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Communication Through Conducting: The Effects of Verbal and Nonverbal Gestures on a Musical Ensemble

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Communication Through Conducting: The Effects of Verbal and Nonverbal Gestures on a Musical Ensemble

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Communication through Conducting: *The Effects of Verbal and Nonverbal Gestures on a Musical Ensemble*

Annotated Bibliography

Conducting as an artform has drastically changed throughout music history. The modern conductor assumes the role of leader, educator, and coach for a given ensemble. Their duty as a leader is to be the vessel from the composer to the ensemble to the audience. This process can only be completed with practical communication skills. These skills involve verbal communication (CCVS, figurative language, and instructions) and nonverbal communication (gestures, CCVS, and rehearsal preparation). These skills make up the vital role and responsibility of a conductor. A conductor is also responsible for balancing the importance and use of verbal and nonverbal communication, affecting the musicality and expression that an ensemble can produce.

Secondary or Tertiary Monographs

Bailey, Wayne and Brandt Payne. *Conducting: The Art of Communication*. New York, US: Oxford University Press, 2015.

This book is divided into three sections: introduction to conducting, advanced techniques, and score study. The authors discuss strategies, showing musicality, and refining our gestures during these sections. The evidence that the authors provide includes musical excerpts that are designed to focus on refining specific gestures. They also use diagrams to indicate different beat patterns. The beat patterns that the book provides are fundamental gestures that help with tempo and clarity. Once a conductor masters the basics, they can apply the information in the rest of the book to add musicality to their clarity. Wayne Bailey is a Professor of Music at Arizona State University, where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in music appreciation and conducting. Brandt Payne is a Professor of Music at Youngstown State University, where he is the athletic band director. In this book, the authors focus on refining a conductor's gesture. The introductory material helps a conductor refine their gesture and is the building block for the basis of nonverbal communication.

Haithcock, Michael, Brian K. Doyle, Kevin, M. Geraldi, and Jerald Schwiebert. *The Elements of Expressive Conducting*. Tecumseh, US: Conway Publications, 2020.

This textbook discusses conducting techniques, score study and analysis, expressivity in movement, balancing your body as a conductor, and how to shape the sound as a conductor. The primary argument throughout this textbook is mastering the essential roles of a conductor.

Haithcock, Doyle, Gerald, and Schwiebert describe these roles as administrator, teacher, and performer regardless of the level of the ensemble a conductor is working with. When a conductor can provide clear and compelling musical leadership, they have just begun to master the artform. The evidence that the authors' offer includes musical excerpts that are designed to focus on refining specific gestures. They also use diagrams to indicate different beat patterns and how they vary based on the piece's mood. These diagrams mainly focus on angular versus fluid gestures.

Michael Haithcock is the primary author of this textbook and was assisted by Brian K. Doyle, Kevin M. Gerald, and Jerald Schwiebert. Michael Haithcock has been a Professor of Music at the University of Michigan since 2001. He conducts the University of Michigan Symphonic Band. Haithcock also guides the graduate band and wind ensemble conducting programs. Brian K. Doyle is a Professor of Music at Crane School of Music. Kevin M. Gerald is a Professor of Music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Jerald Schwiebert is an Assistant Professor of Acting, Dancing, and Movement at the University of Michigan. This textbook discusses nonverbal communication that is universally understood among ensembles. The authors also discuss ear-based versus eye-based musical expectations when a conductor tries to show a gesture based on the sound they have in mind. This concept pairs with gestural intent and navigational conducting, the physical responses and gestures that a conductor communicates. These responses reinforce what is already visible to the performers: dynamics, tempo, articulation, and phrasing.

Schonberg, Harold C. *The Great Conductors*. New York, US: Simon and Schuster, 1967.

In this book, Schonberg discusses the role of the conductor and how this job has evolved throughout music history. The primary function of the modern conductor is to provide leadership to a group of musicians. This is attained through guidance, wisdom, and inspiration. Schonberg uses direct quotes from musicians and conductors. These quotes deal with how an ensemble perceives a conductor at first glance. Most of the book is a critical commentary on the artform of conducting, its evolution, and the key contributors throughout history. Harold C. Schonberg (1915-2003) was an American music critic and author. Schonberg was most known for his role as the chief music critic for the New York Times from 1960 to 1980. In 1971, Schonberg was the first music critic to win a Pulitzer Prize for criticism. His research focus was on conductor critiques and late Romantic piano music. Schonberg addresses famous conductors from different countries and disciplines throughout music history in this book. He also focuses on the origins of conducting, baton preference, and the ways patterns indicate tempo and expression.

