THE GRAMMAR OF CONDUCTING

SECOND EDITION

MAX RUDOLF

THE GRAMMAR OF CONDUCTING

A Practical Guide to Baton Technique and Orchestral Interpretation

by

MAX RUDOLF

Second Edition

SCHIRMER BOOKS
A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
NEW YORK

Collier Macmillan Publishers
LONDON

Schirmer Books
A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
866 Third Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10022

Collier Macmillan Canada, Ltd.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 79-7634

Printed in the United States of America

printing number

5 6 7 8 9 10

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Rudolf, Max.
The grammar of conducting.

1. Conducting. I. Title.
MT85.R8 1980 781.6'35 79-7634
ISBN 0-02-872220-5

THE GRAMMAR OF CONDUCTING

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Thanks to the detachment from his work that an author owes to the passing of time, I hope that this new edition of *The Grammar of Conducting* has benefited by the reexamination of judgments which I now, thirty years later, see in a different light. I have attempted to increase the text's usefulness by rewording comments that need better clarification and by adding musical examples in the interest of greater variety. In order to illustrate a point in question more effectively, twenty of the former excerpts have been replaced. Most important, the scope of the book has been widened by the addition of eight chapters. Transcending the area of baton technique, they touch upon questions of musical interpretation and render advice related to the preparation of performances.

The text's layout as a grammar has been preserved, which implies that rules and usage are compiled within a system that lends itself to class work or self-study within a gradual progression from simple to more exacting assignments. My book is not a treatise, but a methodic introduction into the techniques used in conducting an orchestra. Theoretical discussions are immediately applied to musical examples to let the student accumulate techniques as the examples increase in difficulty and variety. This explains some repetitions and the seemingly improvised nature of some chapters, much in the way of instruction in a seminar. It further explains why some of the most pertinent advice can be found in my comments on the musical examples.

The musical excerpts, brought up to date according to authentic sources, are condensed so as to offer the greatest aid to students, not for their pianistic effect. In class work, they should be played by the teacher or by a student who is able to react to the beat as an orchestra would. Although the orchestration is in-

dicated, full scores should be consulted frequently to put the excerpts into wider perspective.

Most examples are quotations from the symphonic and operatic standard repertory. Others consist of technical exercises which enable the student to concentrate entirely on mechanical problems. Since users of the first edition did not see a need for rewriting those unpretentious bits of music, I have refrained from "modernizing" them. The exercises should be practiced at many different speeds so as to train the student to indicate contrasting tempi unmistakably. Also, I recommend arranging some exercises for a small ensemble to let students prove their ability in front of an orchestra.

Nearly all the diagrams of the first edition have been retained. When I began designing them, I observed that the very small diagrams often found in textbooks were impractical and frequently inaccurate. Consequently, I decided, as a safeguard, to draw conducting patterns on large sheets (60 x 43 cm) and to adjust the lines to fit exactly my life-size gestures. Since it was my intention to suggest techniques that followed the common practice of prominent conductors, I asked George Szell to test my patterns by conducting along their lines, while I was playing on the piano excerpts of his choice. During the stimulating discussions that ensued, he shared my thought that students would profit by transferring the printed diagrams back to large size as a device to insure self-control. Musicians studying under strict supervision are less in need of such precaution than those who proceed on their own. To the latter, I recommend the procedure explained on pages 4 to 10. It will help them achieve a clear and incisive beat.

No author could hope to pinpoint the unending diversity of motions used in conducting. My task, therefore, was to organize the principles of what we might call good usage in conducting within a workable plan and to show students how to develop a great variety of gestures, free of pedantic time beating, yet marked by the kind of self-discipline that characterizes any worthwhile artistic endeavor.

My terminology and method of teaching, with its six basic beat patterns (*non-espressivo, light-staccato, full-staccato, espressivo-legato, marcato, tenuto*), have been largely accepted by those who have studied the book's first edition. (To my pleasure,

I have seen my term "accented upbeat" appear even in music reviews.) Methods and terminologies, however, are merely tools in the hands of an educator to be used in conjunction with his estimate of each student's potential as a performer. This takes on a special meaning in the education of conductors which, unlike any other musical training, is aimed at a fusion of comprehensive musicianship with the mastery of a highly individual sign language.

Part musician, part actor, the conductor pursues a craft that cannot be easily described. Even its definition is controversial and may depend on a person's more or less biased outlook. Haven't conductors been exposed to surprisingly divergent evaluations, from a denial of their right to exist to blind adulation of the "miracle worker" on the podium? Another radical view is the not infrequently heard assertion that conducting is nothing but an innate gift and cannot be learned. True, in every profession the measure of success is inseparable from an inborn talent. Yet, when speaking of a "born surgeon," no one would suggest that a medical person, no matter how brilliant, should take charge of an operation unless he was thoroughly trained in the theory and practice of his craft.

