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# The influences and responsibilities of the conductor towards the visual aspects of choral music

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THE INFLUENCES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE  
CONDUCTOR TOWARDS THE VISUAL ASPECTS OF CHORAL MUSIC

A Performance Paper

Presented to the  
Department of Music  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Music  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

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PERFORMANCE PAPER ACCEPTANCE

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BJR

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

From the initial reading of a new piece to the final preparation prior to a concert weeks later, the conductor is constantly prioritizing the musical problems encountered during rehearsals. We are trained to classify musical problems into the categories coinciding with the elements of music: timbre, pitch, duration, and dynamics. The method in which these problems are categorized and solved becomes an integral part of our musical personality or experience and, on a surface level, becomes rehearsal technique. As rehearsal time dwindles, the conductor's attention shifts quickly to hone those techniques that refine the concepts presented in earlier rehearsals. These concepts culminate in performance.

Periodically, some of the other elements of performance skills may be addressed. Quick reminders of the method by which the group enters the stage, posture and position on the risers, and the manner in which the music is held may be reviewed. Occasionally, the visual aspects of the performance may be mentioned. Commonly the final and only suggestion pertaining to the "look" of the group may be to "smile". If practice reinforces habits, once on stage, the concentration of the group would tend to focus on those elements consistently addressed and rehearsed during the past few weeks.

The conductor's movements not only serve a metronomic function but also remind the ensemble of aspects presented in rehearsal. Is it any wonder that choir members lose their feigned "smiles" minutes into their performance? Where is the choir's concentration throughout the entire performance? Certainly conductors demand that attention be drawn to the visual reminders (gesticulation) shown, particularly during the rendering of a composition, and rightly so. Does preparation of the ensemble include the aspects of performance, particularly the visual representation of the text? Without consistent practice the visual aspects of a performance remain a peripheral element, and the ensemble's potential for establishing sincere expression is diminished.

The responsibility of the performer to represent a composer's intentions is not a new issue. Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach (1714-1788), a composer who was a principal practitioner of the Empfindsamkeit style early in the Classical period, subscribed to the premise that the performer must be involved emotionally if he wishes to be faithful to the composer's intentions. As Bach explains:

A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved...he must make certain that he assumes the emotion which the composer intended in writing it. Those opposed to this stand are often incapable of doing justice, despite their



technique, to their own otherwise worthy compositions. Unable to bring out the content of their works, they remain ignorant of it (152).

This concept of the performer's involvement, or responsibility, is reinforced by Reinhard G. Pauly in his explanation of the 18th century's "Age of Feeling." He states, "Music, as an art of the emotions, must above all appeal to the heart; if it is to do this the performer himself must feel what he plays, must be emotionally involved" (25). Lawrence E. Tagg, a twentieth century choral director, compares ensembles to funeral directors in an evaluation of the visual aspects of performance. Cognizant of the need for visual sensitivity from the performers, Tagg states:

...the most ardent art lover cannot stare transfixed at a painting more than a few minutes, and we doubt if your audience can do better with static staging. Regardless of costume, there is rarely a more entrancing sight than a choir performing with evident sensitivity to changing texts of the program (Tagg 36).

Bach, Pauly, and Tagg support the concept that emotional expression is a viable factor in performance. As will be shown, there exists a correlation between the emotion felt within a performer and the visual expression as

a result of that emotion. It would appear that the concept of expression, emotional or otherwise, has been a factor in the believability of a performance and in the responsibility to a composer for some time. If Bach's statement is true, how much more involvement could a singer employ utilizing the human voice?

C.P.E. Bach's prescription for the performer has not lost its merit in the last two hundred years. It is the purpose of this investigation to review some of the responsibilities and influences that the conductor may bring to the realization of ensemble visual expression. Through visual representation a choir has the ability to tap the emotional memory of an audience. In this manner, technique is not an end in itself but is transcended, allowing sincere expression to result. The conductor's influence can be an effective tool in leading singers to the discovery of the composer's intent, musically, emotionally, and visually.

Certainly the aspects concerning the visual representation of a composer's intentions merit rehearsal time. But one cannot simply designate songs as sad, "Nor 'putting on' a toothy smile when singing a happy song" (Craig 69), and elicit a sincere expression from the ensemble. A superficial approach to the visual elements can be characterized by an imposition of mood. The mood exhibited is not generated by the singer's internal understanding of the work but merely a parroting, with a

resulting lack of visual sincerity.

The choir members must be made aware of their responsibilities to reach not only the ears of the audience with an accurate interpretation of the work, but also to present a visually sincere performance. Whether the choir is aware of the fact or not, the audience is constantly receiving visual messages. The difference between an effect that is artistic or merely fortuitous, lies in the control of the outcome. It would seem that many performances could be sung from behind a curtain so as not to destroy the audience's imagination of how the ensemble looks as they sing a beautiful movement of a mass or a driving syncopation in a motet.

