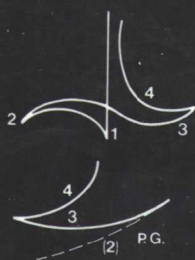
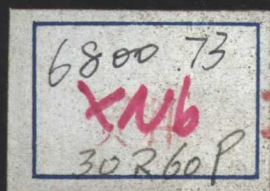


# THE ART OF CONDUCTING

DONALD HUNSBERGER AND ROY ERNST



eye contact, left hand  
attention  
position

preparatory gesture  
cue



right  
hand:

4  
4

left  
hand: attention

(Preparatory Gesture rises to  
avoid crossing of hands.)



THE ART OF *Conducting*

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THE ART OF *Conducting*

Donald Hunsberger & Roy E. Ernst

THE EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

## PREFACE

The improvement of college conducting classes is a matter of widespread concern, particularly since a large percentage of graduates use their conducting skills extensively during their careers and many—perhaps most—will receive no additional formal instruction. The number of students who need to receive individual instruction and experience in a limited amount of class time seems inevitably to make accomplishments too limited. What can be done to increase the effectiveness of conducting classes, given the amount of class time and the number of students? More specifically: How can classes be organized so that each student will receive as much time as possible to actually conduct? What are the best methods and sequences for presenting instruction? How can instrumentalists and vocalists be accommodated in the same conducting class? What musical repertoire can be conducted and performed in class? How can score reading and analysis be integrated with the development of technique? How can the wide array of background knowledge and administrative skills required to become a successful conductor today be included? These were among the questions that we addressed during four years of concentrated evaluation and revision of the basic conducting curriculum at the Eastman School of Music. The organization and instructional materials which were developed are presented in this comprehensive text for introductory through advanced conducting classes consisting of vocalists, instrumentalists, or both.

The techniques and information included in most undergraduate conducting courses are thoroughly covered in the first twelve chapters of the book, and classes that progress only to this point will give students an excellent grasp of the fundamentals of conducting technique. Many instructors will find, as we have, however, that the more efficient procedures and instructional sequence will make it possible to include much or all of the material in introductory courses. Where this is not the case, due to the size of the class or the number of hours per week, these chapters can be included in subsequent courses. The chapters on advanced conducting techniques and special areas such as musical theater also will be an important reference resource for students who are not able to study them in other courses.

We found that concise instructions, directly to the point, are most helpful to students. This should not be mistaken, however, as a dogmatic approach. Alternative procedures are discussed, and teachers and students are encouraged to consider and analyze still additional alternatives.

Every musical concept or physical skill presented in the text is accompanied by musical excerpts for illustration and conducting practice. The excerpts are long enough to establish a musical context for conducting—not just three or four measures to illustrate a point. We have found—not surprisingly—that students prefer to conduct standard repertoire (“real music,” as they say) rather than études. This is also an opportunity to learn additional repertoire. Single-pitch exercises are provided where they will be useful for unison conducting in class.

The musical excerpts have been selected from the standard choral, orchestral, and wind repertoire, so it is possible for classes with vocalists and instrumentalists to function both as an instrumental ensemble and as a choral ensemble. Classes consisting of vocalists only or instrumentalists only will find sufficient repertoire for each type of ensemble. Classes that are not able to perform some of the more difficult excerpts can use those for analysis and the less difficult excerpts for class performance. We recommend that students perform in class on either their major instrument or a secondary instrument on which they are fairly advanced.

The main focus of this text is on conducting technique, score reading, score analysis, and general rehearsal procedures. More detailed information on rehearsal procedures and repertoire for each type of ensemble is expected to be covered in subsequent courses. If the class consists of all vocalists or all instrumentalists, however, this specialized information can be easily integrated.

Musical excerpts in chapters one through five are to be sung (with piano accompaniment) and conducted by the class in unison with the instructor. This enables the class to learn and practice each technique before individual students conduct—an efficient procedure that makes it possible for the class to learn the fundamentals of technique very quickly. Instruments can be added to the vocal line when individuals conduct the class.

Beginning with Chapter 6, instrumental excerpts are included that are arranged for performance by small groups of random instrumentation. Students are expected to transpose, if necessary, when playing easy excerpts. Transposed performance parts for more difficult excerpts are included with each chapter.

