

Dr. Mark A. Laycock
Director of Orchestras
Associate Professor of Music
Ann Walenta Faculty of Distinction Endowed Professorship
Wichita State University

1845 Fairmount, Box 53
Wichita, KS 67260-0053
316-978-6202
Fax: 316-978-3625
mark.laycock@wichita.edu

Strategies for Reinvigorating Rehearsals **Mark Laycock, clinician**

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Musicians of the Philadelphia Orchestra recall performing under Leonard Bernstein:

“It was always emotional. ...With him there were never any dead notes, always a personal intensity.”
Davyd Booth, violin and piano

“You could almost see the electricity going through the baton. Bernstein made music from his heart, his whole being.”
Richard Harlow, cello

“He was an emotional bombshell.”
Roger Blackburn, trumpet

Philadelphia Daily News, January 9, 2008

Preparation

Develop, Maintain Personal Musicianship

- nurture instrument skills
- attend performances
- observe rehearsals
- attend conferences, workshops
- present a conference session
- explore other musical genres: opera, choral, jazz, world
- support local professional, university symphonies; student field trips
- explore other arts: literature, painting, theatre, dance
- maintain professional affiliations
- join Facebook group (School Orchestra and String Teachers)

Recordings

- use as a tool in selecting repertoire; avoid thereafter
- if necessary, listen to multiple recordings
- gain stylistic knowledge through recordings of similar pieces by same composer or pieces by his/her contemporaries
- make analytical, expressive decisions, then confirm with recording

Score Study

- analyze for expressive potential as well as technical challenges
- determine textural hierarchy: melody, countermelody, harmony, bass
- ascertain form, phrase length, key area, unusual sonorities
- determine bowings based upon expressive goals

Rehearsal Guidelines

Address Expression in Every Rehearsal

- combine with intonation, rhythm, tone quality
- improvement in one area often aids another
- encompasses many elements: balance, blend, articulation, dynamics, phrasing, style, color
- reinforces a common motivator for ensemble participation; music as a vocation typically arises from an emotional performance
- as with other musical elements, expression becomes more nuanced as rehearsals progress
- Boonshaft: make “one small moment in a rehearsal truly beautiful”
- music as science *and* art; more than technical perfection
- avoids danger of adding expression after solidifying technique; technical elements affected by style, dynamics, rubato, articulation, etc.
- provides students tangible reminders of ultimate goal, motivation for further polishing
- even when sight reading, fundamental expressive concepts may be addressed
- almost all music may be classified song or dance

Conduct Collaboratively

- eye contact, spiritual interaction
- requires comprehensive score knowledge
- inviting cues
- inclusive language
- impulse of will: commitment, passion (Elizabeth Green)
- give only what is needed; the stronger the metrical pulse, the greater the freedom; meld, shape
- avoid subdivision
- in rehearsal, periods of no conducting

Get Off the Podium

- nurture student leadership; give principals time to correct their sections
- breathing, movement
- visual/aural cues
- increased focus, ensemble awareness
- new perspective for director
- better monitor last stands; provides students much-needed attention, proximity, importance, accountability
- permits listening without distraction of conducting, score reading
- allows for rehearsing from anywhere in the room

Broaden Your Range of Intonation Strategies

Avoid focusing on the issue in purely auditory terms

- kinesthetic and visual learners may not be fully engaged
- combine two or more learning styles (e.g., kinesthetic and auditory)
- try to determine the cause: individual, section, or ensemble

Intonation quality of individual players is rooted in accuracy of open string tuning

- create an environment that is most conducive to precise tuning
- most important segment of entire rehearsal
- any extraneous noise, particularly talking and unnecessary playing, must not be permitted
- students should play at a volume level just loud enough to produce steady vibrations
- once in tune, a student's primary focus is to aid his or her peers in tuning by maintaining absolute silence

Correct posture and position are essential if students are to play in tune

- left elbow, wrist, and thumb are crucial in creating a hand frame conducive to meticulous finger placement
- reinforcement, correction of position should be incorporated into each rehearsal
- convey these reminders through a variety of delivery methods: manual assistance, modeling, and verbal recognition of exemplary—or noticeably improved—students

It is generally easier for a student to evaluate the intonation of others

- create exercises for intonation training by sounding a pitch together with a drone played by a student
- begin with perfect intervals: unisons, octaves, fifths, and fourths
- students raise their hands when the two tones are perfectly in tune
- solo scales with open string drones

Address intonation issues in terms of finger patterns

- students raise their hands and form their fingers into accurate patterns for each string in any given key
- illustrate finger patterns on the board to build connections between the aural, tactile, and visual aspects

