

## Thoughts on Arm-Waving

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Conducting comes from the inner singing voice; good physical conducting *looks like good singing* (and like good singing, it is concerned with shaping lines and story-telling. There is an aspect of drama about it.

Chest and neck should be soft, relaxed and open

Chin: should be in (as in good singing)—not thrust up or out. Find a place for your head where you sing most easily. Keep your head there when you conduct.

Ensembles always sound better when the conductor's mouth is open slightly. Your face should be relaxed and natural—like good singing or good brass playing.

Let your mind lead your hand—and let your hand follow your ear.

Physical conducting comes out of the dance between creating an expectation, following through on the intention AND reacting to what is produced. It sounds complicated because it is.

You are dancing in the phase of existence between “future” and “past.” Some might call that the “present...”

...BUT you're only there for an instant. “Now” is just only bridge between the past and the future. If this seems confusing, please read “The Book of Five Rings” several times.

Gestures inspired by shape, weight (linear and dynamic) and color are more effective than gestures that come out of rhythm or geometry (patterns). The priority is to *shape lines*, not to “give beats.”

Whether conducting an orchestra or a band, the conductor's arm movement is most effective when related to the arm movements of good string playing.

In bowing, the string provides resistance to the movement of the bow; the conductor must develop an awareness of that sensation. The conductor, therefore, is showing the players what it feels like to shape the music (with either bow or wind).

Conducting is a combination of musicianship and athleticism. Elite athletes instinctively move their bodies to react to changing situations. They move quickly but never seem to hurry. They are balanced and in control even when performing the most extraordinary movements. This is what elite conductors do as well.

Good physical conducting is based on the posture of good athletic movement.

ASYMMETRY allows posture that is both stable and capable of flexibility; we seek stability without being “planted.”

The “fetal crouch” is the body’s natural response to stress and fear. We take the body posture of fear even when we don’t consciously feel it—and this comes across to players as a lack of artistic commitment.

Think of hockey players. They require strength and solidity in the lower body for skating power, an ability to shift their weight flexibly to maneuver, and very soft hands to corral a puck that is sliding across ice. These three qualities are also valuable for conductors.

These are also the qualities of trees, and of good buildings—a stable, firm foundation becoming more fluid, elegant and supple as they ascend.

Energy flows FROM the center out through the relaxed arms, then through the hands and baton to the players. Do the “unbendable elbow” exercise from martial arts. The shoulder, elbow, wrist and fingers are simply flexible connections that unite what is inside you with the tip of the baton. Any tension or “holding” (of arms, hands or baton) will break this flow and disconnect you from the ensemble and the sound.

Create a space for sound in front of the body. If you make that space larger, the players will instinctively fill it up with more sound—make it smaller and they will make less sound. This is the most effective way to control dynamics.

Preparatory beats go DOWN before they go up. The purpose of the preparatory beat is to inspire a beautiful sound from the ensemble. The purpose of the downbeat is to RELEASE that sound. Breathing is essential to this process of “gather and release.”

“Giving beats” is the enemy of good conducting. The moment of the beat is too late to effect any change in the playing. Good conducting (like sophisticated music-making) is all about what is

happening between the beats. The moments of the beat are simply confirmations of what has been prepared in advance.

Conduct smaller. Every conductor not named Fritz Reiner uses more space than necessary. Move less and you will hear better. Move less and you will have more freedom to change the gesture and music. Move less and your expressive gestures will be more clear to the ensemble.

Wind ensembles sound best (i.e. most “musical”) when they rely on phrase direction and contrast—rather than raw power—to create energy. Conducting smaller helps de-emphasize transitional passages to create more powerful “arrivals.”