THE EXPRESSIVE CONDUCTOR

by J. Steven Moore, DMA

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Principles for expressive conducting

tools to unleash your inner creative spirit

BeyondTheNotes.com
THE PLAN

• We are going to cover:
  • Laban principles of movement applied to evoking sound
  • Initiating sound
  • Sustaining sound
  • Releasing sound
  • Sound principles for using gesture to evoke sound
IN APPRECIATION
TO MY CONDUCTING TEACHERS

J. Larry Moore, Lafayette High School, ret.
James K. Copenhaver, University of South Carolina, ret.
William J. Moody, University of South Carolina, ret.
W. Harry Clarke, University of Kentucky
Richard Clary, Florida State University
David MacKenzie, New Bedford Symphony, Orchestra
Massachusetts
Know the rules well, so you can break them effectively.

Dalai Lama XIV
CONNECTING GESTURE TO SOUND

• Every gesture may be inspired by the music.

• The music is the impetus for the movement.

• In turn, the conductor’s movements evoke and inspire music from the musicians.

• Gestures should evoke the articulation, body, and release of sound. Avoid a series of “swipes” in a pattern.
FLOAT
FLOAT

- Light
- Sustained
- Flexible
GLIDE

- Light
- Sustained
- Direct
FLICK
FLICK

- Light
- Quick
- Flexible
DAB
DAB

- Light
- Quick
- Direct
SLASH
SLASH

• Heavy
• Quick
• Flexible
PUNCH
PUNCH

• Heavy
• Quick
• Direct
WRING

- Heavy
- Sustained
- Flexible
PRESS
PRESS

- Heavy
- Sustained
- Direct
### Terminology Chart

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Light</th>
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SUSTAINING THE SOUND
Sounds are separated when you use quick motions. Sounds are connected when you use sustained motions.

Quick
Flick
Dab
Slash
Punch

Sustained
Float
Glide
Wring
Press
TENSION AND RELEASE

Musical release is created when the movement is more free. Musical tension is created when the movement is more bound.
PRACTICING SUSTAINING THE SOUND

Practice conducting four quarter notes at various tempos using the eight movement types.

Practice a well-known song, such as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* using the eight movement types.

- Flick
- Dab
- Slash
- Punch
- Float
- Glide
- Wring
- Press
INITIATING SOUND

The beginning of a note is influenced by the character of the ictus and the motion that precedes it.

- Light
  - Sustained
  - Flexible
- Heavy
  - Quick
  - Sustained
  - Flexible

Glide  Float  Dab  Flick  Press  Wring  Punch  Slash
THE ICTUS

The beginning of a note is influenced by the character of the ictus.

Light

Quick

Flexible

Strong

Sustained

Direct
Imagine the horizontal plane in front of you as a “soundboard.” The manner in which you strike the “soundboard” determines the style of the articulation (beginning of the sound).
GRAVITY

Softer articulations and dynamics are more horizontal. Stronger articulations and dynamics are more vertical.
PRACTICING THE SOUNDBOARD

- Practice striking the soundboard in various styles:
  - light
  - staccato
  - pizzicato
  - normal
  - legato
  - accented
  - weighted accented
  - marcato
  - marcatissimo
RELEASING SOUND

• Use the left hand to demonstrate releases.

• Use the right hand to indicate moving to the next beat.

• If there isn't a note following the release, use the right hand.

• Release carefully, in the manner you want the musicians to stop the air, bow, or roll. Avoid “whipping,” “snatching,” or quickly closing the fist for a release unless that is the desired musical effect.

• As in a preparatory gesture, the release should begin and end near the table. Avoid the common habit of initiating the release gesture from the table and ending it high, near your eyes.

• Don’t let the release gesture alter the inner oral cavity or vowel formation in the musicians.
THE BEAT

Beats have an upward and downward motion. The pulse is expressed through this motion.
A straight line has no predictable ending.

Is it easier to catch a line drive?  ... or a pop up?
A mechanical metronome is easy to follow. The pendulum’s speed and path are consistent. Therefore you can predict when it is going to change directions (ictus).
THE PULSE

The rate of the up and down motion is consistent.

Quickly jerking the hands up on the rebound, creates an “upbeat” conducting style. The beat will appear to be at the top of the pattern instead of at the ictus.

Accelerating to the ictus or pounding the ictus will create a ponderous conducting style. It’s less predictable and becomes tiring to the conductor and the musicians.
THE RATE

The rate is the speed in which you move from one ictus to another. Imagine tossing a ball into the air. It is easy to know when it is going to land, because the rate is predictable.

A conductor’s beat may follow the same physical characteristics of an item being tossed. It should be easy to predict when it is going to land on the ictus. The ictus occurs on the “table.”