Scholarly Journal Articles

Cornelius, Jeffrey M. "The Use of Metaphor in the Choral Rehearsal." *The Choral Journal* 23, no. 1 (1982): 13-14. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23546071>.

In this article, Cornelius states that the metaphors we use during rehearsals are broken into two categories. The first is verbal utterances which are typically nonmusical image associations. The primary purpose of using these verbal utterances is to achieve a musical idea or to provide pedagogical support to musicians. The second is gestural utterances, the movements we choose to use to support the verbal utterances we decide to say. This article's primary evidence to support its claims is scholarly journals in literacy and music. This article's conversation regarding gestural communication differs from my other sources. Placing gestural utterances in the verbal communication category opens up the broader picture of communication. This article helps bridge the articles that strictly cover verbal or nonverbal communication in isolation. The author, Jeffrey M. Cornelius, was a Professor of Music from 1975 to 2012. During this period, he served as the dean for Temple University Boyer College of Music and Dance. In 2014, he received the Elaine Brown Award for his lifelong dedication and devotion to choral music. Understanding the similarities and differences between verbal and nonverbal communication can drastically improve a conductor's efficiency and musicality. When a conductor can communicate with refined gestures complemented by concise verbal communication, an ensemble will have no room for unclear communication.

Farberman, Harold. "Beating Time: How Not to Make Music." *Music Educators Journal* 88, no. 3 (2001): 39-45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3399757>.

In this article, Farberman discusses how more than just beating a standard pattern is needed when you are a conductor. He discusses in depth how the placement of the focal plane or ictus can alter the sound that is produced by an ensemble. After Farberman finished discussing the importance of the placement of the beat, he then began to discuss the importance of differentiating the beat. This includes phrasing, dynamics, tempo, and articulation. At the end of the article, Farberman discusses how the conducting arm, baton, and body are all three responsible for portions of conducting. This article had many insightful diagrams showing the body and placement of the focal plane. The diagrams also showed the importance of directing the beat toward the musically important part. Farberman also provided many personal examples of what he has learned over his time as a conductor. The author, Harold Farberman (1929-2018), was an American conductor, composer, and percussionist. Farberman was a Professor of Music at Hartt School of Music. He became a professor at Bard College when the Conductors Institute moved there in the early 2000s. Looking past the standard 4/4 pattern into musicality is helpful because, as a conductor, we need to know where to make music and where to help with guidance during a piece of music. This article is all about knowing the fundamentals of conducting and then learning how to break the rules to get the desired effect that you are aiming for.

Gentry, Gregory and Matthew Harden. "Content Specific Somatic Vocabulary: Conducting Gestures with Musical Outcomes." *The Choral Journal* 48, no. 10 (2008): 20-26. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23557685>.

In the article, the authors argue that a singer-based approach to conducting may change the gestures used. When this change in process and gesture happens, it will alter the ensemble's expressiveness and vocal pedagogy. The second half of the article focuses on Context Specific Somatic Vocabulary (CCVS) and how it is used during a rehearsal. One way to use CCVS during a rehearsal is to give a thumbs up when a section does something correctly that you have been working on. This allows the conductor to move forward with the rehearsal while also acknowledging the correction without needing to stop the flow of music. The authors use personal experiences to show how they both developed their approach to CCVS. They also provided a short note list at the end of the article that provided scholarly articles and book sources that supported their argument.

Gregory Gentry is an Associate Professor of Choral Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. Gentry administers choral studies for doctoral, master's, and undergraduate students. He also oversees all university choral ensembles. Gentry is also a music editor for the Gregory Gentry Choral Series, distributed by Hal Leonard Corporation. Matthew Harden is the founder and artistic director of the chamber ensemble Madrigali et al., the fourth choral ensemble he built over his long conducting career. Harden is also the Music and Worship Ministries Director at First United Methodist Church Appleton. Harden also served as the Nebraska Choral Directors' Association president from 2011 to 2013. The authors provided a different approach to verbal and nonverbal communication in this article than some of the others I have read. The CCVS approach to conducting could be a handy tool for conductors trying to transition from conducting over talking. This type of communication is vital during the rehearsal process because it allows the conductor to convey information to the ensemble that is not always primarily focused on musicality and expression. This is vital for the types of nonverbal communication that a conductor must master to show their ability at the podium.