Developing fluency and confidence in score-reading techniques—clefs, transpositions, and orchestration schemes—requires continual practice over a long period of time. Therefore, exercises for score reading are distributed throughout the text rather than grouped in one or two chapters. Some of the earlier exercises for reading clefs and transpositions, however, can be omitted if this has been adequately covered in other courses and time does not permit additional practice. These can also be grouped and reviewed as a single unit. Score-reading assignments progress gradually from reading clefs and transpositions to comprehensive analysis of compositions.

The appendix includes lists of terms for convenient reference, forms for planning and organization, a transposition chart, additional guidelines for score analysis, and recommended procedures for the conducting class.

We wish to express our appreciation to Carl Atkins, John Boyd, Donald Kendrick, Grzegorz Nowak, Michael Ramey, Munro Sherrill, and Rodney Winther for their assistance in using this text in its early stages of development and assisting with its evaluation. The comments and suggestions from the following persons who reviewed the manuscript were extremely helpful in making final revisions: John Boyd, Kent State University; Joseph L. Estock, James Madison University; C. Dale Fjerstad, University of the Pacific; Robert C. Fleming, Arizona State University; Craig J. Kirchhoff, Ohio State University; Albert F. Ligotti, University of Georgia; H. Robert Reynolds, University of

Michigan; Barry M. Shank, East Carolina University; Charles H. Webb, Indiana University, Bloomington. We are particularly indebted to the many students with whom we have worked, both at Eastman and throughout the United States, whose enthusiasm and musicianship are a constant source of inspiration to us. We hope that our efforts through this book will help many of them to have rewarding musical careers.

DONALD HUNSBERGER

ROY ERNST



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## INTRODUCTION

Conducting is a great privilege—an opportunity to use the vast resources of musical composition and performance for artistic creativity. It also carries with it many responsibilities, particularly to the composer, the members of the ensemble, the audience, and the conductor's own standards of musical and personal integrity.

Scholarship is essential to become a conductor, for in addition to possessing the skills to analyze a score thoroughly before rehearsal, a conductor must be able to draw upon extensive knowledge and long experience to develop the inherent, distinctive characteristics of each composition. Interpretation of one composition requires a knowledge of the composer's other works and of how this composer's style is similar to or different from that of his contemporaries, his predecessors, and his followers. The ability to clearly differentiate compositional and performance styles will result in performances that are distinctive and interesting, while the failure to do so usually results in bland and monotonous renditions. Even the experience of many years of conducting will not lead to convincing, stylistically valid interpretations if the conductor's research and analysis habits are superficial rather than thorough.

In addition to possessing a broad knowledge of traditional repertoire, each conductor should study the works of contemporary composers—the music of his own time—and develop the special knowledge and skills necessary for analyzing, interpreting, and conducting contemporary compositions. Jazz performance and music theater are important areas of contemporary composition that should not be ignored.

The conductor must be worthy of leading other musicians. He should allow his conducting abilities and his other accomplishments as a musician to speak for themselves without indulging in pompous self-flattery.\* Conductors must be able to inspire and challenge musicians to perform at their highest possible level through instructive assistance that is supportive and positive rather than intimidating and destructive. Fortunately, the era has passed when it was common practice for egotistical or personally insecure conductors to psychologically abuse performers through verbal intimidation. Such actions are usually an attempt to draw attention away from the conductor's own deficiencies. A conductor should never hesitate to display sincere caring for the performers and the music being performed.

In addition to scholarship, a clear, fluent conducting technique is essential. A secure technique enables a conductor to concentrate entirely on the needs of the performers and the music. It also serves to reduce the use of verbal instruction during the rehearsal, since performers will recognize good technique and react positively to it. A polished technique by itself is not sufficient, however; it is only the means through which the conductor expresses knowledge and musicianship. Flamboyant and dramatic gestures made primarily to impress an audience should not be mistaken for good conducting technique.

Conductors frequently must be responsible for administrative details that are essentially nonmusical but that, if left unattended to, can become critical obstructions. An enormous amount of behind-the-scenes detail work is necessary for the successful

\*Throughout this text *he* and *his* are intended as neuter pronouns. The authors fully realize that many women are outstanding conductors.

operation of a musical ensemble. The conductor's objective is to develop organizational procedures to handle each problem as efficiently as possible.