In sustained music, the rate is generally consistent in speed. (Float, glide, press, wring)

In music that is separated, the rate slows as it nears the top of the arc and accelerates as it approaches the ictus. (Flick, dab, slash, punch)
THE RATE

The rate of movement should match the rate of the air flow or bow speed. Imagine paint flowing from the tip of your baton onto a canvas. The paint may flow onto the canvas in the same manner as the air flow or bow speed.

If a steady airstream is desired, then the rate of movement from ictus to ictus may be steady and consistent.

If the airflow accelerates toward the next note, then the rate of movement from ictus to ictus may accelerate.
PRACTICING THE BEAT

• Practice a “one” pattern using a metronome at various speeds.
• Allow the baton to strike a music stand, pvc pipe, or other material set at the appropriate height.
• Use a mirror and video for self-evaluation.

Go up and down at a predictable rate of speed. Begin the upbeat where the ictus will occur.
DYNAMICS

Dynamics are shown by the size of the beat. Softer is smaller. Stronger is larger.

Soft

p

mp

mf

f

fff

Strong

heights vary by context

3"

6"

9"

12"

15"

ppp

fff
PRACTICING DYNAMICS

Practice a 16 count *crescendo* that culminates in a chord. Practice the reverse.
PRACTICING TENSION AND RELEASE

Practice a 16 count crescendo and allargando that culminates into a climactic chord. Then practice the reverse.
OVERVIEW OF PROCESS

• Sound is the impetus for all gestures.
• All conducting precedes.
• Each active pulse is generally demonstrated by an up and down motion.
• The rate of the motion should be predictable.
• The rate may be consistent (typically in sustained motion) or decelerate on the upbeat and accelerate toward the ictus on the downbeat (typically in quick motion).
• The manner in which you strike the soundboard may evoke the appropriate articulation (beginning of sound).
• The body of the note is demonstrated by the rate and manner in which you move from ictus to ictus. The rate and manner should match the air stream, bow speed, or mallet roll.
• Sustained music is evoked through sustained motion: float, glide, press, or wring.
• Separated music is evoked through quick motion: flick, dab, punch, or slash.
• Active beats have a vertical, up and down motion from the table.
• Passive beats have a horizontal, side to side motion parallel to the table.
• Passive beats may be demonstrated by melding gestures, or by “holding sound” with an open palm up.
• Notational beats are smaller, or are depicted by the release or initiation of sound.
• Musical intensity or tension is evoked when motion is more bound.
• Musical release is evoked when motion is more free.
• Releases are usually in the left hand and visually represent the style of the release.
• Keep the information in the tip of the baton or fingers.
• The conductor develops a sound template in her mind through score study and experience.
• Preparatory motions evoke the appropriate time, style, volume, and other musical qualities.
• Sound is influenced, inspired, and evoked by gesture and facial expressions.
• Musicians respond to the gestures that precede the sound.
• Tempo changes are depicted in the preparatory beat that precedes the tempo change.
• Dynamic changes are depicted in the preparatory beat that precedes the dynamic change.
• Patterns can be conceived of as a series of preparatory beats.
• Musicians breathe and move together in preparation to play or sing together.
• Preparatory beats:
  • Play now or sing now (up and down)
  • Breathe, play
  • Conductors and musicians may move and breathe together
INSPIRED MUSICIANSHP

As a conductor, you have one of the most creative jobs in the world--you sculpt sound with your hands! You evoke, shape, and inspire sound with your conducting and you get to do it with wonderful people in your ensemble. When you pick up a baton, does it feel like a foreign object? Have you ever noticed how easy it is get stuck in the “beating the pattern” rut? If you were given the task of inventing conducting--would you pound the air on every beat regardless of the musical impetus? Or rather would you craft a set of gestures that indicates all aspects of the music, not just the meter. Here are 15 tips to help your conducting become the artistic catalyst to inspired music making.
Tip #1 - Conduct the music, not the pattern.
Conduct only that which is in the music--no more and no less. There is much more to music than the delineation of the meter. Time-beating usually results in over-conducting. Even lovely gestures, if not called for in the music, may not be present in the conducting. Look for techniques, clinics, or instructional materials to help you get out of the pattern box. Applying the language of Rudolf Laban may be helpful.
Tip #2 - Conduct the music, not the musicians. Allow each musician to assume responsibility for maintaining pulse, subdividing, entrances, and releases. You initiate and define the time, cue entrances and releases, but you do not function as a traffic cop directing a chaotic intersection.
Tip #3 - Display the information in the tip of the baton or fingers. Imagine paint flowing from the tip of your baton or your fingers on to your imaginary canvass. It flows smoothly in legato passages, creates dabs in normal articulations, and dots in staccato passages. The pulse should not be in your elbow. Preparatory beats should not be given with your head or your mouth. By focusing on the tip of the baton, your body will automatically adjust to the most efficient movement.
Tip #4 - Use the smallest tool for the job. Don’t use a hammer to insert a small screw. Similarly, don’t use your entire arm to depict light or normal articulations. Use the smallest hinge appropriate for the task: fingers, wrist, elbow, shoulder, body. With a normal-sized 15 inch baton, you can trace a 15 inch arc from horizontal to vertical using only your wrist hinge. Add your elbow hinge and you are tracing 24-30 inches of space--more than enough for most musical situations. By using the smallest hinge appropriate for the music, you avoid over-conducting, beating the air, and large patterns.
USE THE SMALLEST TOOL FOR THE JOB