Gonzo, Carroll L. "Metaphoric Behavior in Choral Conducting." *The Choral Journal* 17, no. 7 (1977): 8-12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23544300>.

In the article, the author, Carroll L. Gonzo, addresses the verbal, metaphorical side of conducting. This side of conducting focuses purely on what you say to an ensemble during rehearsal. The article discusses how if a conductor shows something and says the opposite, it leaves room for the ensemble to decide if they will listen or watch. Gonzo also warns young conductors from becoming too reliant on verbalizing everything because you cannot use this type of communication during a performance. The primary evidence that Gonzo uses is examples of figurative speech that are commonly used in ensemble rehearsals. He focuses most of the article

on the significance of carefully choosing your words. He also gives practical examples of what you should and should not say during rehearsals. Carroll L. Gonzo is a Professor of Music at the University of Texas. Gonzo also served on the editorial leadership team for the *Choral Journal* from 1999 until 2013. His most extensive accomplishments while working on the editorial team was the expanding number of research databases, electronic publication in multiple formats, and repeated awards recognizing the publication's art and layout. While most of my sources focus on the nonverbal aspects of conducting, Gonzo's article addresses the verbal elements of conducting. This facet of conducting is just as crucial as the nonverbal because, to be an effective conductor, a musician must master both the verbal and nonverbal aspects of the artform. Being proficient in both lanes of communication allows a conductor to support their verbal comments with clear and concise gestures.

McClung, Alan C, and Rodney Eichenberger. "The Relationship between Nonverbal Communication and Conducting: An Interview with Rodney Eichenberger." *The Choral Journal* 36, no. 10 (1996): 17–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23551097>.

This article focuses on the importance of nonverbal communication in conducting. Throughout the article, the author, Alan C. McClung, describes the vast range of what is classified as nonverbal communication. McClung uses the Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (PONS) test to help decode some meanings behind nonverbal communication and responses received. McClung also uses an interview with Rodney Eichenberger to discuss the significance of this research topic and why it is essential to the field of conducting. McClung also references psychology research centered around how humans react to nonverbal communication. Alan C. McClung is an associate professor at the University of North Texas. He conducts the Concert Choir, supervises student teachers, and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in music education and conducting. Rodney Eichenberger is an Associate Professor of Choral Music at Florida State University. Aside from conducting and teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in choral music education and conducting, Eichenberger is a highly sought-after clinician. This article addresses the nonverbal aspects of conducting. This is related to the gestures we choose as conductors and how it affects our ensembles' tone quality and overall success. The interview at the end of the article helps take this nuanced topic and apply it to conducting, education, and musical expression.

Plondke, James. "Prepare Yourself for Better Conducting." *Music Educators Journal* 78, no. 6 (1992): 45-49. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3398383>.

In this article, James Plondke addresses the preparatory skills developed outside of verbal and nonverbal communication with an ensemble. Some of these skills include aural preparation, gestural preparation, and technical preparation. These skills are then developed in his last

section, which involves applying all the principles during a rehearsal and performance. The aural preparation skills involve hearing the music, developing musical literacy, practicing transpositions, analyzing scores, and listening to several recordings. The skills in gestural preparation involve conducting while singing the melody, conducting small with the score in your head, daily baton practice, left-hand independence exercises, working with a colleague to improve gestures, and videoing yourself for reflection. The skills in technical preparation involve combining the skills from aural and gestural preparation. The evidence that Plondke uses is reading suggestions that support his argument. He breaks the reading suggestions into categories based on the three skills listed above and one for the conductor's perspective. All the readings are books with short descriptions of the information they cover. The author, James Plondke, is the Conductor and Music Director of the Central Florida Symphony Orchestra. He also serves as the Conductor and Music Director of the Valdosta Symphony Orchestra and Professor of Music at Valdosta State University. Plondke was formerly the conductor of the University Symphony Orchestra at Lawrence University and the Director of Orchestral Activities at the University of Tennessee. Before his time in collegiate education, Plondke taught orchestra and strings at York Community High School, where he served as Department Chairperson. This article benefits my research by addressing the skills a conductor needs to develop before stepping on the podium. The skills listed in this article also work towards the beginning stages of developing clear communication and concise gestures.

