eyes.

Of course we can conduct outside of the field. An impression of strength is inherent in the center of gravity though, which we feel based in the center of the body, in the gut. The farther we move the tact from the center of gravity, laterally or vertically, the more we reflect a lessening of power; that is, the more we convey lightness.

Sound must be energized to flow, never to remain static. Regardless of its position, the baton should continue to reflect the dynamic flow of musical energy.

We can also show all variations of tonal character in the travel and intensity of the baton. The players produce a singing intensity with lots of bow or breath and little pressure, or

an energetic intensity with little bow or breath and lots of pressure. Mirroring that, the baton seems to sing when we show light energy in an ample arc, and to energize when we show much intensity within a short one.

The musicians do not watch the conductor all the time, as you well know. Most of the time they follow the music on their stands, and look up where they need to see changes of tempo, dynamic or character. Our responsibility is to show those changes and set the style.

Our job is not to beat one, two, three, four, mindlessly throughout the work. The orchestra doesn't need that. Something far nicer can be achieved occasionally by stilling the baton, thus focussing the orchestra's self attention on its own propulsive energy and ensemble texture, and passing ownership over to the players. Try it.

7.2 – Considerations of rehearsing – Some techniques of the trade

Sometimes tastefully soaring phrases, fluidly flowing rhythms and singing sonorities are not exactly what we hear from every section or from every player. Some phrasing, rhythms or textures become bound up, it seems, in the mechanics of the instrument or notation.

Our work is principally realized during the process of rehearsal, when we work with our musicians to prepare the performance. Rehearsal time is precious. With the large orchestras, bands and choruses we conduct, every minute of rehearsal time represents an investment of more than one man-hour.

You can do virtually anything honorable with a student group, and the players will accept your approach without question. You may apply the same techniques with an amateur group. First though you would do well to engage their understanding of the objective, so that they feel expertly and sympathetically led, and not demeaned.

You might even wish to utilize some of these techniques with a professional group, but be wary. Even if successful in your objective, you risk alienating proud professional players and calling the union down on your head.

7.2 (1) Correcting

The most universal technique I use to correct a problem is to sing the passage the way I hear it, then repeat it the way I want to hear it.

7.2 (2) Tempo

To help players to become more aware of the style of a passage, ask them to start it together alone, without you – and, by the way, without counting off. When they raise the bow or take the breath together as chamber music, they cultivate self-awareness of the relationship of the preparatory beat to the style and character of the music.

7.2 (3) Phrasing

To help players to shape musical phrases more intelligently, ask them to tell you the length of the phrase. If they are breaking the phrase, ask them if it is two, four, eight or sixteen measures in length – or another length. If they are flattening the phrase, ask them where is the point of the expressive arch. Then ask them to play the phrase without breaking it, with the peak at the proper point of climax.

7.2 (4) Rhythm

To help players to free up the rhythmic flow, ask them to play the passage without looking at their music. You can even take their parts away. When they play by heart, freed from the visual impediment of the barlines, they intuitively perceive the music organically.

7.2 (5) Repair

To help players to correct lengthy faulty passages, ask them to take up the line in short sections starting from the end, not the beginning. After the last section has been fixed correctly, then ask for the next to the last section, which, once fixed, can be continued on to the conclusion of the passage without fatigue. After that, the third last section can be addressed, and so on progressively until the entire passage is rendered correctly from beginning to end.

7.2 (6) Memory

To help players to memorize a lengthy or complex passage, do the same: start from the back end and gradually add bits progressively toward the front.

7.2 (7) Parts

To help a section to correct notes, balance or intonation in their parts, first work out the corrections in the lowest part alone, not the highest. After lowest part has been rendered correctly, then add the next higher part, and so on progressively until the entire section is playing together correctly, in balance, in tune. This not only isolates problems which the principal player or section is not responsible for, but it also avoids fatiguing him unnecessarily and dignifies his playing.

7.2 (8) Ensemble

To help players to become more sensitive to ensemble, ask them to play the passage together alone, without you. When they play together as chamber music, they cultivate awareness of the interaction of the parts. They also develop a vital sense of ownership of their own ensemble.

7.2 (9) Standing

To help players to focus the musical style and assert the prominence of their parts, ask them to play the passage standing. When they play standing while others around them are sitting, the context of the ensemble automatically produces a sense of proportion and dominance, and they intuitively play with greater concentration.

7.2 (10) Bowing

To help string players to define dynamic levels more clearly, ask them to play in a specific part of the bow. Ask them to avoid the midpoint, where it is comfortable to play but the sound has no particular character. Ask the players to consider the bow length divided into 1/6ths from the tip to the frog – pianissimo, piano, mezzopiano, mezzoforte, forte, fortissimo – and to use it that way.

7.2 (11) Singing

To help players to make a passage sound more expressive, you can ask them to sing the line, vocally. Then ask them to play it the way they sang it. You might first ask the entire orchestra to sing their parts together though, after which you can ask sections or individual players to sing. When musicians rid themselves of all mechanical impediments, the difference in their playing is amazing.

7.2 (12) Style

To help players to play more stylistically, ask them to describe for you the musical character. Ask them especially if they feel the phrase is masculine or feminine, the essential distinction in human character.

7.2 (13) Reinforcing

For reinforcement of any of these techniques of the trade, ask the remainder of the orchestra, band or chorus if they can hear a difference from before. This is a good thing to remember. It draws in the listeners, rewards the players, and lends credibility to the process.

7.3 – Considerations of concertizing – To be ready, rested, and roused

Professional players regularly perform in concert, and so develop their own personal routine to be able to deliver a proper performance at concert time. Amateur and student ensembles would likely benefit from a few words of guidance though, when the rehearsals have come to a conclusion and the concert is around the corner.

In order to give their best, the players must be ready, rested, and roused. I have a little list.

- (1) Take a good hot bath the night before the concert, so that you can get a good night's rest.
- (2) Warm up thoroughly in the morning and then put the instrument aside, so that you can relax the mind.
- (3) Enjoy a good nourishing meal four hours before the concert, so that it will be completely digested and working for you in your system.
- (4) Get to the concert hall half an hour before concert time, so that you can change, check that your instrument is okay, check that your music is okay, check that your bladder is okay, and check that the mirror smiles back at you.

CODA

As conductors, we bear a heavy responsibility to continually reexplore the score, in an unrelenting quest to refresh the memory and develop new insights into the music. Of course we can never complete the endless pursuit for perfection. But all the simple tools are in our hands, and we have the worktable of our heads and our hearts to fashion an interpretation true to the music, true to the composer, and true to ourselves.

Ultimately, our role on the podium is to shape a performance faithfully reflecting the musical conception we have developed in our own mind. To do that we return to the score, and to the study of the black notes on the white page, for music is the connection between the notes.