Use the smallest hinge for the job:
• Fingers
• Wrist
• Elbow
• Shoulder

TIP: If you are using your wrist, don’t use the elbow. If you are using the elbow, don’t use the wrist.
Tip #4 - Address your ensemble. Conductors often allow the baton to point to the left side of the ensemble. Hold the baton comfortably in your hand. Relax your fingers and wrist with just enough tension to maintain control of the baton. The baton is an extension of your forearm. It should not angle significantly to the left.
Tip #5 - Stay grounded. Avoid going up on your toes by keeping your feet flat on the podium. This often occurs on preparatory beats. (Video yourself from the side.)
AVOID DEEP KNEE BENDS

Tip #6 - **Avoid deep knee bends.** Allow your knees to be relaxed, yet stable. Let’s leave the knee bends to our beloved drum majors. (Video from the side.)
Tip #7 - Move your baton up and down at a predictable rate of speed. All beats have some type of upward and downward impetus which emulates the laws of physics. If you toss a small bean bag in the air, its landing is completely predictable. This predictable motion is helpful to the musicians. Do not rush to the downbeat or jerk the baton up quickly after the ictus is given. You may not realize you are doing this, so please record your conducting. If you flick your baton up too quickly, you will become an “upbeat conductor.” The pulse will appear to be on your upbeat instead of your downbeat.
Tip #8 - Begin with the end in mind. Show the musicians the location of the ictus by starting in that position. In other words, begin the beat where the beat concludes.

Go up and down at the same rate of speed. Begin the beat where the ictus will occur.
**Tip #9 - Release with your left hand.** An elliptical motion with the left hand clarifies your intention for a release. Right hand motions may be interpreted as an indication to play the next note. When releases occur at the end of sections, movements, or compositions where there is not another note, right hand releases are perfectly acceptable.
Tip #10 - Begin with baton parallel with the floor.
Often conductors allow the ictus to drift too high, sometimes chest and above. Save this position for indicating registration, i.e. triangle cues are higher than trombone cues. Keep your elbows away from your torso and forward of your ribs. Many old (and some contemporary) conducting texts illustrate a fundamental position that is too high. The fundamental position for conducting includes:
1. Baton and forearm parallel with floor (or just slightly higher).
2. Forearms angled toward each other (45° from elbow to wrist).
3. Elbows in front of your torso (45° from shoulder to elbow).
BEGIN WITH YOUR BATON PARALLEL WITH THE FLOOR

Forearm & baton parallel with floor

Ictus too high
Tip #11 - All beats may move up and down, not in a straight line. All gestures that describe a beat may have an upward and downward impetus. The more pronounced the musical articulation required, the more vertical the beat. The less pronounced the musical articulation required, the more horizontal the beat. Choose a pattern that aligns each ictus along a horizontal plane. Since a straight line does not indicate a beat, the “floor-wall-wall-ceiling” pattern is not the best tool.
All beats move up & down, not in a line.

A straight line has no predictable ending

All beats may have an up and down motion
Tip #12 - Don’t mirror unless there is a purpose.

Develop independence in your gestures. There is rarely a reason to mirror. If your left hand is not adding to the musical interpretation, it is adding to the confusion. Imagine your left hand:

1. Resting comfortably at your side
2. Cueing entrances.
3. Releasing sound.
4. Increasing or decreasing volume.
5. Signaling attention--something is going to change.
6. Shaping a phrase.
7. Sustaining sound.
8. Encouraging a musician.
If the air keeps moving, your hands keep moving. When you stop your hands, the musicians tend to stop the air. If you intend for the sound to sustain, keep your gestures in motion. If the air, the bow, or the roll is moving, your hands may continue moving. Your conducting may emulate a violinist moving her bow. Your ictus depicts how you want the bow, tongue, stick, or mallet to initiate sound.
Tip #14 - Trust your performers. Allow them to come to you. Train them to watch and respond. Teach them to internalize time. Expect that they will assume responsibility for the music. You will get exactly what you expect from your ensemble. This is true of young musicians as well as more experienced musicians.
Tip #15 - Record yourself on video. One video study session can lead to tremendous improvements. You may notice a hitch at the top of the beat, an extra curly-que between beats, an oversized pattern, “thinking-man” expression, traffic-cop cueing, excessive mirroring, head in the score, or any number of issues that are easily resolved.
JOY IN ARTISTRY

