

**PLEASE CONDUCT, DON'T TALK**  
**From the Rear Row and Lowest Voice**  
**A Tuba Player's Reminders for Community Band Conductors**

David C. McCormick

The Midwest Clinic

December 16, 2005

Sponsored by the Association of Concert Bands

**“Give a musician a baton, and it goes to his mouth.”**

(Rochester Philharmonic violinist, related by Marvin Rabin, emeritus professor, University of Wisconsin)

**“Speaking about music is like dancing about nuclear physics.”**

(An anonymous wise person)

**“I am told and I forget, I read and I remember,**

**I do and I understand.”**

(Ancient Chinese proverb)

**“Time is every person's most precious resource. If wasted, it can never be recouped, and all remaining years of life are diminished.”**

(Composer/Conductor Alfred Reed)

- I. You conduct, we'll play enthusiastically. You talk, we'll lose interest. Music is an aural art, not verbal.
- II. Words are inadequate for most things musical. Of the relatively few words that can apply to music, most can be expressed by conducting--louder, softer, faster, slower, *legato*, *staccato*, accent, *marcato*, *cantabile*, etc.
- III. Please speak only in those rare instances when the subject can't be communicated visually. Conducting is visual, not verbal. Singing is better than speaking. Expect speaking to have little or no effect. Record rehearsal and measure the amount of time talking; take note of ineffective words.
- IV. I present nothing new about baton technique, but I give a player's perspective.
- V. Our job as players is to execute the conductor's interpretation.
- VI. Your job as conductor is to do what we players cannot do for ourselves.
- VII. Players learn to watch the conductor most effectively when they discover that performance improves and enjoyment increases, but telling us to watch has no effect. Demand that we play everything that is written. Don't necessarily perform passages the same way every time. Make certain that your instructions