One of the aspects that contributes significantly to live performances is the skillful balance between the visual expressions and the aural presentation. This is impossible to achieve with recordings, no matter how great the artist:

Unless there is a visual connection between performers and audience (and the director is not the only performer on the stage), we might almost as well leave choral music to the radio and recording artist who can do it much better unseen (Tagg 36).

If habits are developed through consistent practice, then the aspects of sincere, believable visual representation can be practiced, and eventually become

habitual. Because an audience witnesses visual aspects during a performance, the premise that the choir's visual involvement is an essential and integral part of a performance is relevant. Therefore, the conductor has a direct responsibility to provide his ensemble with the means to enable them to generate emotions internally which will produce the external expression accurately reflecting the textual and musical mood of the work. There is little doubt that conductors strive to reveal their personal perceptions of the composer's intent. Musical training specializes in developing sensitivity to this end. Does sensitivity to artistry cease with the "sound" of the group?

This paper will examine two specific perspectives leading to the realization of this concept. The first will be an examination of how the ensemble may be intellectually prepared. Intellectual approaches are used during the rehearsal process. These can develop a broader foundation, enabling a better understanding of the music, text, sub-text, composer, historic period and style in which the piece was written, and possible circumstances connected with the composition.

The second perspective will focus on the non-verbal aspects of conducting. While these aspects are utilized during the rehearsal process, they are most applicable in performance, during which verbal explanations are suppressed. Proficiency in this perspective allows a

conductor to optimize consistency in conducting technique. This can elicit positive responses from the ensemble during the performance, both musically and visually. This is partially accomplished through an understanding of the influence of non-verbal communication in conducting as reinforced by the Delsarte System of Expression.

A clearer understanding of the intellectual and non-verbal concepts explained in this writing may enable a conductor to apply these techniques during rehearsals and subsequent performances. The two major perspectives examined in this paper were applied in practice, as a rehearsal technique and during recital performance, respectively, by the author. As a result, the ensemble demonstrated sincere visual representation of a composer's intentions in the recital. Two pieces of literature, which were performed in the aforementioned concert, will serve as specific examples for this writing. These pieces are Cantique de Jean Racine, Opus 11 by Faure', and Gloria in Excelsis from Haydn's Heiligmesse in B-flat. The limitations imposed will exclude analysis of "choreography" and how it relates to show, jazz, or swing choirs as well as the examination of "choralography", in which an ensemble, within a standard concert presentation, uniformly executes movement that provides visual variety.

## Chapter 2

### Intellectual Preparation

Teaching music and the subsequent performance of that music is a combination of verbal instruction and non-verbal communication. The verbal instruction is most often used during the rehearsal process, when the conductor will explain a solution to a musical problem or provide further instruction. Since stopping to explain or correct is impractical, non-verbal communication, in its strictest sense, is used during the performance. This chapter will provide an overview of some intellectual aspects available to a conductor for preparation of the ensemble during the rehearsal process. Obviously, this information provides the conductor with some foundation for personal musical interpretations, but the sharing of this knowledge may also provide a greater base knowledge for the singers as well.

It is no secret that a better understanding of the elements of music and rehearsal of those elements can lead to stronger musicianship. This becomes apparent in the continual improvement demonstrated at each successive performance. This same approach may also be effective in addressing the visual aspects of music. Through understanding and rehearsal, the realization of visual mood can be demonstrated and improved. At the very least, the singer can be supplied the "tools" with which internal motivation for external expression can be generated. This

increases the potential for improvement. Don Craig expresses this point in his article for the Music Journal, "Awakening this interest within him (the student) is the surest guarantee that he will appear animated in performance" (70).

#### Areas of Concern

Each of these intellectual approaches was used, independently or in combination, during the rehearsal process in order to help develop the singers' understanding of the intentions of the composer.

1. Basic Textual Understanding
2. Sub-textual Understanding
3. Period in which the Work was Composed
4. Circumstances Surrounding the Composition
5. Concepts in Musical Text Painting
6. Emotional Memory
7. Responsibility to the Composer

#### Basic Textual Understanding

As a frame of reference, a series of questions may help guide the conductor through this area. What is the language used? Is it poetry, prose? If it is in another language, are multiple translations available? Is a literal translation possible or practical? Might any of the words be unfamiliar to the singers? Why were these particular words chosen? Are there onomatopoeic qualities inherent in the word choice? When these questions are satisfied, the

conductor will have a basic grasp of the surface level of the text. The purpose behind this area of study is simply to acquaint the conductor and students with the basic construction and fundamental concepts of the text.

Fauré's Cantique de Jean Racine, Opus 11 is in French. Though the sounds of the language were taught phonetically, a translation into English was necessary to familiarize the choir with the basic content of the text. Carl de Nys' translation is shown below.

