

Making Your Band Better Without Saying a Word

Ten Steps to Becoming a More Effective Conductor

Dr. Rodney C. Schueller

How many times have you wished you had one more rehearsal before an important performance? What if you could have the rehearsal time and more?

All you need is a video camera and the courage and commitment to improve the efficiency of your rehearsals through more expressive conducting.

I used to believe that in our profession the artist conductors spent too much time developing choreography and not enough time

taking care of the technical aspects of the music. In my mind, there was a disconnect between what artistry and non-verbal communication could do for an ensemble as opposed to time spent giving in-depth explanations and modeling of the desired musical effects. It is only now that I realize how important effective non-verbal communication is for

the sake of rehearsal efficiency, overall musicianship, and spontaneity.

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evaluating my conducting performance, I realized that often what I thought I was conveying with the baton, left hand, body, or face, was not what the ensemble was seeing. The only way to become a more musical conductor was to increase and improve my repertoire of conducting gestures

and facial expressions through individual practice. If I believed what I was seeing, perhaps the ensemble would as well.

Dr. Jeffrey Gershman and I have developed ten steps to becoming a more effective conductor, which we will present in detail at this summer's Texas Bandmasters Association Convention/Clinic.

These are the ten areas we will address:

1 Correct Body Position:

Before any artistry can begin, the basics of good conducting begin here. Maintaining attention comes from strength, which begins with good posture.

2 Defining Your Levers:

Knowing how and when to utilize your shoulders, elbows and most importantly, your wrist. If you have felt overworked in a rehearsal, chances are it is because you have used your levers improperly.

3 Controlling Your Baton:

What is the function of the baton? Is your grip and baton position/angle working to your benefit?

4 Rebound:

An area that is usually a conductor's worse enemy, and I am living proof of why rebound should almost always be eliminated. It was only after receiving feedback concerning clarity in my conducting that I completely reevaluated my approach.

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5 *Patterns:*

Rethinking your basic patterns to make your motions more efficient.

6 *Conducting Dynamics:*

Utilizing both arms, as well as your face, to convey the desired dynamic.

7 *Style:*

Although style is a dangerous word, what you do to communicate legato and tenuto, staccato and marcato helps to dictate style.

8 *Attacks:*

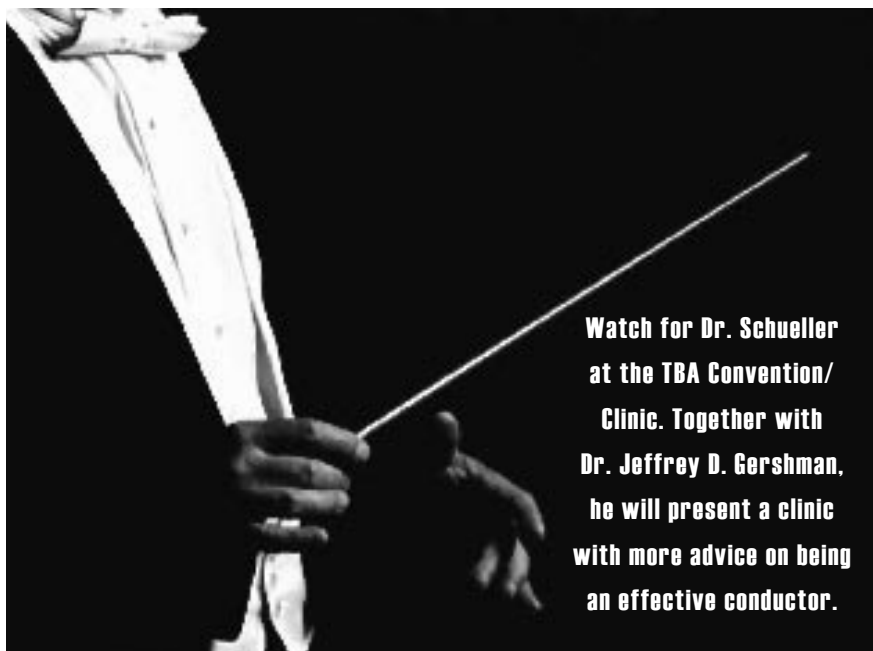
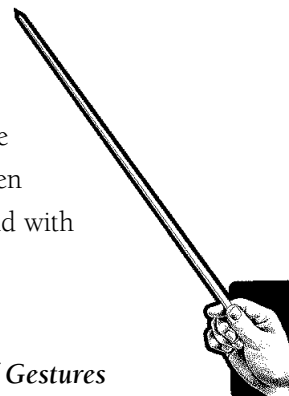
The importance of solid preparation, breathing, and eye contact. Do you maintain eye contact beyond the downbeat or important cue?

9 *Releases:*

Making sure releases are not an afterthought, are given in the style of the music, and with effective eye contact.

10 *Using Your New Repertoire of Gestures and Removing the Mask:*

Ensuring that you are conducting what the music is expressing and showing the desired emotion with your face. This is the last hurdle, and often the most difficult to achieve.



The benefits of refining your conducting skills are many. It will save valuable rehearsal time, as detailed explanations will be needed less often. Many will find that effective use of your levers and clear, concise gestures saves energy and helps prevent muscle pain. Although it will not give you more time, allowing yourself to engage in a personal critique and evaluation will make the time you have more productive.

Dr. Rod Schueller is Assistant Professor of Music and Director of Bands at Texas State University-San Marcos. In this capacity, he directs the Bobcat Marching Band, the Basketball Band, the Symphonic Winds and teaches courses in the Music Education area as well as supervising student teachers. He also serves as the chief administrator of the band department. Prior to his appointment at Texas State, Dr. Schueller held faculty appointments at Northern Illinois University and Western Illinois University. He earned the Bachelor of Music degree in Trumpet Performance and Music Education from the University of Iowa (1994), the Master of Music degree in Wind Conducting from Indiana University (1997), and the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Wind Conducting from Michigan State University (2003).