The first edition included only occasional references to musical interpretation. The impulse to discuss it on a broader basis came from my students, especially during the three years when I taught conducting at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. My students' interest in performance practice (an interest generally more in evidence now than a generation ago) seemed to justify the addition of chapters with the purpose of establishing a basic understanding of interpretational problems, of putting them in historical perspective, and of providing guidelines for further investigation.

The field of study related to musical interpretation is much too extended to allow, within the framework of this volume, more than an outline of the most common questions. As every performing musician knows, relatively few of them yield clear-cut answers. Hence, my discussion of a number of typical cases should be regarded as a means of helping students preserve an open mind when making their own choices. I hope to meet with understanding when I consider an "open mind" not as something which is given us by nature, but as an attribute which must be

acquired. In this context, I could not avoid pointing to the diversity of attitudes among performers as to how best do justice to the composer. Without claiming to have solved the problem of objectivism versus subjectivism in performing music, I believe that young conductors can be shown a path that leads in between a literal and an individualistic approach to a sort of "realism" in music making, a blend of well-founded knowledge and personal initiative.

As in the first edition, an Appendix serves to discuss the performance of complete works; some of the former selections have been replaced to cover a wider range of styles. Appendixes B and C have been added to illustrate points in connection with new chapters.

My gratitude to those who helped me with the first edition has not diminished through the years. First, I recall my unforgettable friend, George Szell. Without his encouragement, generous interest, and expert advice, it is doubtful whether my project would have become reality. Dr. Irving Kaplan contributed invaluable critical and literary assistance in the preparation of the text; Prof. Leo Kraft gave highly competent aid while I was working on the first draft. Three men, then associated with G. Schirmer, are gratefully remembered: William Schuman, who was the first to read my manuscript and believed in its worth; Nathan Broder and Felix Greissle, who gave their time unstintingly and contributed many helpful ideas.

Thanks to *The Grammar of Conducting,* I have made a large number of new friends both at home and abroad. Traveling in our country or touring around the globe, I have had numerous occasions to discuss my book with colleagues who had studied it and used it as a text for teaching. I am happy to use this opportunity to express to all of them my thanks, not only for their interest and appreciation, but for their excellent comments that have been put into use for this revision.

M.R.

INTRODUCTION

Directing an Orchestra Is a Complex Job

THE CONDUCTOR must be a trained musician, must know how to work with people in a group, and must be able to convey his intentions to his players by means of gestures.

It is very important that the conductor have a thorough knowledge of composition, and he should be familiar with various musical styles. He should also be aware of the problems of musical interpretation. A good working knowledge of instruments, both individually and in combination, is indispensable. The ability to read an orchestral score, and, if necessary, play it on the piano is a vital part of the conductor's equipment. While absolute pitch is not a prerequisite, the conductor's ear should be keen enough to recognize inaccuracy in pitch and to maintain the proper balance. The mastery of all these elements will give him the authority to be a genuine leader.

But all his musicianship and thorough study of scores will help him little unless he knows how to talk to people, work with them, and get results in a quick and direct manner. Knowledge of a few simple principles of group psychology is of great assistance in rehearsing efficiently and in stimulating the players to a good performance.

Musicianship and knowledge of psychology, however, still do not make a conductor. There is a technique of conducting just as there is a technique of playing an instrument.

The Technique of Conducting

The technique of conducting involves the use of the right arm in wielding the baton, the left arm in lending support, and

the functions of the eyes. The most elementary gestures are used to set the tempo of the music and to indicate when to start and stop, including holds and interruptions. These gestures are indispensable but are in themselves hardly more than traffic signals to keep the orchestra together. To obtain an artistic result the conductor must be able to communicate nuances in dynamics, details of phrasing, articulation (legato and staccato), and general expression. For this, mere *time-beating* is not enough; the appropriate gesture for each musical expression must be mastered, before we can speak of *conducting*.

If you watch an accomplished conductor, you will be impressed by the natural unity and coherence of his gestures. His motions seem to be such a simple and direct means of evoking musical expression that you may not realize their thoroughly planned and purposeful nature. These motions constitute a technique for conveying to the orchestra a large number of musical details. In order to teach this technique, the various gestures that the conductor uses will be analyzed and discussed in this book. You may wonder why an activity that appears so easy and natural must be dissected. You may also doubt whether all conductors have worked out their techniques as methodically as this book proposes to do. Actually, if they have not done so, they have attained the same end only by a long process of trial and error.