Word, equal of the Almighty, our sole hope,  
 Eternal day of earth and heaven,  
 As we break the silence of peaceful night,  
 Divine Saviour, cast Thine eyes upon us.  
 Shower the fire of Thy powerful grace upon us,  
 That all hell flee at the sound of Thy voice,  
 Dispel the slumbers of a listless soul  
 For they incline it to forget Thy laws.  
 O Christ, look favorably on the flock of faithful  
 Now assembled to bless Thee,  
 Receive the chants they offer up to Thy immortal  
 glory  
 And let them depart blessed with Thy bounties.

Providing a translation for the choir allows the opportunity for basic textural understanding.

#### Sub-textual Understanding

Sub-meaning or sub-text is defined as the underlying



meaning or message content conveyed through word choice (Tanner 94). Audiences desire to experience and can be intellectually sustained by the sub-text of a work rather than by the surface level of a performance. "He (the spectator) has a silent part in the (the performers) exchange of feelings, and is excited by their experiences" (Stanislavski 186).

The analysis of the sub-text of great works is a never-ending task. The depth of the conductor's understanding of sub-text is predicated on literary background, perceptiveness, quality of training, and sensitivity to the text. The analysis of the sub-text attempts to reveal the probable emotional content which the composer or author attempts to convey. Mitchell, from the introduction to Bach's treatise, states:

Music here was far removed from a decorative art, from abstract patterns of sound; it was, above all else, a vehicle for the expression of emotions...the performer must understand the true content of each piece that he played. He must transmit accurately and faithfully its expressive nuances to an audience whose heart must be stirred (16).

Singers can often relate to adjectives that may best describe a given word or phrase within the music. An example of this concept is shown by revealing the myriad of

ways the simple word "why" can be delivered. This word can be shouted in anger, spoken in frustration, uttered in pity, sighed in astonishment, expressed in confusion, ad infinitum. Though the word never changes, the meaning or sub-text is clear based upon the attitude and inflection with which it is conveyed.

Adjectives such as passionate, pleadingly, or humbly were used during rehearsal preparations to help the ensemble reflect the sub-text of the Cantique de Jean Racine. These are descriptive terms with which singers may identify, enabling them to assume an attitude congruent with the predetermined sub-text. The use of adjectives provides a frame of reference for the basis of sub-textual understanding.

Accuracy of the representation of the composer's intentions or the sub-text is, in part, predicated on the singer's understanding of the work. The sharing of multiple interpretations of the sub-text will potentially aid the most singers. There are certainly many interpretations possible. This is obvious in the variety of interpretations of the same symphony by different conductors. If this is the case with instrumental music, the possibilities certainly seem greater with the addition of text. The conductor's knowledge of this area, as with any element of music, will be far more encompassing than that of the singers. Different interpretations, or at least a variety of

explanations, approaches, or even analogies to reveal a single interpretation, are necessary. Since all humans do not react similarly to identical stimuli, a slightly different approach may very well be the key that unlocks the singer's understanding of the sub-text.

#### Historical Period

An understanding of the historical period in which the work was composed may provide another means of aiding the singer. Similar to the other aspects discussed in this chapter, research into this area can be a life long process. For example, Gloria In Excelsis, from Haydn's Heiligmesse in B-flat, was written in 1796 and reflects a culmination of three distinctive characteristics that set Haydn's late compositions apart from his earlier works. Those characteristics were his mastery of symphonic writing, his choral style as influenced by Handel in London a few years earlier, and Mozart's influence in Classical expression.

Sharing such knowledge with the singers has a dual intent. Initially, the purpose is to provide information about the historic aspects specific to the work being performed. Beyond this primary objective, this information may provide a broader frame of reference with which a singer may begin to recognize stylistic similarities among composers or works of the same period. In this respect, the singer gains insight for music as a whole rather than solely for a specific piece.

### Circumstances

Just as an artist expresses himself with paint on canvas, or a dancer with motion through space, the composer expresses himself with sound and silence through time. Study of the circumstances under which a composition was written attempts to determine what motivated the composer to write a particular work. The reasons can be as varied as a commission from a patron, the occasion of a wedding, funeral, mass or cantata for a special service, or in J.S. Bach's case, simply a work to fulfill a weekly service requirement for three choirs. Beethoven believed he was not necessarily writing for a patron or a single ensemble but would achieve immortality through his works. Of his critics, Beethoven said, "...they will certainly never make anyone immortal by their twaddle, nor will they rob anybody of immortality to who Apollo has decreed it" (Thayer 269). This would indicate that the motive behind composers efforts may be quite diverse. Through research, the conductor can disclose the circumstances of the creation of a work, once again, providing the singers with greater insight. Singers can identify with some of the very practical reasons behind many of the great compositions.

Fauré's compositional style was individualistic and did not immediately receive respect from his contemporaries. Faure, in the writing of Cantique de Jean Racine, recalls the sacred style of Gounod by writing in a linear fashion

for both the keyboard and vocal parts. This was done within the constraints of a traditional ABA structure. Faure completed his training at L'Ecole Niedermeyer with this piece, entered in a composition contest. Proving his competency as a composer, the work was awarded first prize (Nectoux 417).