The subject of right-handed and left-handed conductors is frequently a topic of discussion. Today, conductors face musical tasks so complex that they must be able to use either hand independently, contrary to the traditional concept that the right hand is primarily assigned to beating time patterns while the left hand is relegated to indicating *sostenuto* support, dynamic levels, cueing, and so forth. To perform Renaissance antiphonal choir music, contemporary aleatoric and proportional-notation compositions, or accompaniments of all periods requires a free and independent use of *both* hands for rhythmic pulse, cueing, or dynamics. Thus an ambidextrous approach is essential for the beginning conductor.

Once the fundamental knowledge and techniques are acquired, each conductor must strive to develop an individual style and personality—avoiding the common tendency to mimic other conductors. Do not hesitate to learn from others, but be selective in what you choose to adapt to your own style. You must be able to analyze the logic and validity of the many dogmatic concepts and myths about conducting. For each new technique you try, ask yourself such questions as: What are the advantages for my development? What are the disadvantages? In what type of situation would this be best? Where would an alternative technique work better? Using this analytical approach—rather than merely attempting to reduce conducting to a set of simple rules—will lead you, as a musically sincere conductor, to continual intellectual growth and superior conducting capabilities.

## POSTURE

The foundation of a good conducting technique begins with correct posture. A knowledge of how each aspect of posture affects conducting will lead to maximum physical flexibility and will give a general impression of confident leadership and artistic elegance.

The following stance is recommended for beginning conductors. Slight variations will develop naturally as each person's individual conducting style begins to take form.

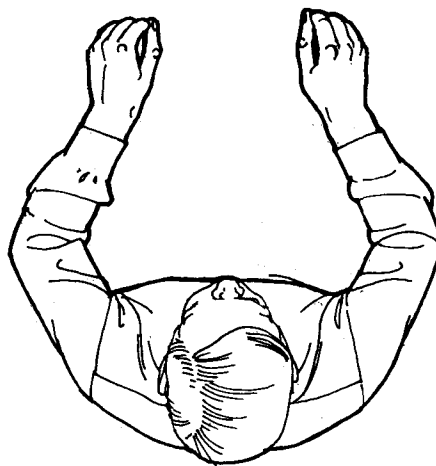
1. Stand erect with your feet five or six inches apart, toes pointed slightly outward. This position will provide good balance and the ability to turn comfortably to each side. (Some conductors develop the habit of placing one foot forward, creating a tendency to face one side of the ensemble more than the other. This presents a somewhat lopsided appearance to the audience.)
2. Keep your knees straight but not locked. Distribute your weight evenly on both feet.
3. Keep your shoulders back, though not stiff or uncomfortably rigid.
4. Hold your head high with your neck relaxed. Avoid holding or twisting your head to one side or the other, as this may produce tension in the neck and shoulder area and possibly turn the body in that direction.
5. When you turn your upper body to face sections of the ensemble, do not give the impression that your feet are immobile or fastened to the floor. Change your foot position for a more decisive turn or move.

Practice these positions and experiment with variations that feel natural to you.

### *Arm Position*

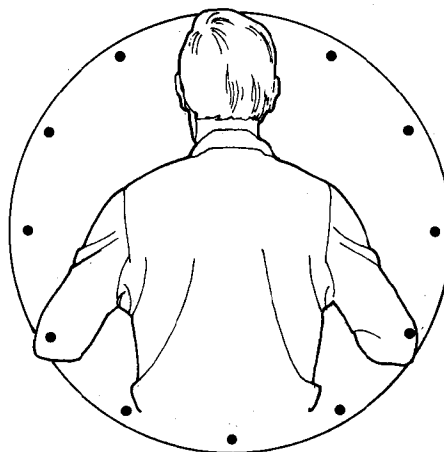
1. Fully extend both arms in front of your body. Retract your hands toward your chest until the bending of the elbows creates an angle of slightly more than ninety degrees between the upper arm and the forearm. Your elbows should be in front of your body, not by your sides. Figure 1.1 illustrates this position.

**Figure 1.1** Conducting arm position, as viewed from above.



2. Thinking in reference to the numbers on the face of a clock, position your right elbow between four o'clock and five o'clock and your left elbow between seven o'clock and eight o'clock. This is the basic arm position and will provide a natural appearance as well as maximum freedom of movement. (See Figure 1.2.)

