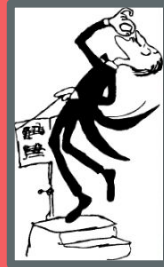


**Collaborating Through  
Gesture: *Practical Approaches for  
Breaking Down Barriers in  
Communication***



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*Who possesses an **insecurity**  
on the podium?*



# Why are we insecure on the podium?

- We shift gears and become primarily conductors with 2 semesters of training...
  - Compared to years of study on our instrument
- We don't know the score well enough...sigh...
- We feel awkward moving our bodies in this manner...
- Our conducting doesn't seem to work...and we don't know why
- Our “gesture toolbox” is lacking so we just beat time...
- We compare ourselves to the great conductors of the world...
- Conducting doesn't seem student-centered...
- *...what else?*



# What is Conducting?

## Study

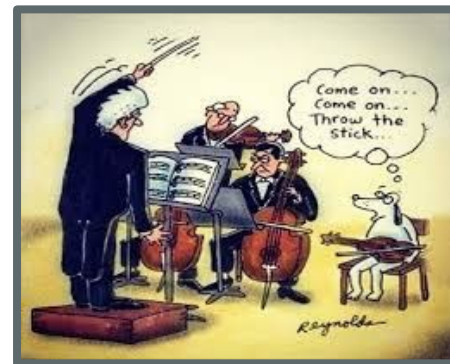
- Come to the table with a plan - interpretation!

## Non-verbal communication

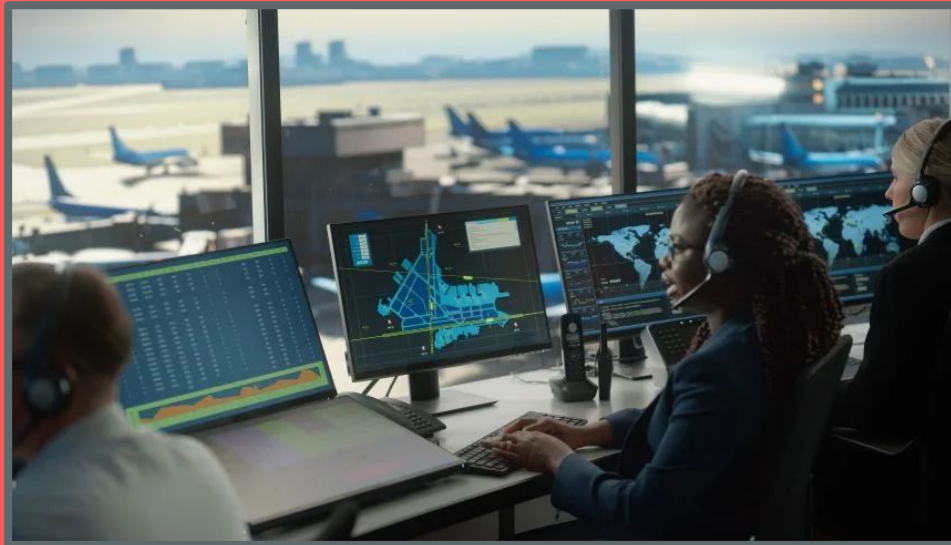
- Modeling the sound and story through gesture
- Guiding listening
- **How** and **when** - coordination/unification!
- When we talk, we are “rehearsing”

## Efficiency

- Shared governance takes time



# How is conducting... “designed to work?”



# Air traffic control!

## Air traffic control analogy

- Trust
- Highly trained constituents
- Preparedness
- Autonomy but guided by common purpose
- Predictability (so the unpredictable stands out!)
- Efficiency



# The reality is...

**Are students AREN'T pros...they are still building their skill sets**

**Our insecurity on the podium radiates to the students**

**Our students are often too busy trying to play the notes to watch**

**Rehearsals are boring when we talk too much**

**They are approaching ensemble with varied levels of student experience and engagement**

**Don't know how to glean information from the conductor**

**The implications of school "hierarchy" restricts the collaborative spirit**

**The pace of growth is slow - perhaps in part because we have too much rehearsal time?**

**Classroom management concerns which may distract from the mission**

**Conducted ensembles aren't fully democratic - time constraints and the need for product!**





Start with our **students!**

# They cannot fully engage in the artistic process if the music is too difficult

- If they cannot learn the notes in the first  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the “cycle,” the music is too technically demanding
- “Reach” pieces are a slight exception
- This rule applies when the goal is music making, not note performance
- If students are in survival mode, they won’t listen or watch, and definitely won’t react musically
- It’s not a competition - it’s about helping kids fall in love with music and the numinous nature of ensemble experiences!