### Text Painting

This area addresses the actual musical setting of a particular text. In reference to Faure, Nectoux states:

Harmonic richness is matched by his melodic invention. He was a consummate master of the art of unfolding a melody: from a harmonic and rhythmic cell he constructed chains of sequences that convey, despite their constant variety, inventiveness and unexpected turns, an impression of inevitability (423).

Cantique de Jean Racine serves as an example of this mastery. As part of an intellectual approach, text painting and the manner in which the text is set can be isolated and used as a aid to increased understanding of a work. By investigating the text painting the conductor can reveal to the singers the compositional methods taken by the composer to best represent the sub-text. This is a particularly valuable tool when comparing settings of the same text by different composers.

### Emotional Memory

"Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotional memory can bring back feeling you have already experienced. They may seem to be beyond recall, when suddenly a suggestion, a thought, a familiar object will bring them back in full force"

(Stanislavski 158).

While the area of emotional memory may seem nebulous, it is no less a potential source of internal generation for external expression. The singers in an ensemble bring with them an immense variety of experiences. The emotional content of these experiences can be tapped and focused in performance when a correlation exists between those emotions and the sub-text the composer or author wishes to convey.

The conductor can utilize this area of concern by tapping the emotional memories of the singers. The suggestion that the sub-text be internalized or compared to a life experience, real or simulated, can result in powerful expression.

### Responsibility to Composer

The communication of the composer's intentions should remain the primary objective of the conductor and ensemble. "The fact that the music in hand is a product of a real person, no matter how long dead, must be in the singer's

being as he recreates the man's expression" (Hawkins 9). It is the adoption of this philosophy that builds integrity in a musically educational situation. This also places the music and the survival of the composer's work significantly above the temporal parameters of a given performance.

Utilizing this approach can educate in three ways. First, it can provide a greater understanding, not only for a specific work, but also for music holistically. Second, it can provide examples of musical aesthetics for the singers; and third, this sense of responsibility to a composer can elicit sincere external visual expression. The process is one of enlightenment with the natural outcome being the potential for realistic, believable visual representation. The result of approaching the visual aspects of performance through imposition of mood, without internal motivation or the support of intellectual understanding, can result in a clichéd, unbelievable expression. "Never begin with results. They will appear in time as the logical outcome of what has gone before" (Stanislavski 175). This concept of internal motivation is further substantiated in Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares:

One word, in conclusion, about the active principle underlying the process of communication. Some think that our external visible movements are a manifestation of activity and that the inner, invisible

act of spiritual communion are not. This mistaken idea is the more regrettable because every manifestation of inner activity is important and valuable. Therefore learn to prize the inner communication because it is one of the most important sources of action (193).

The correlation between the arts, especially music and theatre, is very high. The singers on the risers are no less responsible to communicate the intentions of a composer than the actor is in the communication of the playwright's intentions. Application of these intellectual approaches during rehearsals can expand the foundation of knowledge upon which singers draw, assisting in the believability demonstrated in performance.



## Chapter 3

### Conducting Basics

Conducting has always been a method of communication. In its early forms, conducting consisted of musicians giving select visual signs to the singers from an organ or piano. This progressed from pounding a staff on the floor, to a concertmaster's silent waving of a bow and finally culminating in the conductor we recognize today. From these beginnings, the profession of conducting has developed into a highly involved skill as well as a sensitive art. To an audience, conducting appears to be nothing more than arm-waving that corresponds to the tempo and moods created by the ensemble. In reality, conducting is "...one of the most complex and demanding activities in the realm of music, comprising both the visual public performance and the constant application of technique" (Green xiii).

Investigation into the physical aspects of conducting has not provided any single method or approach which is accepted by all conductors as "preferable." Many books dedicate several chapters attempting to explain the following conducting aspects: basic beat patterns for a variety of meters, division of the beat, fermatas, articulation, the left hand and its function, etc.:

Texts on conducting deal only with the spatial reproduction of patterns, minimal introduction to cueing, dynamics, phrasing,

etc. Some recognize the differences in style of beat, but none provide tangible methods for developing those differences (Poch 21).

While there are varying philosophies concerning the "ideal" visual process in conducting, there appears to be a consensus regarding the basics of a solid, teachable, technique. To this end, many conducting books contain an abundance of photographs showing a freeze-frame representation of exact hand, head, and body positions. As a point of departure, this chapter will serve as a review of selective literature, defining some "basics" with regard to the visible aspects of conducting.

Because the correlation between gesticulation and the visual and aural results is quite high, a review of the attitudes of the body, through which non-verbal communication is demonstrated, is appropriate. This will provide a frame of reference for an examination of how the Delsarte System of Expression can reinforce good conducting techniques.

### Posture

It is generally accepted that the basic posture or stance of the conductor should be one of energy that commands or projects a sense of security and leadership to the ensemble. Of the references reviewed for this paper, leadership, aggressiveness, confidence, and command are four

words that are most commonly used when describing the proper posture for the conductor.