**Figure 1.2** Conducting arm position as viewed from the back.



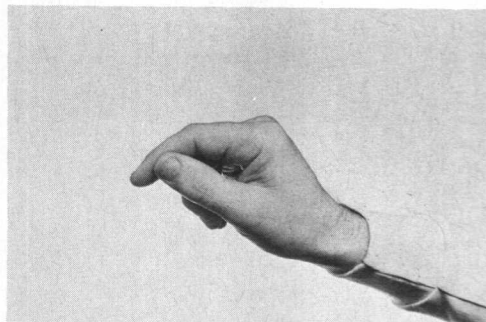
3. Practice adjusting this position by raising the right elbow to a three-o'clock position and the left elbow to a nine-o'clock position. Rotate both elbows and lower them to approximately six o'clock, or close to the body. Be aware of the feeling of each of these extreme positions. Now return to the basic position.

### *Hand Position*

1. You may want to learn the basic beat patterns first without a baton, because this approach might encourage a more relaxed and natural grip when you add the baton later. Also, developing the ability to "feel the pulse" in your hand will assist you when the baton is used. (If your instructor prefers to begin the entire process with a baton, read the section in Chapter 3, "Using the Baton" (pp. 29–35), before proceeding.)
2. Turn the palm of the right hand downward with a slight inward roll and lightly touch the thumb against the first finger by the first joint. Curve the remaining fingers inward naturally toward the palm. This will be approximately the same

shape as when the hand hangs relaxed by your side. It is also the same basic shape you will use later with the baton. You may extend the first finger slightly to give the hand a more pointed shape. The back of the hand should be held a little higher than the wrist. (See Figure 1.3.)

**Figure 1.3** Hand position without baton.



3. Give small downbeats and upbeats to feel a rhythmic pulse with your hand, focused in your fingertips. The hand should flex downward slightly at the wrist as downbeats are given, as though you were flicking water from your fingers. Observe the wrist action carefully; too much motion will produce a floppy effect, and too little motion will appear stiff and rigid.

### *Conducting Area*

Ordinarily, the conducting area extends from the top of the head to the waist (approximately the height to which a conductor's stand is generally raised) for vertical strokes and the full reach of the arms to either side for horizontal strokes. The horizontal center of the beat patterns should be approximately at chest height. The vertical beat patterns should be in front of the body slightly to the right of center for the right hand (approximately in front of the right shoulder) and slightly to the left of center for the left hand (again in front of the shoulder area).

## PREPARATORY GESTURES AND DOWNBEATS

It takes a great amount of practice and analysis to produce consistently clear and rhythmical preparatory gestures and downbeats. These introductory motions must convey

1. The tempo
2. The dynamic level
3. The articulation style of the opening statement
4. An exact beginning of the first tone

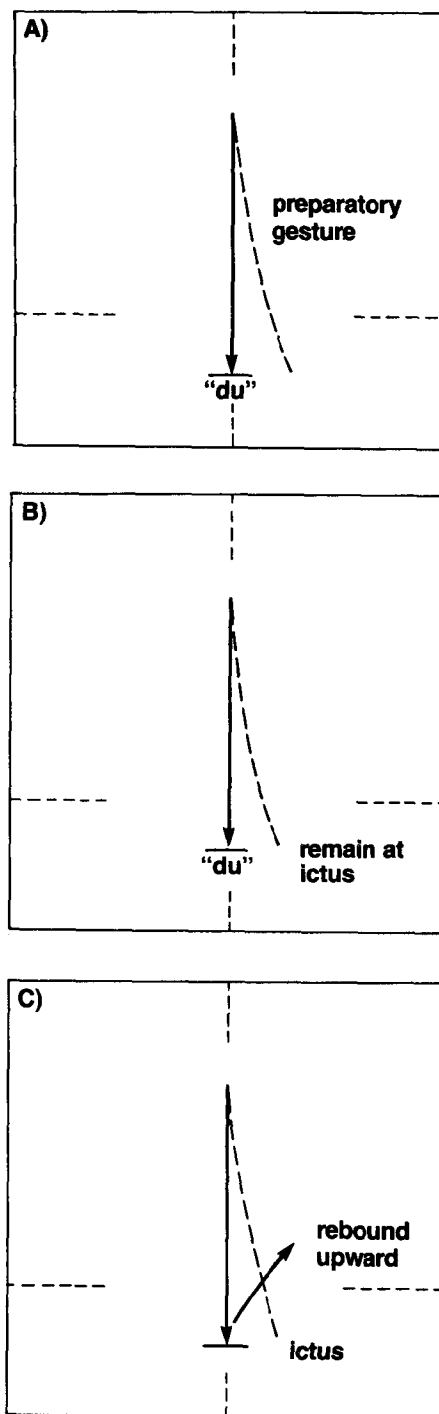
Practice giving preparatory gestures and downbeats as follows:

1. Assume the basic conducting positions previously described. Check the position of your feet, shoulders, and head. Extend your right hand and arm to the position shown in Figures 1.1 and 1.2. Let your left arm hang in a comfortable position by your side.
2. Give a preparatory gesture and downbeat, inhaling slightly as you raise your hand through the preparatory gesture. Breathe quietly—do not make a loud gasp! Breathing along with the preparatory gesture places the conductor in a sympathetic

position with the performers, who will usually breathe on the preparatory beat. This will also help to avoid rushing on the preparatory gesture.

3. Bring your hand downward to the same horizontal plane where the preparatory gesture began (See Figure 1.4) and sing a syllable such as *tu* or *du*. The tone should begin at the point when the downward motion stops. The hand can either remain in this position or make a slight upward rebound. The precise moment when the metric pulse is felt and the tone begins is called the *ictus*.

Figure 1.4 Preparatory gesture and downbeat.





The class should now practice preparatory gestures and downbeats in unison with the instructor.\* Always establish eye contact with your performers and pause for a moment until you sense their concentration and readiness. Practice until the breathing motion, the preparatory gesture, and the downbeat are coordinated within an overall feeling of rhythmic flow. Practice the patterns indicated in Figure 1.4.

The various parts of the preparatory gesture and downbeat should be carefully analyzed to see how they indicate specific musical qualities, such as dynamic level, style of articulation, and tempo. For example, the size of the preparatory gesture and the downbeat gesture indicates the expected *dynamic level*.

*Articulation style* is indicated primarily by the speed and the smoothness or abruptness of the gestures. The contour of the preparatory gesture can also indicate articulation style. An abrupt, angular motion would indicate an accented or staccato style; a smooth, curved gesture indicates a more flowing, legato style.

It is particularly important to analyze how the *tempo* is set. In a scientific sense, setting the tempo means defining a unit of time duration that will be repeated exactly to create a steady metric pulse. Just as two specific points in space are needed to define a unit of distance, two specific points in time are needed to define a unit of duration.

The beginning of the preparatory gesture cannot be consistently identified by observers as a specific point in time because it is impossible to recognize the exact moment when motion begins, so the upward motion from the beginning to the end of the preparatory gesture gives only an approximation of the tempo. The end of the preparatory gesture, which we will now call the *preparatory ictus*, can be observed as a specific point in time. Therefore, the duration of time between the preparatory ictus and the downbeat ictus precisely defines the length of metric unit or pulse. (See Figure 1.5.)

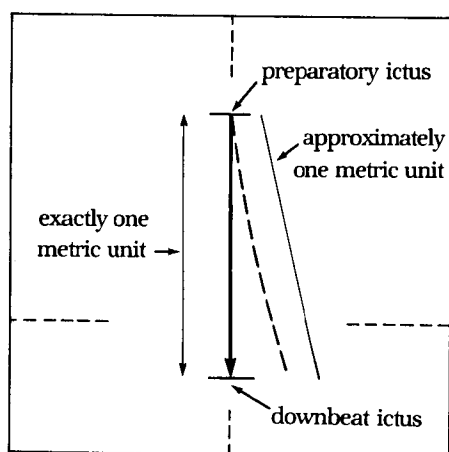


Figure 1.5 Defining the tempo.

You can develop a clearer understanding of how the tempo is set by testing each of these observations. First, try indicating several different tempos to the class, using only preparatory gestures without downbeats. The class should try to sing beats on *tu* to continue the pulse that you indicate. Do they succeed?

The problem is that *two* precise points in time have not been given, because the precise beginning of the preparatory gesture is usually not observable. To test this, ask the class to sing *tu* both at the beginning and the end of the preparatory gesture.

\*The class should sing the syllable on a given pitch with each downbeat. Having the class stand in a circle will enable each member to observe the others while practicing; in addition, the instructor can move quickly among the class members for corrections.