

## On Conducting ( by H.J. Nagel )

general remarks

preparation of the conductor at home and at the place of the rehearsal

preparations of the musicians before a rehearsal

Conducting combines intuitive forming with critical observation of the musical process. Gestures and movings of a conductor have a double function: to present the music as a piece of art and to lead an orchestra.

It means: to observe, to correct, to prepare and to solve difficult places in the score and in the parts of the musicians, to balance mistakes during a performance and to be aware of them in order to avoid them.

Conducting means – observing

- supporting

- helping

The movements/gestures show the metrical process of a musical work and the necessary expressions for realizing the form and the musical content

The conductor should practice his movements and gestures at home in front of a mirror. He should be aware from the beginning that only he is the reason, when an orchestra plays bad under his conducting.

The combination of conducting with the playing musicians is a most sensitive process and needs engagement, knowledge, personality and fire at any moment of a rehearsal.

The conductor has to become the music himself and has to transfer this ability to the musicians.

The movements should have neither over-dramatic gestures nor should the face and head express wrong pretensions. The ideal way is to restrict the movements only to the right arm and not using the left arm.

Only the left hand is a very great help for supporting expressions.

The view has to be absolutely free of any false mimicry or grimaces. The eye of the conductor has to observe, helps and conducts itself! The whole body is quite and relax with regard to the feet and legs. The downpart of the body does not take part in the process of conducting. The upper part is standing upright without bowing. No tension at all is visible. Head and eyes are absolutely reacting flexible.

Aim of the rehearsal: all musicians must develop an own imagination of the piece and its sound, its structure and their personal contribution of realizing this.

#### Conductors preparation at home

1.

- choice of the pieces he is going to rehearse in the next rehearsal
- preparing of the bowings in the parts and in his score ( the conductor can prepare the bowings in one part of each musical



part of the different groups and give it to a reliable assisting musician , who will transfer them in all the arts.)

2.

Analysis of the score with regard to

Tempi, beat ( in 4, in 2, in 1 etc.), difficult places in the parts, which require special preparation and attention at the rehearsal.

It is necessary that the conductor prepares separate from the score a special paper containing the places of difficult places in the parts with bar numbers or letters. Those decisions have to be done before hand and not during the rehearsal.

Rehearsals have to be fluent and the conductor has to know his decisions always ahead of the musicians. Musicians want to play and not waiting on the result of the conductors thinking process.

3.

Rehearsals have to be structured in a way, that difficult places of a score are rehearsed at the beginning. A so called run through of a piece does not make sense, when musicians are not prepared or able for this. Do not start too often from the beginning, which is mostly a sign, that the conductor is not prepared for the rehearsal.

Rehearsals must be challenging and interesting for the musicians. Section rehearsing must never be a reason for sleeping or not playing .They have to be involved by listening to the others and understanding the context of their parts.

Conductor and musicians before the rehearsal starts

The conductor has to be at the place of the rehearsal min. 30 minutes before the rehearsal starts. He has to prepare the setting of the orchestra with the positioning of the seats. This is necessary if an orchestra does not have- as usual- a professional former player who is engaged for this work and responsible for it. The setting of the orchestra respects the view and space of each player as well as the view of the conductor on each player.

The conductor must prepare folders (files) for each desk. The folders contain the parts which are going to be rehearsed.

Musical parts should not be piled up like a place of garbage in front of the musicians. It makes the conductor ridiculous and musicians notice everything which happens in front of them.

The folders have to be divided in

4 folders for 1.violin ( each marked with the desk No., as for instance Violin I 1<sup>st</sup> desk), 4 folders for 2<sup>nd</sup> violin, 3 folders for Viola, 3 folders for cello, 2 folders for double bass. (it is always better to have one folder in reserve.)

All stands should have a pencil for the musicians for marking the parts especially with a change of the prepared bowing, dynamics, cresc., accelerando, diminuendo or rallentando.

Attention: musicians have to learn the different signs which they have to be put in their parts. **THIS IS MOST IMPORTANT.**

Musicians have to be min. 15 minutes before the rehearsal starts in the rehearsal room. The instruments have to be picked up from their storing places and checked. The boxes of the instruments have to be placed outside of the orchestras setting.



## Knowledge and abilities of a conductor

The conductor must know in all details the score of the work he is going to conduct.

This means knowing – the musical form

- the harmonic development of a piece
- historical details with regard to the way of performance and the historical situation in which the music was composed
- historical stylistic elements as phrasings, tempi etc.
- bars or phrases in the work to be performed and rehearsed which need special attention at the rehearsal practice.

At the beginning of each rehearsal, scales have to be played relating to the pitch of the work to be rehearsed. They have to be played in different rhythmical exercises, different bowings.

Those exercises should refer to musical elements which are going to be performed.

The conductor has to prove here his experience of string instruments and his ability for inventing those exercises, which should help to improve the basic technique repertoire of the musicians, as

- division of the bow
- improvement of intonation

- dynamic playing as the p or pp in an intensive way.
- playing on the finger board in case of p and diminuendo playing

Main aim of the rehearsal should be

- musicians must develop and improve a personal imagination of the sound
- they must gain an awareness of the structure of the music and their personal contribution in it and for a performance

The conductor has to combine his imagination of a work with the reality of the orchestras abilities

## Conclusions:

The instrument of a conductor ( the orchestra) is alive and consists of a diversity of performing musicians who are playing different instruments. The conductor has to transfer them in a serving position.

Musicians are primary concentrated on their instrument, not so much on the musical work they are going to present.

The conductor has a score which contains the work he is going to rehearse. He must be able to hear the piece in his imagination in the same way as the composer had written down his intentions.

The conductor has therefore to develop a perfect " inner singing". Without this he just appears as a tool with moving arms.

Only when the music becomes alive in him, he will be able to conduct.

The conductor works with tunes which have to be formed and brought into a relation to the construction of a piece.

The result depends on the personality, imagination and abilities of a conductor.

There are also considerations with regard to technique aspects of conducting. They can be studied and learned.

If one decides to stand in front of an orchestra and an audience he has to be prepared for it.