"Many have found that the most commanding posture is a position similar to military "Attention", standing straight, heels together. The most successful conductors maintain a convincing posture of command throughout the performance" (Stanton 26).

The posture assumed by a conductor is similar to that of a well-trained singer. It is erect, relaxed and allows for complete freedom of movement. The chest is usually comfortably high with the shoulders slightly back. Linton explains posture in this manner:

Simply speaking, the basic stance is one of good posture: 1) erect but not stiff, 2) shoulders high, but free to move slightly forward, 3) chest high, not concave, 4) feet slightly apart with freedom to move either a half-step forward or backward, 5) weight distributed evenly on both feet, knees locked, and 6) head and eyes directed toward the ensemble (20).

The initial or foundation position for the feet is in question. Van Bodegraven and Wilson state:

...the right foot slightly in front of the left foot and with the heels slightly turned in.

If the weight of the body is shifted a little forward on the balls of the feet he is more free to pivot as he conducts various sections of the ensemble (1).

McElheran's suggestion is as follows, "Keep your feet together and still. Every time you walk around you are a distraction" (15). Yet a third conductor explains posture in another manner, "A natural, easy, fixed position of the feet will prevent the lower part of the body from moving" (Scherchen 187). The decision as to the most advantageous foundation position of the feet will need to be a personal one. While this writer takes exception with the suggestion of the "locked knees", the adoption of Linton's definition of appropriate posture appears to be well-suited to a good conducting technique.

#### Right Arm and Hands

It is with arms and hands that the conductor executes the majority of non-verbal communication. Once again, there are few texts that give specific instructions regarding the optimum starting position or point of reference for the hands and arms.

"With the shoulders relaxed, the elbows are raised slightly sideways, the hands are held at chest level about 1 1/2 times the width of a hand away from the body. The hands do not quite form a continuous straight line with the forearm, but are

raised at a slight angle and should appear as if they are in the process of releasing some muscular tension" (Ehmann 118-19).

Van Hoesen explains the posture of the right arm in this manner:

Place the right hand in front of the body, palm down as if on the head of a child approximately chest high. The elbow should be slightly away from the body and there should be no exaggerated bending of the wrist or elbow (6).

The right hand and arm have generally been used to define the meter. Most of the texts available explain at great length the beat patterns executed by the right hand and arm.

#### Left Hand

The left hand is responsible for the execution of three basic functions: "(1) to reinforce the movement of the right hand; (2) to indicate dynamics and dynamic change; and (3) to cue performers who have had several measures rest, and to indicate the important entrances and releases" (Berg 74). While the general movement of the right hand remains consistent within a given pattern, the attitude or position of the left hand is dependent on which of the three functions the conductor is displaying at any one time.

"When the palm faces the players, it is usually read as a

caution to soften; when it faces the conductor, the musicians read it as a command for more power" (Green 68). It is a consistent agreement that the left hand should not simply mirror the right hand in the execution of the patterns but rather be independent to help convey phrasing and reinforcement of dynamic interpretation. "The clenched fist may indicate a forte. The palm pointed towards a section in a pushing position signals that section to play more softly" (Berg 76).

While the reviewed authors' emphasis pertaining to the most important visual aspects of the conducting process varies, most are in general agreement about those aspects presented within this paper. These concepts serve as a basis for comparison of aspects of the Delsarte System of Expression with acceptable conducting techniques.

## Chapter 4

### Non-Verbal Communication and Delsarte

In order to better understand how aspects of the Delsarte System of Expression can apply to an accepted conducting technique, a brief overview of non-verbal communication and how it relates to the individual may be beneficial.

Singers bring a base knowledge of non-verbal communication to an ensemble. This base knowledge is built over a lifetime of interaction and begins shortly after birth (Molcho 37). Since parents could not possibly take the time necessary to explain all of their instructions or desires to a child, children learn to define and use non-verbal communication at a very early age. Facial expressions are interpreted by the child at a glance as being positive or negative. Sometimes children are seen mimicking the stern expression of an angry adult. As we grow older, we refine the use of body language allowing us to communicate a variety of emotions (Springer 23). We are also able to control and monitor social interaction.

Some example of this ability occurs in everyday conversation. "If a speaker has finished a particular syntactic sentence but wants to say more, he will make a juncture by pausing in his utterance but will maintain his posture and his head-eye address in order to keep possession of the floor" (Schefflen 49). At the end of the point being

expressed, generally the head and eye position will change, signalling that the speaker has relinquished control of that particular aspect of the conversation.

In a musical performance, the conductor can effectively control the audience through non-verbal communication by maintaining a conducting posture. By keeping the hands or baton in sight of the audience after the final sound of a musical work, this signals that, "The performance has not yet concluded." Once the hands or baton have been lowered and the posture of the conductor is relaxed, the audience takes its cue to show appreciation by applauding. It is obvious that all of us have, both consciously or subconsciously, developed a vocabulary of non-verbal gestures and understand their meanings.