Instruments that share the same part should be afforded opportunities to rehearse in isolation

- sectionals can develop pitch, student leadership, camaraderie
- if necessary, the director may run these practices by creating a rotating schedule of sectionals outside of the school day
- regular seating rotation

The pencil as invaluable intonation aide

- director's comment, principal's instruction, student's own initiative
- glaring errors should be marked by everyone, regardless of the perpetrator
- time saved in rehearsal vs. tactile connection
- H/L, arrow, fingerings, sharps/flats/naturals

Ensemble pitch

- often related to tone quality, blend, balance
- importance of pitch, tone in bass instruments
- pyramid approach to balance
- improved intonation through rehearsing another element
- experiment with arrangement of sections, mixed formation

Give Back to the Profession

- pay it forward
- write an article
- present a clinic session
- consider collaborating with a colleague on one or both
- mentor a student teacher or early-career colleague
- students for life: reference letters, advice, encouragement
- become active in ASTA/NAfME at the state and/or national level
- create a social/support group of teachers

Expressive Principles

Phrasing

- nuance *within* given dynamic
- begin with room for growth
- melodic figures frequently contradict metrical emphasis
- accompanying voices must look externally for phrasing nuance
- melodic voice may also need to look externally for phrasing nuance (harmony, articulation)
- acknowledge challenge of shaping accompaniment vs. melody
- use vibrato speed, width to add timbral dimension to volume shifts
- have the courage to explore lesser intensity via minimal vibrato
- care with phrase endings reveals maturity of ensemble
- nurture horizontal conception of music; conduct accordingly
- explore how phrases combine to create periods, paragraphs, sections, movements
- challenge students to widen thinking; strive for fewest impulses (Benjamin Zander on ted.com)
- insist on organic changes
- composers communicate dramatic shifts via dynamics, dissonance

Repetition

- repeated notes, static pitches must have direction
- differentiate repeated motives within phrases; principle of threes
- structural repeats: consider emphasizing different voice (e.g., harmony, countermelody)
- stylistic unity is crucial when a melody is shared in turn by multiple sections

Articulation

- accent, sforzando must correspond with expressive context
- staccato: separated, detached; shortened but not always short
- slurred staccato: dangerously ambiguous notation; ranges from staccato to portato; examine context, composer's notational vocabulary
- marcato: longer note values require greater separation, intensity of attack
- articulation of accompaniment typically matches that of melody

Dynamics

- unless otherwise indicated, cresc/dim gestures go to adjacent dynamic level
- define mode of dynamic notation: homogenous vs. differentiated
- melodic line often distinguished by rhythmic motion, harmonic interest, expressive marking (*espressivo*, *dolce*)
- adjust printed dynamics to achieve composer's intent; variables: instrumentation, skill level, acoustics
- harmonized melodies: bring out lower voice (octave doubling, harmony) to add resonance, sonority
- delay onset of cresc/dim
- maintain characteristic tone quality at all dynamic levels

Rhythm

- approach from expressive opposite: slow, legato passages need forward motion, animation while rapid figuration must "settle" temporally
- subtle shifts in articulation may help prevent rushing, dragging
- fastest note values control tempo
- insist on accuracy, intensity in dotted rhythms

Tempo

- consistent ensemble pulse based on shared internal subdivision
- subdivision should be at least one-half value of prevailing beat (i.e., eighth notes in 4/4)
- continue subdivision through longer note values
- when possible, change subdivision unit in advance (i.e., anticipate triplet during rest or whole note)

- rests as moments of preparation
- avoid tendency to rush smaller note values in slow, lyrical passages
- ritardandos, accelerandos must be spontaneous, organic; be unpredictable

Recommended Resources

Jordan, James. *The Musician's Soul*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 1999.

- key to effective communication with an ensemble is self-knowledge
- conductor must subsume his/her own personality to promote expression of individual members

Ulrich, Jerry. "Preparing the Conductor as Teacher." *Music Educators Journal* 95, no. 3 (March 2009): 48-52.

- conducting training should focus on the roles of teacher, musical collaborator, pedagogue
- ensemble members should be taught to make interpretive judgments, decisions in rehearsal, performance

Wis, Ramona M. *The Conductor As Leader: Principles of Leadership Applied to Life on the Podium*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2007.

- five spheres of leadership: vision, trust, teaching, persuasion, character
- clarifying our leadership role allows us to focus on things that really matter

Zander, Rosamund Stone and Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

- Rosamund, a family therapist, and Benjamin, a conductor, offer prescriptions for personal and professional fulfillment
- provides practical paradigms in which leaders may minimize or eliminate the inherent conflict between "individuals and the collective"

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