Whether a conductor studies in the manner proposed by this book, or whether his technique evolves in the course of his experience alone, he will have to pass through a stage of development in which he becomes acutely conscious of technical problems. Most musicians rely at first on their natural feelings and may work for some time with little to guide them but their instinct. But presently they realize that technical control is indispensable to artistic mastery. Once attained, such control gives the artist that expressive simplicity which is the goal of all artistic performance. For the conductor this means that his gestures become second nature and he can give himself entirely to the music.

The Use of the Baton

A conductor who fractured his left arm would still be able to exercise complete control of his group, provided that he had a good baton technique. Therefore, a large part of this book will

be devoted to advising the student how to handle the baton, the conductor's most efficient tool.

The handiest kind of baton is about twenty inches long and fairly light in weight. It should not be so thin that the point is shaky, making it hard to beat distinctly. The choice of a baton with or without a handle depends upon the individual. You must also decide for yourself what grip is the most convenient. The conductor must be able to control the baton completely and feel perfectly at ease; this is the test of a good grip. The most advisable way to hold the baton is with the thumb, first, and second fingers, and with the butt against the palm of the hand. You will feel more secure in the energetic beats if you use an even fuller grip.

Conducting Without Baton

Conducting without baton has one obvious advantage in that there are two expressive hands instead of one. But even though the baton takes some of the expressiveness from the right hand, there are advantages in using it. Remember that the player's attention is always divided between his music stand and the conductor. It is much easier for the player to follow the baton, especially if the music is unfamiliar or the part is technically difficult, or in accompaniments. The baton is even more important when there is a large ensemble, for then many of the players are quite a distance from the conductor's stand. In the interest of clarity, therefore, the student should learn to conduct with a baton. Nevertheless, the diagrams of this course can be studied without one.

General Explanation of the Diagrams

It is suggested that the student enlarge the diagrams of at least the first ten chapters. Each square of the diagram represents one square inch. The enlarged diagrams, drawn either on a sheet of paper or on a blackboard, will make it possible for the student to practice with a life-size beat.

Because of the two-dimensional nature of the diagrams, different beats along the same line can be indicated only by slight separation of the beat-lines. Straight lines which run close together on the diagram coincide in actual practice.

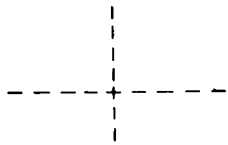
All counts are marked so that the played beat coincides with the written count: the baton is at ① when the 1st beat sounds, and moves so as to arrive at ② at the start of the 2nd beat.

◯ The baton passes through without stopping.

□ The baton stops at this point.

ATT Position of attention.

There are four kinds of lines in the diagrams:



indicates the field of beating.

indicates deliberate, controlled movement.

indicates very quick movement.

indicates bouncing.

CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE to the Second Edition . . . . . **xi**

INTRODUCTION . . . . . **xv**

Directing an orchestra is a complex job; the technique of conducting; the use of the baton; conducting without baton; general explanation of the diagrams

1. THE NON-ESPRESSIVO PATTERN (4-BEAT) . . **1**

General training of the right arm; the non-espressivo pattern (4-beat); the preparatory beat at the start; applying the gestures to musical exercises; emphasizing the beats by "clicking"; applying the non-espressivo pattern to musical examples

2. STACCATO PATTERNS (4-BEAT) **11**

Light-staccato; full-staccato

3. THE ESPRESSIVO-LEGATO PATTERN (4-BEAT) **19**

4. STARTING ON OTHER COUNTS **26**

Start on the 4th count; start on the 3rd count; start on the 2nd count

5. THE 3-BEAT **35**

Non-espressivo and espressivo-legato; light-staccato and full-staccato; start on the 2nd and 3rd counts

PAGE

6. SUDDEN CHANGES OF DYNAMICS AND ARTICULATION 47

Sudden change from p to f and vice versa; (1) changing the size of the beat; (2) using the left hand; (3) moving the right hand nearer to or farther from the body; change from legato to staccato and vice versa

7. CRESCENDO AND DECRESCENDO 53

Changing the size of the beat; using the left hand

8. THE 2-BEAT 61

Non-espressivo and espressivo-legato; light-staccato and full-staccato; dynamic changes; change from legato to staccato

9. FACING THE ORCHESTRA 74

Orchestral seating arrangement; cuing; conducting a complete work

10. THE 1-BEAT 78

Non-espressivo; espressivo-legato; staccato; dynamic changes and change from legato to staccato; musical examples