#### Delsarte

Until Francois Delsarte, no one had attempted to classify and define specific gestures. Francois Delsarte was born November 11, 1811, in Solesmes, France. After a difficult childhood that included the death of both parents and a brother, he received a scholarship to the Paris Conservatory. It was there that he intended to study singing and acting for a professional career in the arts. Due to inept instruction his voice was ruined, ending any hopes for a career in singing. He managed to acquire a position in the theatre which provided the income necessary for a meager existence. His position allowed him the time



necessary to pursue his studies in the concepts and principles of expression. While at school he found, "...that all of his teachers were ignorant of any principles of art, and that their instruction was entirely a matter of passing on personal styles or idiosyncracies to their pupils" (Shawn 5). After years of devotion in the study of anatomy, music, and theatre, he was able to define what he termed to be the "laws of expression."

His system is based on the premise that:

...the external motions are caused by internal emotions. The pantomimic or gesture language which consists of the altitude and gestures of the body, limbs and face, by which is manifested the deepest conditions and intentions of the human soul... (Booth 9).

A better understanding and proper utilization of this premise will enable choral ensembles to visually represent a composer's intentions sincerely and believably.

An overview of Delsarte's three categories of expressive action is given below:

Inflections. "...exhibit the efforts of the will or affective nature to preserve the poise of our being amid surrounding persons, objects or ideas. They are the motions by which we expose our views, reveal

truths, bestow favors, renounce errors, reject proposals, deny requests, and in general, pass out subjective states of the moral nature" (Booth 57).

Attitudes. "...modify its inflections, ...by showing the subjective condition or the objective relation of the being under which the inflection is made...If I say 'no' by an inflective motion of the head, the significance of that passing act is modified both by the attitude of the arms, the attitude of the feet and legs, and the attitude of the torso" (Booth 59).

Bearings. "...show to a greater or lesser extent the kind of beings we are, both in character and in conduct." For instance, "...If a young man with scooping shoulders and a slouching gait should proclaim himself a recent graduate of West Point, no one would believe him. Such is not the bearing of West Point graduates" (Booth 60).

#### Application

As an extension of the basics of conducting, it is no understatement that the essence of conducting, in the performance aspect of music, can be found in the non-verbal

communicative process executed by the conductor, called gestures. Throughout the texts reviewed, the authors stress the importance of gestures. Green defines the use of expressive gestures as a conductor's "declaration of intent" (40). She explains that the expressive gesture goes beyond the basic time beating patterns, communicating to the ensemble the intentions of the conductor concerning the performer's change of dynamics, tempo, inflections, etc. Other authorities agree, "The object must remain [a] perfect clarity of presentment - an unambiguity of gesture that will exclude all possibility of doubt" (Scherchen 188).

Often, however, the conductor is unaware of the total visual message being transmitted. The beat pattern may be exact within the conductor's interpretation, but there may be less obvious conflicting non-verbal cues being given. It is the constant use of non-verbal communication that makes it imperative for the conductor to be aware of the complete visual impact. "Gesture is more than speech...A hundred pages do not say what a simple movement may express..." (Shawn 25). There appears to be agreement that the gestures used by conductors must be concise in order to communicate the musical demands of the score.

Conductors teach their respective groups the meaning of the gestures they use habitually. Every conductor has some gestures in his conducting vocabulary that may deviate from the intent of the original gesture learned. Conductors will

often develop idiosyncracies or habits. These may or may not have any significance to the conductor or the intentions of the score. There can be little doubt that these gestures make some impression on the ensemble, with possible negative effects. These gestures are either explained to the ensemble or are actively suppressed by the musicians in the process of performance. While such gestures may or may not be totally responsible for the results which occur in an ensemble, they do nothing to prevent aural problems.

"...many of us (conductors) place blame for improper singing upon the choir, when, it is a mirror of our own gesture" (Jordan 6).

As a result, the group will attempt to perform in spite of the visual cues they receive from the conductor. "The most powerful of all gestures is that which affects the spectator without his knowing it" (Shawn 25). If this premise is true, are not the individuals that make up our ensembles "spectators", so to speak, involved in the process of conducting? Can they be affected without really knowing it?

It is understood that conducting is a communicative process utilizing gestures to reflect the intentions of the score. It is also understood that every member of an ensemble brings with him or her an interpretive base knowledge of non-verbal communication. If so, a conductor, through a greater awareness of these facts, may improve

conducting skills.

### Correlation of Gestures

There appears to be a correlation between the findings of Delsarte and certain accepted conducting practices. Perhaps an overview of some of these correlations will provide support for these practices.

The torso or trunk of the body is held high. Delsarte states that this expanded position of the torso suggests, "health, power, and courage" (Booth 69). If the torso is relaxed, this suggests, "indolence, prostration and insensibility" (Booth 69). If the torso is contracted, it suggests, "pain, weakness, and fear" (Booth 69). This interpretation would tend to support the practice of holding the torso erect with the chest held comfortably high. If the chest is "greatly dilated...[it is a] sign of energy...The chest need not be lowered; it is here that all the energy concentrates" (DeLaumosen 84-85).