Go easy on yourself as this is supposed to be a joyous activity. Whatever undesirable habits you have developed can be replaced with more artistic gestures. Visualize yourself conducting the music with tremendous artistry. Compare the video to the image in your mind. Allow yourself to gradually transition into the conductor you see in your imagination. Once you begin to move in the right direction, you will notice a rapid change. Remember: “Your conducting makes a difference in the sound of the ensemble!”
PATTERNS

• Patterns are used to express meter.
• If the meter is constant, the musicians don’t require as much information from the conductor regarding meter. Other fundamentals may be more important, such as:
  • rate
  • ictus
  • up and down motion of the beat
  • gravity (more vertical or more horizontal)
  • weight, speed, direction
  • resistance (degree of freedom or boundness)
PATTERN CONSTRUCTION

Registration: neutral table is usually at waist. Parallel to ground.

Registration: raise the table for lighter, softer, higher pitches, i.e. triangle cues.

Registration: lower the table for heavier, louder, lower pitches.
PATTERN CONSTRUCTION

• The table (soundboard) is parallel to the ground and waist high.
• Beat one is vertical and typically higher than the rest of the beats.
• To maintain a predictable rate, each beat must travel approximately the same distance from ictus to ictus.
• The last beat always comes from the right.
• Rebound in the opposite direction of the next beat.
• Each beat may travel in a line if the motion is direct:
  • glide, dab, press, punch.
• Each beat may be more flexible (indirect or curvilinear) if the motion is indirect:
  • float, flick, wring, or slash.
ACTIVE BEATS

Active beats occur when a note is articulated on the beat.

In this example, all four beats are active.
PASSIVE BEATS

Passive beats occur when a note is not articulated on a beat.

In this example:
beats 1 and 3 are active;
beats 2 and 4 are passive.
NOTATIONAL BEATS

Notational beats occur when a rest is on a beat.

In this example:
beat 1 is active;
beat 2 is passive;
beats 3 and 4 are notational.
PASSIVE BEATS FOR A HALF NOTE

Beat 1 is active and thus vertical. Beat 2 is passive and completely horizontal.

Ictus remains in place
PASSIVE BEATS FOR A WHOLE NOTE

Beat 1 is active and thus vertical. Beats 2,3,4 are passive and are completely horizontal.

Ictus remains in place
PASSIVE BEATS FOR A DOTTED HALF NOTE

Beat 1 is active and thus vertical. Beats 2, 3, 4 are passive and are completely horizontal.
PATTERNS

4 pattern
Glide: sustained, light, direct motion.

Each ictus is on a horizontal plane.
All beats have a predictable up and down motion.
Rebound occurs in the opposite direction of the next beat.
Articulation is defined by glide on the “soundboard.”
PATTERNS

Neutral 4 pattern.
Press: sustained, **heavy**, direct motion.

Each ictus is on a horizontal plane.
All beats have a predictable up and down motion.
Rebound occurs in the opposite direction of the next beat.
Articulation is defined by press on the “soundboard.”
PATTERNS

4 pattern
Float: sustained, light, flexible motion.

Each ictus is on a horizontal plane.
All beats have a predictable up and down motion.
Rebound occurs in the opposite direction of the next beat.
Articulation is defined by float on the “soundboard.”
4 pattern

Wring: sustained, **heavy**, flexible motion.

Each ictus is on a horizontal plane.
All beats have a predictable up and down motion.
Rebound occurs in the opposite direction of the next beat.
Articulation is defined by wring on the “soundboard.”
PATTERNS

Horizontal plane pattern in 4.
Radical change in line direction: flick, dab, slash, punch.

Each ictus is on a horizontal plane.
All beats have a predictable up and down motion.
Articulation is defined by flick, dab, slash, or punch on the “soundboard.”
Central ictus or focal point pattern in 4

- Beat 1 is vertical.
- Beat 2 comes from the right at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
- Beat 3 comes from the left at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
- Beat 4 comes from the right at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
• Beat 1 is vertical.
• Beat 2 comes from the left at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
• Beat 3 comes from the right at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
• As in all patterns, the last beat comes from the right.
Central ictus or focal point pattern in 2

- Beat 1 is vertical.
- Beat 2 comes from the right at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
- As in all patterns, the last beat comes from the right.
Central ictus or focal point pattern in 5

- Beat 1 is vertical.
- Beats 2 and 4 come from the left at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
- Beats 3 and 5 come from the left at a 45° angle and half the height (of beat 1).
- As in all patterns, the last beat comes from the right.
This pattern does not allow for an up and down motion on each beat. It works well if the tempo is steady and \emph{moderato} or faster. It doesn’t work well if it is important for the musicians to watch for time from the conductor.