11. THE MARCATO PATTERN 86

12. START AFTER THE COUNT 93

Start after the count; use of an extra beat

13. THE 6-BEAT 102

German style; Italian style

14. SUBDIVISION 114

8 beats in a measure; 4 beats as a result of subdivision; 12 beats in a measure; 9 beats in a measure; 6 beats as a result of subdivision; 1-beat with subdivision

15. RESTS 129

Rests; rests at the beginning of a piece; rests at the end of a piece; rests in accompaniment

PAGE

16. RITARDANDO AND ACCELERANDO 138

Ritardando and accelerando; tempo transitions by changing the number of beats in a measure; ritenuto

17. THE TENUTO PATTERN 152

18. HOLDS (I) 160

Concluding holds; holds during a piece, not followed by a rest

19. HOLDS (II) 184

Holds followed by rests; holds on rests; different note values under a fermata; interruptions

20. ACCENTS AND SYNCOPATION 196

Accents; syncopation; accents on off-beats; fp

21. PHRASING 210

Phrasing; sustained notes; shaping the melodic line

22. DIFFERENT USES FOR BASIC PATTERNS 222

Non-espressivo; espressivo-legato; light- and full-staccato; marcato; tenuto; legato and staccato simultaneously; simultaneous different dynamics; problems of orchestration

23. ACHIEVING COMPLETE PHYSICAL CONTROL 233

General appearance; field of beating; use of the eyes; independence and use of the left hand

24. ON PREPARATION IN GENERAL 239

Techniques of starting; entries; preparation in its broader aspects; free preparatory gestures; preparation with subdivision

25. NUMBER OF BEATS IN A MEASURE (I)..... 247

General considerations; simultaneous different rhythms; irregular measures

PAGE

26. NUMBER OF BEATS IN A MEASURE (II) 259

Changing the number of beats for one or more bars; subdividing a single count

27. 5-TIME, 7-TIME, AND OTHER ASYMMETRIC TIME PATTERNS 271

5-time with beats on each count; 5-time with 1, 2, or 3 beats in a measure; 7-time with beats on each count; 7-time with 3 or 4 beats in a measure; various asymmetric time patterns; 8-time with lopsided 3-beat; 9-time with lopsided 4-beat; 10-time with lopsided 4-beat; 11-time; 13-time

28. CHANGES OF RHYTHM AND TEMPO 286

Change of time-signature without change of tempo; change of tempo with rhythmic relation maintained; change of tempo without rhythmic relation

29. FREE STYLE 300

Free style of conducting; the art of accompaniment; aleatory music

30. APPLICATION OF BATON TECHNIQUE 307

Applying baton technique to the score; adjustments while in action

31. SCORE STUDY 313

Purpose of score study; selecting the score; methods of score study; marking a score; memorizing a score; interpretation of a score; different attitudes to interpretation; the quest for authenticity

32. CHOICE OF TEMPO 321

General considerations; application of a chosen tempo; tempo modifications; tempo relations; metronome

33. PERFORMANCE PRACTICE (I) 331

The study of performance practice; old vs. modern instruments; baroque music; Haydn; Mozart

PAGE

34. PERFORMANCE PRACTICE (II) 345

Beethoven; music in the romantic era; Schubert; Mendelssohn; Schumann; Berlioz; Wagner; Brahms; Bruckner; late romantic music; bibliography

35. PREPARATION OF ORCHESTRA MATERIALS 364

Examination of materials; marking parts; bow marking; changing the composer's text; changing the orchestration; doubling; retouching vs. arranging

36. REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES 382

Rehearsal planning; efficient rehearsing; technical advice and its application in rehearsal; the psychology of the conductor-orchestra relation; the conductor-soloist relation; concluding remarks

37. CONDUCTING OPERA..... 397

Studying an opera score; performance practice in opera; rehearsing opera; conducting in the pit

38. CONDUCTING CHORAL WORKS WITH ORCHESTRA 408

APPENDIX A: *Discussion of Complete Works or Movements*

1. George Frideric Handel, *Concerto Grosso in G minor, Op. 6, No. 6—Third Movement (Musette)* 411
2. Antonín Dvořák, *Serenade for Strings, Op. 22—First Movement* 412
3. Johann Sebastian Bach, *Air from Suite No. 3 in D major* 414
4. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Symphony No. 7, in A major, Op. 92—Third Movement* 415
5. Johannes Brahms, *Symphony No. 4, in E minor, Op. 98—First Movement*..... 418
6. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Overture to "Egmont", Op. 84.* 422
7. Johann Strauss, *Overture to "Die Fledermaus" ("The Bat")*..... 425
8. Claude Debussy, *"Fêtes" ("Festivals"), No. 2 from Nocturnes for Orchestra*..... 430