The arms and hands are held away from the body. "An assertion of the will" (Booth 99) is observed if a conductor assumes the arm and hand position in which the arms are held away from the body, slightly less than parallel to the ground. This "assertion of the will" is a position of strength, whereas, if the arms are held close to the body or "...drawn in and pressed against the sides, they register timidity, or suppression of the will" (Booth 69). "The wrist is the thermometer of vital energy" (Booth 68).

Therefore, if the wrist is held in a limp fashion, or stretched upward, it loses intensity. "The hand is the vital, the executive agent of the mind. It manifests what the mind has sought to say through the face" (Booth 94). According to Booth, if the hand is extended straight on the wrist, partly open, it suggests, "calmness or repose" (94). If it is drooped from the wrist with the muscles relaxed, it suggests, "indifference and insensibility" (Booth 94). If it is sloping out from the wrist, more open, it suggests "tenderness" (Booth 94). The hand tightly closed, displaying a clenched fist suggests, "conflict, struggle, and a concentration of force" (Booth 94). Although these definitions were originally designed to aid in the interpretation of oratory, it is easy to recognize these same gestures when used in the conducting process.

### Eyes

The eyes are the tools we use to focus attention in our ensembles. "We will supplement our hand cues with our eyes" (Lee 22). "Our ensembles observe our gestures peripherally, but focus on our eyes" (Williams 25). While there is little guidance given in text books as to the specifics of the use of our eyes, it has been suggested that we learn to use our eyes and face to be able to show expressions of "...sorrow, majesty, anxiety, determination, fear, anger, love, etc." (Lee 77). Delsarte has defined the eye as an expressive agent composed of the:

...eyeball, the eyebrow and the upper and lower lid. The eyeball shows the direction of the mind's attention, whether it be subjective or objective. The eyebrow is the mental thermometer and shows the conditional intensity of the mind's action. As the eyeball shows involuntarily the direction of the mind's action, so the upper lid shows voluntary acceptance or rejection of that directive action (Booth 109).

Delsarte further supports the concept of congruency between the eyes and the hands. Often the conductors are encouraged to ensure their hands are not saying one thing while their face, or eyes, are saying something else. "The attitudes of the eyeball should correspond to the relative attitudes of the hand" (Booth 110). Once again, this view is commonly held, "The weak hand and the strong face, are the sign of perfidy" (Delaumosen 79).

Shawn was also convinced that the adoption of the Delsarte System was advantageous:

The creative or interpretive artist in any of the performing arts, knowing what it is that he wants to say or express, and knowing this science, can more powerfully and exactly communicate the inner essence to his audience, and through empathy that audience to share

in the experience and not merely witness the performance as a detached spectator (31).

The concepts of the Delsarte System of Expression have been used by Gregory H. Lyne, faculty member of the choral department at California State University at Long Beach. He has found that the use of specific gestures will habitually elicit specific responses from his ensembles. In a published article entitled, "Effective Bodily Communication: A Key to Expressive Conducting." in the Choral Journal (20, Num. 1 1979), Dr. Lyne explains how the Delsarte System may be beneficial to the conductor by referencing some of these gestures and responses. In an effort to understand his methods, a telephone interview was conducted. Dr. Lyne answered a series of questions that exemplify how knowledge of the Delsarte System has been beneficial in his conducting experience. The questions and answers to this interview can be found in the Appendix of this paper.

It is not to be misconstrued that the conductor should concentrate on the non-verbal aspects to the point of paying little or no attention to the musical demands of the score. As was mentioned earlier, a conductor, through a greater awareness of the non-verbal cues being displayed, will become self-critical of possible vocal problems those gestures can elicit. In addition, the conductor will be better able to represent visually the musical demands of the score by an increased awareness of the meanings inherent in



the gestures used. In turn, the conductor's awareness of the responsibility to use visual reminders to project the sub-text will be enhanced. This can create a greater potential for the gesticulation used to reinforce, both consciously and subconsciously, the intellectual aspects shared in preceding rehearsals.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

"An artistic truth is hard to draw out, but it never palls. It becomes more pleasing, penetrates more deeply all the time, until it embraces the whole being of the artist and his spectators as well" (Stanislavski 28).

The concepts presented in this paper describe an indirect approach to achieving a unified visual projection during a performance. Combining the intellectual approaches with consistent non-verbal communication during rehearsal preparation will ensure the highest level of non-verbal communication during the performance, enabling the singers to represent visually the composer's intentions to a greater degree. When this is achieved through the singer's intellectual understanding of the music, without imposition of mood from the conductor, the result is sincerity of expression generated by internal emotion. If by sharing some of the intellectual concepts during the rehearsal process, the singers develop a greater understanding or sensitivity to music as an art and to its aesthetics, then the conductor has contributed to the students musical development beyond the teaching of choral literature.