**FAERIE'S AIRE and DEATH WALTZ**  
(from “A Tribute to Zdenko G. Fibich”) Words and Music by John Stump  
Arranged by Accident

Based on a Cro-magnon skinning chant

© Copyright 1980 John Stump  
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# They see you as a *teacher*, not a *collaborative musician*



- *Be an authentic musician, not a patronizing teacher*
- *Think: “air traffic control!” (trust)*
- *Make space for your student’s interpretive ideas!*
- *Clarify who “has the con” - it’s not always us!!!!*
- *If the sound must be beautiful, your gesture must be beautiful!*
- *“Let’s try again...” (heightens awareness)*

***Conductors...***

...start

...stop

...and modify time

***The players...***

...maintain time!



**Hold all constituents accountable!**

# Calibration & Sensitization

## Calibration

### Translating gestures into actions:

- *What does it mean?*
- *How do I do it on my instrument?*
- *Give me time to process!*
- *Healthy repetition for skill development!*
- *When you do speak - use descriptive language*

### Let students in on your process

- *Why am I doing this gesture?*
- *Tie back to story/study of score!*
- *Let them develop the gesture that you use?!?*

## Heightening sensitivity

*Wait...that was conducting? I thought you were swatting at a fly!*

**Describe in EXACT detail, the image below...no detail is too obvious**



# Get your students conducting!

Theatre exercises/games - Charades!

**Move to the music!** (turn off the lights/close eyes for this...)

*Happy Birthday* OR *Mary Had a Little Lamb* OR an excerpt from your rep

**Students to lead warm-ups** (this is not so you can take attendance!!!)

Engage them in rehearsal: *“Sally...if you were me, what might you tell the clarinets?”*

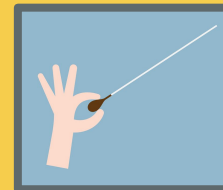
Encourage them to **MOVE** when they perform (“conduct” your sections!)

Conduct phrases, not beats - forces musicians to listen - heightens sensitivity

In place of describing music, have them “conduct” it for you

Have them “conduct” (physical movements) when they sing

Have them conduct and **YOU** play...perform **EXACTLY** what they show you!



# Teach our students to listen!

## Where to listen at any given moment in a piece

- *"Joe - who plays the same melodic line as you?"*
- *"Trombones...listen to the horns and mimic their note length."*
- *"Flutes...pay the timpanist an objective complement!"*
- Ask more...tell less: *"saxes...your line stagnates...why? How do we fix it?"*
- Guide listening by *showing* whenever possible
- Stop conducting/deputize soloists or sections to lead
- Program a work with a soloist! (LISTEN and the watch conductor)

## Listening to great music!

- Teach listening through the analysis of a painting! - Heightening their awareness!
- Start a listening club!
- Asynchronous assignments

Develop confidence, leadership, and listening skills through chamber experiences



# Host guest conductors at your school!!!



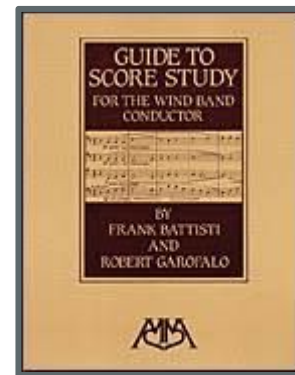
# How do **WE** improve?



# Select music that inspires you!

## Music that you'll want to study!!

- Battisti/Garofalo checklist - spend a few moments each day reading through the piece at your desk
- Experiment with gestures for specific moments in the privacy of your work space
- Develop a score marking system that guides your internalization of the music



### SUMMARY of the SCORE STUDY PROCESS

Steps:

#### 1. SCORE ORIENTATION

**Objective:** To acquire an overview of the entire work.

**Method** (3 phases):

- A. Read all information printed on the cover and on the introductory pages to the score.
- B. Examine first full page of music and answer two questions:
  1. Is this a transposed score or is it a score in C?
  2. Is there anything unusual about the instrumentation and score layout?
- C. Leaf through of score:
  1. Observe all tempos, meters, and key signatures.
  2. Identify and clarify unfamiliar musical terms and notation.
  3. Determine an appropriate slow reading pulse.

#### 2. SCORE READINGS

**Objectives:** To achieve an overall sound image of the music in the mind and to develop an intuitive musical feeling for the expressive potential of the music.

**Method:**

- A. Use a comfortable slow reading pulse.
- B. Don't stop.
- C. Give full reign to your musical imagination, feelings, and intuition.
- D. Do not analyze details or attempt to memorize the music.
- E. Do not use the piano or listen to recordings.
- F. Reread the score several times every day until you have achieved the objectives of step 2 in a natural way.