Webb, Jeffrey L. "Promoting Vocal Health in the Choral Rehearsal: When Planning for and Conducting Choral Rehearsals, Guide your Students in Healthful Singing." *Music Educators Journal* 93, no. 5 (2007): 26-31. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/002743210709300513>.

In this article, Webb discusses the benefits of healthy vocal pedagogy to both the singers and the conductor. From the conductor's perspective, healthy vocal techniques involve good posture and eliminating tension so the singers feel open and free to sing. One of the significant pre-rehearsal decisions a conductor makes is the repertoire. This includes divisions, tessitura, difficulty level, and balancing quantity and quality. Webb states that the conductor should always have a plan when in front of a choir. He also discusses the different types of serious vocal problems. The last part of the article discusses how a conductor can help aid a musician in making healthy decisions during rehearsal and why this is a substantial investment. In the article, Webb uses charts and diagrams to show tessituras that are difficult for developing singers. He also lists many sources that support his argument in his article. All of his references come from academic articles or books regarding vocal health. The author, Jeffrey L Webb, is an Associate Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. He teaches music theory, western art music, and critical listening courses. Webb also conducts the Pitt-Johnstown choral ensembles. This article is relevant to my research topic because it shows some of the risks we, as conductors, need to consider while on the podium. The article states that we need to think past what we are doing and be a part of the ensemble. Teaching proper vocal pedagogy is difficult, but when an ensemble masters this concept, it

allows the conductor to focus more time on musicality and expression. Conductors need to be aware that some of our gestures can cause issues with a singer's tone quality and the health and lifespan of their instrument.

Wis, Ramona M. "Physical Metaphor in the Choral Rehearsal: A Gesture-Based Approach to Developing Vocal Skill and Musical Understanding." *The Choral Journal* 40, no. 3 (1999): 25-33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23553144>.

Wis discusses the importance of deciding on metaphoric language after the gesture in this article. She discusses how the two should be used together but not at the expense of the gesture. This will help eliminate confusion among the ensemble and provide the most clarity and musicality. During the article, Wis explores the difference between physical metaphors and, what she calls, the metaphorical mind. The last part of the article focuses on simple gestures during the early music learning process that will help an ensemble overcome musical difficulties. The primary source of evidence that Wis provides is the suggested repertoire of gestures. This table lays out different gestures that a conductor can do to help an ensemble. The table is divided into the type of gesture, description, and application. She also provides an extensive notes section with many different books and academic journals supporting her argument. The author, Ramona M. Wis, is a Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities at North Central College. She teaches courses in conducting and music methods. Wis is the author of a conducting book and for many different academic journals. She is also a blogger for ChoralNet and was the first female President of the American Choral Directors Association in Illinois. When a conductor melds together their metaphorical language and gestures, they will begin to see a difference in how an ensemble reacts. The use of metaphors during rehearsal should aid in the music-making process. I think the best quote I could pull from this article is, "but what is important to note is that verbal metaphor is essentially the after-the-fact reporting of that which has been experienced physically" (p. 26). This quote ties directly into the premise of my paper.

Essays in Collections

Abrahams, Daniel. "Fostering Musical and Personal Agency: Considering the Conductor," In *The Oxford Handbook of Choral Pedagogy*. edited by Frank Abrahams and Paul D. Head, 107-28. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Daniel Abrahams focuses on the musical agencies in choral conducting in this collection of essays. He focuses primarily on constructivist principles to choral and conducting pedagogy and how conducting is integrated. Abrahams also focuses on conducting habits involving reflective practices, musicality, refining gestural skills, and problem-solving. By the end of his teaching approach, Abrahams believes that conductors should express feelings of confidence and empowerment through musical and personal agencies. Abrahams' primary evidence includes

books and scholarly journals regarding conducting pedagogy, constructivist principles, and choral pedagogy. Daniel Abrahmas is an Associate Professor of Music Education at the University of Arkansas. Abrahmas primary research focuses on reciprocal teaching, sociotransformative apprenticeship, and learner agency in the music classroom. He is also known for his regional and national presentations regarding pedagogy and music education. Using personal and musical agencies focuses on the intrapersonal side of conducting. This approach is vital when researching conducting because it allows musicians to see everything that goes into conducting an ensemble. Focusing on lining up the pedagogy behind conducting to work alongside vocal and choral pedagogy will drastically improve an ensemble's musicality and ability.