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Conducting with Commitment: Finding a Visceral Connection to the Music

- Score → Head → Heart → Body → Arms → Ensemble → Audience
- What are my artistic priorities? What kind of experience do I want to create for the students in my ensemble?
- Stimulus value
- The visceral connection to music should generate our movement.
- Body mechanics
 - Things that feel good and familiar often aren't helpful.
 - Idiosyncrasy is the absence of technique; it is visual white noise.
 - Being a better conductor begins with eliminating movements that are meaningless.
 - A relaxed and efficient setup provides the groundwork for communicating your ideas.
 - In order to lead, you have to be ahead of your group.
 - Why do conductors give the beat?

- Tension is the enemy!
 - Intention and intensity should not equal tension. Tension is never good. Tension is static and indicates the absence of movement/flow. All art needs dynamic potential.
 - Don't confuse the amount of motion with the amount of intention.
 - Power requires muscle, not being muscle-bound.

- Breath and torso
 - How connected to the music do I feel, and how does it make me move?
 - The more character you feel in your body (and face) the easier it is to communicate character in your arms.
 - Taking a good breath and giving a good breath aren't the same thing.
 - Lifting – rather than compressing – the sound creates resonance.
 - Listen with your torso.

- Using the baton
 - The beat pattern isn't important unless it goes the wrong way or is out of time.
 - Conduct breath/bow, not beats.
 - Tap on a plane to feel the energy going to the tip of the stick.
 - Use the baton for expressive purposes (pulling, pushing, poking, stabbing, skating, sweeping, stroking), not just time-beating.
 - Look through your baton at the people you want to conduct.

- Improvisation
 - How does it sound? If it doesn't sound good, be ready to do something different!
 - What are you willing to do to get what you want?
 - How do we listen? What is the purpose of our listening?

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT MUSIC

“Music is revelation! It must say something, it must tell a truth that is human or divine or both. Just delivering notes, even if it’s perfect, doesn’t give this revelation at all. Performance is a personal witness, it is the way the conductor sees its meaning or message. It is in his mind, and he has caught a glimpse of the composer’s vision and gives it just as personally as if the composer would conduct it.”

–Herbert Blomstedt

“I think of the score as the genuine creation of an individual’s mind, reflecting, in a way, human frailties eventually reaching for heaven, revealing poetic summits of beauty or even ugliness, but always human, always the patent result of an intelligent earthy mind sharing a poetic essence in sounds with us.”

–Eduardo Mata

“The wonderful thing about the conducting profession is that no matter how many times you perform a piece, it is always a premiere. Something different will happen each time, and you will have found something new. I don’t care if it’s one new bar. That one bar will make the piece a brand new experience. We can be bored with the periphery of conducting, God knows, but the actual music-making is never boring, because something is always brand new in the piece. You can run fill tilt after the repertoire for your entire life and may find only near the end of your life that you will have caught up a little bit. That’s wonderful.”

–André Previn

“One of the main factors that contribute to interpretation is time; there are no short cuts. Real insight comes only after doing the pieces over and over and over again, and daring to go further each time. Every time I pick up a score, I see new things. I don’t live my life carefully, I don’t believe in the status quo, and I don’t believe I know it all. If anything, I think that I know too little. I have thousands of questions and not many answers, but by posing the questions to myself and to fellow musicians, I can perhaps come a little closer to the core.”

–Edo de Waart

AN EXCERPT FROM

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience

by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

On the **phenomenology of enjoyment:**

“First, the experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing.

Second, we must be able to concentrate on what we are doing.

Third and fourth, the concentration is usually possible because the task undertaken has clear goals and provides immediate feedback.

Fifth, one acts with a deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life.

Sixth, enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions.

Seventh, concern for the self disappears, yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over.

Finally, the sense of the duration of time is altered; hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours.

The combination of all these elements causes a sense of deep enjoyment that is so rewarding people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it.”

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