

# Bringing the Music to Life

Don Haynes, Jr.

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Here in the great state of Texas, we music educators enjoy great support of parents, community, administrators, and of course, the best students on campus. We do a marvelous job of teaching young musicians to make music. Yes! They do some pretty amazing things with their musical talents. Many of our middle school and high school groups perform the finest wind literature written. Through music, we invite our students to embrace high standards, practicing and mastering excellence. In essence, we teach them to love music—a passion that we too embrace—not only as a profession, but as a major love of our lives. That part of our job we do very well, but what about the music? Are we doing justice to the composer's work? What is your approach to the art of conducting your fine musicians? ... and the music itself?

Like many of you reading this article, I was fortunate to have an excellent conducting professor. During my undergraduate studies at The University of Texas, Austin in the 1970s, then conducting professor Dr. Bill Moody would state his beliefs and desires for his young aspiring music students. One of my favorites was, "The conductor's number one responsibility is to get the tempo right". This conductor agrees whole heartedly. And now, I am adding my personal favorite belief: As a conductor, I believe it's our job to "bring the music to life."

As I travel across the country to conduct and clinic bands, I am quite fortunate to work with many energetic

and enthusiastic young people. I am often moved by these fabulous youngsters who hunger for the opportunity to make exciting music on the concert stage. They seem to enjoy being in the ensemble, making a musical contribution when it's time for them to play. They embrace the music making experience and cherish this rewarding activity. Performing in a group becomes the most wonderful bonding session musicians get to experience. Therefore, it becomes my job to inspire, motivate, and encourage them to bring the printed music "to life." It is my personal challenge that I accept the moment I step on the podium.

I know that effective score study, special insights, and appropriate conducting on my part will help them bring the music to life. By the way, young musicians just love it when you give them a story behind the work. I encourage you to share with the ensemble the composer's intent and any historical significance represented by the composition. I contend that just as a movie director works his craft at every level, offering creative ideas, and motivating the actors to produce "their magic," so must a music conductor work his craft to bring the music to life. The biggest differences, of course, are our art form is done live and our passion is all in the music. Unlike the movie makers, we get one chance to successfully pull off a selected work.

During that musical performance, what is the job of the conductor?

Think on that for a moment. Allow me to emphasize some key elements that I believe truly help bring the music to life. My fellow conductors, you cannot shortcut the number one element. It is a must!!! **You must know the score extremely well.** Study it, and learn it so that you may use your gestures to show the ensemble and the audience what the music is doing.

- Learn the gestures that show phrasing, style, lyrical lines, crescendos, accents, etc.

- Learn the gestures that "help" your ensemble breath and enter together every time. (Don't make them guess... that can't be fun for them)

- Practice a variety of gestures in front of a mirror. (Video tape yourself in rehearsals)

- Learn to use facial gestures that show the musicians intensity, joy, love, sadness, etc. (the great conductors don't have a problem doing this, why should we?)

- Practice chorales with your band, using a variety of gestures, changing things each time you play the chorale. (Look for ways to be creative) Make yourself "get out of the score", Look up, and make eye contact more often. I like to smile at soloist's right after they've presented a nice solo. The rest of the group sees that and they feed on that, believe me.

- Plan ahead, plan how you will cue major entrances and practice them at home first.

- Know when to get out of the way of the players (esp. a long solo)

- Learn how to use dynamic

## Bringing the Music to Life

gestures effectively (so that even in the sight-reading room, your musicians will respond accordingly)

- Decide what emotion, and what sectional colors the composer's music calls for and try to show that in your conducting.

- Watch and learn from excellent orchestral and wind symphony conductors.

- Rent orchestral videos that show the greats: Sir Georg Solti, Seiji Ozawa, Frederick Fennel, and Robert Reynolds.

- Study the moves of our contemporary greats at TMEA concerts, college wind conductors, and many colleagues in the state. Discover what works for them

- Above all, GET THE TEMPO RIGHT! (Every time)

- Practice difficult time meters and meter changes so that YOU are not in the way of the music making process. (If you're not clear and confident, don't expect the kids to be)

### **My Five Pleases**

**Please** don't start a selection with your eyes down in the score.

**Please** don't conduct the same size beat for all dynamics.

**Please** don't mirror too much (left hand doing same pattern as the right hand).

**Please** don't rock or bounce at the knees as you conduct; this is so distracting.

**Please** don't bury your head in the score; this isn't conducting.

Through your conducting, you should guide the audience's ear and attention to the main line, key entrances, and impressive technical sections as they enter show the audience where to listen. Remember, the notes on the printed page are mere ink dots and markings; it is the written script waiting for the director-conductor and his musicians to bring the music to life.

As we embark upon the "concert season", I invite you to do some self-analysis with regards to your conducting. If your conducting skills tend to lack in any major area, work on those areas. Add some variety to your conducting skills no matter how seasoned you are. Sir Georg Solti wrote, "I am still striving to improve my conducting at the age of 70." Perhaps you may not think your conducting of the music is critical. Perhaps there IS something keeping you from embracing growth, and accepting effective conducting as "your job." Maybe someday you will "climb out of the box" and discover the wonderful adventures that await you as an exciting, insightful conductor. For your student's sake and for the music's sake, I hope you will.

My colleagues, I beseech you, please offer encouragement and praise to those band conductors who do try to bring the music to life. The art of conducting takes years to master. Although it comes easier for some than others, it takes a major commitment to successfully become a good conductor. Keep this in mind when you judge the contests and festivals. Extend to them your praise and encouragement. In my opinion, when they conduct the music and help their students bring the music to life, they're simply doing their job.

Let me close with a few insightful words of the great orchestral conductor Sir Georg Solti from his book, *Memoirs* (1997). "The inexplicable miracle of conducting is that the body, eyes, and soul of a conductor transfer something intangible and unique to an orchestra. Aside from wielding the baton, a basic necessity for a conductor is to know exactly how a certain passage should sound. If your imagination is clear, then you will communicate with the orchestra even if your beat and technique are not first-rate. If a conductor believes in what he is doing, if he is convincing and does not vacillate, the musicians will always follow him."

*Don Haynes, Jr. served as the Director of Bands at LBJ High School in Austin, Texas for 40 years. During his tenure, the LBJ Band earned many sweepstakes honors, and proudly performed across the globe including ambassador trips to Beijing, China, London, England, Paris, France, and Rome, Italy. Mr. Haynes was awarded the prestigious Texas UIL "Denius Award" in 1994, which is presented to Texas' top UIL sponsors. At LBJ High School, his colleagues selected him "Teacher of the Year" four times. He was recognized as the Outstanding Community Leader (Austin) in 2015. He is frequently invited to serve as an adjudicator for competitions, and now serves in the role of music consultant for schools across Texas. Mr. Haynes has become a motivational speaker for young leaders in the band and music industry. He is a practicing Life Coach with a focus on music educators. [DonHaynes2@aol.com](mailto:DonHaynes2@aol.com)*