To this end, the conductor may address the aspects of visual representation in a creative or technical manner. The creative approach, as part of rehearsal preparation, has

been suggested in this paper. This approach allows for synthesis of the information offered and gives some credibility to the singer's ability to comprehend individually. If Delsarte's and Stanislavski's beliefs about external expressions are correct, by increasing the internal awareness of the singers, the natural outcome will be a greater sincerity in the visual expression during performance. This sensitivity will be displayed not only in the musical expression but also in the potential visual expression, the natural outcome of internal emotions.

The technical approach is one of supplying the singer with not only the motivation, the emotional concepts, and some visual expressions, but also gestures or facial expressions that are intended to be reproduced at the moment of performance. This approach, when used exclusively, occasionally provides an immediate solution to an individual visual problem. Telling the ensemble to "look happy" during a joyous moment of a piece of music may temporarily cure a non-expressive ensemble. However, this teaches very little of what the singer can internalize and transfer to other literature. Since singers react differently to a variety of stimuli, the conductor may deal with individuals at different levels.

The intellectual approaches presented are not designed to be "quick-fixes" for visual problems. Many of the musical problems confronted in daily rehearsals are not

those with an easy one-step solution. They require consistent practice with attention and care to the development of good habits. Usually, after a period of time, the habits which have been established to enable improvements will be displayed. The approach to the visual concerns of the ensemble are no less the same. That which will be more meaningful and retained longer will be the concepts that the singer generates personally. This intellectual preparation allows the ensemble to enter the performance committed to representing the composer's intentions, both musically and visually.

The conductor's awareness of those non-verbal gestures and their significance during the execution of the concert will enable a continuation of this representation without inhibiting the potential of the ensemble.

"Music, being the most abstract and least tangible of all the arts, is perhaps, the most personal. He who wields this art, who instills its expression in others, cannot afford to be impersonal" (Hawkins 10). Hawkins continues this thought:

The conductor must make himself imagine that his group is one person with whom he can exchange words, facial expressions, emotions, ideas, laughter, and even tears ...through the actuality of the man will emerge the reality of musical expression (10).

Gail Poch explains the importance of the conductor's awareness and understanding of gesture in this manner, "If a conductor does not understand movement potential and its relationship to the music, his palette is limited to monochromatic expression" (21). The concept of applying the Delsarte System of Expression to a well-founded, solid conducting technique may enable the conductor to capitalize upon the pre-existing awareness of non-verbal communication each singer brings to the ensemble.

"Laban suggests that all movement is initiated from within. A conductor's interpretation shares the same origin. These two elements must emerge as a unified whole through the gesture" (Poch 21). Through application of the intellectual approaches as well as the non-verbal gestures reinforced by the Delsarte System of Expression, a visual representation that was congruent with the sub-textual interpretation of the music performed in recital was demonstrated.

## Appendix

Dr. Greg Lyne Interview

Interviewer: Do you believe that the entire body is actively involved in the communicative process of conducting?

Lyne: "Yes."

Interviewer: Do you believe that a conductor may be unaware of the non-verbal messages he is communicating?

Lyne: "Yes."

Interviewer: Can a conductor present conflicting visual messages to his ensemble?

Lyne: "Yes, very definitely."

Interviewer: Do you feel that the application of the Delsarte System of Expression to your conducting technique has enabled you to better communicate the intentions of the score? If so, in what way?

Lyne: "An awareness of the Delsarte method has enabled a better understanding of portraying or projecting an attitude. It has made me conscious of allowing the hand to create inertia and lift in the phrase. For instance, in a Brahms love song, there might be a conversation between a young girl and boy. The boy is coy, shy. My body can carry the same personality. I am convinced that by doing this [applying the Delsarte System] I am more aware of, or in touch with, my gesture and how it can

affect them [the ensemble]."

Interviewer: What are some consistencies you have discovered regarding the application of gestures to intended results? In other words, are there certain gestures, reinforced by the Delsarte System that will consistently achieve a certain response?

Lyne: "If the knees bend, there is inconsistency in the rhythm, the ensemble will be late. If the wrist is floppy, again, it will affect tempo. The whole arm must work as a unit, including the wrist. If the upper chest drops, the ensemble will elicit an unsupported tone. If there is space between the fingers [of the conducting hand] the result will be a breathy tone. If the index finger is pointed, the result is a nasal tone quality."

Interviewer: Why a nasal quality?

Lyne: "I believe this is in response to the finger directing the tone to the face. The singers will tend to focus where the finger points."

[This is supported by Shawn's research, he states, "The forefinger is the most mental - it indicates, directs, distinguishes..." (43)].

Interviewer: Is the application of the Delsarte System to conducting practical, and teachable?

Lyne: "As a part of teaching the concept of

conducting, yes. Patterns may be learned by a second grader. Simple time beating is not enough. Time beating is a small part of the conducting process, it is how it is utilized that makes a difference" (Rashleigh interview).



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