#### 3. SCORE ANALYSIS

**Objective:** To acquire detailed knowledge of all components of the composition.

**Method:**

- A. Analyze each component of the music:
  1. Melody
  2. Harmony
  3. Form
  4. Rhythm (tempo, meter, rhythm)
  5. Orchestration and texture
  6. Dynamics
  7. Stylistic articulations and expressive terms.
- B. Complete a synthesis analysis of the composition.

#### 4. SCORE INTERPRETATION (*The Goal of Score Study*)

**Objective:** To achieve a personal interpretive image of the music in your mind.

**Method:**

- A. Apply all score knowledge and insight acquired through score study in arriving at your interpretation of the music.
- B. Resolve questions bearing on the interpretation of non-objective elements of the music:
  1. Tempi
  2. Phrasing (melodic, harmonic, rhythmic)
  3. Dynamics (vertical, horizontal)
  4. Timbres and textures
  5. Stylistic matters
- C. Refine your interpretive sound image of the music as you play it back in your mind.

Concurrently with score study, investigate background information about the composer, the composition, and the style period.

*Conduct the music in your mind, not the  
music you are hearing...REACT to the  
music you are hearing!*

**Ask yourself:** *do I have to talk or can I show it?*

# Arm independence!

- Elizabeth Green exercises (let's try a few)
- Beat time and hold a conversation or read a document or practice conducting a piece in the "wrong" meter
- Switch baton hands!



In the Schoenberg *Variations* there is a very rancid odor of the midnight oil. This is machine-made music, the fruit of travail and long sleepless hours. . . But when it is all done, one feels that Schoenberg reached some such conclusion as 'a straight line tangent to a circle is perpendicular to the radius drawn to the point of contact.' Schoenberg's music is huge labor to demonstrate a simple enough theorem, namely, that if you employ the chromatic scale as fundamental, you can make some very weird harmonies.  
(New York Sun, October 23, 1929)

# Expand your gesture toolbox!

Observe great conductors!

Let's watch Leonard Bernstein work:

- What are you seeing?
- No detail is too obvious.
- Be exact in your description.
- Steal gestures - pause - try them!
- Slow the video to get it just right
- Scads of great content on YouTube!

**Patterns serve a purpose but change character of the patterns to model the style of the music**



# Your face is the most underutilized tool!

*Facial expressions require practice*

**Go to the mirror...make these faces!**

- Exhilaration
- Melancholy
- Anger
- Contentment



# Conduct phrases, not beats!

- What are your takeaways from observing these conductors?
- How does their conducting empower the players to contribute in a meaningful way?
- What can you realistically apply with your ensemble? More than you may think!!!
- Breaking the conducting rules is OK!!
  - It doesn't matter what you do so long as direction changes happen in time!
- Slowly roll this out with a safe piece
- Make this about exploration!!!



# Video record your rehearsals!

## Here are some reflection prompts...

- Is my technique consistent or inconsistent?
- Is my prep in the same tempo as the downbeat?
- Is the size/style of my gesture in alignment with the musical moment?
- Have I developed “nervous habits?”
- Do I promote a “vibe of trust?” (if not, what is my podium vibe?)
- Am I insistent when they miss it the first time?
- Am I leading or following?
- Am I helping them calibrate to my gestures - do they react appropriately?
- Am I illuminating the magical moments through gestural contrast?
- Am I being inventive or using the same three tricks over and over?
- Is this worth watching?
- Do we radiate authenticity? Joy? Pride in our students' work?



# Be insistent...hone their sensitivity!

- Watch Frederick Fennell being insistent in this rehearsal
- In place of telling them what to do, say: *“We still aren’t in complete agreement - try again”*
- Ask them: *“What am I driving at with this gesture?”* -OR- *“Propose a different gesture that will be more clear?”*



# Specialized instruction

**Take a lesson**

**Host a conducting masterclass at your school (PD session for area directors!)**

**Attend a conducting masterclass in the summer or over a school break**



(Instrumental Conducting Workshops)

# Coda

## When we engage in this work...students soar!

- Are we holding our students back without even realizing it?!?
- Deepens musical literacy, sensitivity, independence, and confidence
- Removal of school “hierarchical structures” clears the way for a more collaborative process
- Leading by modeling, not telling



## Pace yourself - one step at a time!

- Journey of 1000 miles!
- Work on **ONE** concept at a time - Every bit helps!
- Feel secure in knowing that any effort in this area is time well spent and VERY student-centered!

## Show more...talk less!

## Give your students the space to have agency in the performance of music

# Thoughts?

# Questions?



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