

FROM THE SCORE TO THE PODIUM
A Conductors Outline for Score
Preparation and Presentation

A workshop presentation for:
The Texas Bandmasters Association
San Antonio, Texas
July 26, 2003

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FROM THE SCORE TO THE PODIUM

Conductors Guide to Score Preparation and Presentation

An Outline in 4 Phases.

FIRST PHASE: STUDY PREPARATION: The Conductor's "Mise-en-Place"

Step 1: A Commitment to Discipline

Discipline yourself to work sequentially by the numbers, avoiding the continued temptation to "cut-to-the-chase." This approach is similar to building something from a kit, thus avoiding the danger of leaving out a few components. Remember that this learning process is and should be "cyclic."

Step 2: Sources/Source Persons

Step 3: Information from the composer and Publisher

- a. Composer dates and bio
- b. Program notes
- c. Who premiered the work, when and for what purpose?

Step 4: Bibliography

- a) General Bibliography
- b) Selected Bibliography

Bibliographic reference and research is essential no later than the second perusal and is a continuous/ongoing process not only through the study-analysis phase, but throughout the preparation phase and up to the performance.

Step 5: Perusal- "flip through" (straight through) the score. Get the overall "feel" of the work.

Step 6: Second Perusal- note key, style, tempo changes. Sing through sections, note terminology, transitions, etc.

Step 7: Diagram the score on a separate sheet of paper (or may wish to include "subcharts")

Beginning in a very large and general way, indicate measure number of each section. It is advisable not to make many markings in the score early in the study process.

Step 8: Play or Sing

I encourage both; obviously the piano is the most useful tool in harmonic analysis, but singing, or playing an instrument, contributes expressive and interpretive insights. The importance of sight singing skills cannot be overemphasized.

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SECOND PHASE: ANALYZE -BY THE NUMBERS!

Before this phase begins, recommit to the discipline of tasking by the numbers. It will be tempting to skip or avoid steps and tedious details.

Step 9: Thematic Materials

Find all themes and fragments. Immediately begin to think in terms of allowing the melody to be heard at all times throughout the composition. Look for melodic "references" and important counter- subjects as well.

Step 10: Harmony

Think vertically and be careful that orchestration and instrumentation do not 'distort or alter composer's intent (do not be afraid to use margins to block chords of special or unusual significance. See #10 of Marking the Score). Study prep should have provided clues regarding the harmonic language.

Step 11: Rhythm and Pace

Pick apart rhythmic configurations, recurring patterns, incidences of augmentation, diminution, hemiola, etc. Search for mathematical relationship between sections, metric modulations, transitions, etc. Pace and plan midpoints of accelerandi, ritards, etc. Are there stylistic implications in the rhythmic motifs and patterns?

Step 12: Texture

Analyze density, instrumental combinations. Internalize color possibilities. How are the harmonic implications of step 10 (above) affected by the scoring?

Step 13: Contour

What is the basic form or "scheme", highs and lows, tension- release points, etc? Establish moods in their most simplistic forms.

Step 14: Intent

The cumulative, albeit cyclic, information of phases one and two -to this point, should now have provided a number of solid conclusions. At this time, we should begin to consolidate these insights in order to make "musical decisions." Do not hesitate to alter these decisions following steps 17 and 18 (or even up to the final rehearsal and performance!); however, do so based Only on honest conviction.

Step 15: Dynamics

Dynamics are subjective and relative within the piece and between players as well as sections and must always fit within (and to the extent of) the composer's intent. This step reinforces the need to be disciplined in our stepwise approach in that steps 7, 8 and 10 will be determining factors in decisions regarding dynamics.

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Step 16: Accents/Style

Keep in mind such things as stress note grouping and proportion.

Step 17: Technical

What are the basic and/or subtle technical problems for individuals as well as within and between sections? A study of each individual part can provide valuable insights on performer's problems ranging anywhere from technique to range, endurance, flexibility, breathing and even as subtle as page turns.

Step 18: Conducting

Enough said!

Step 19: Start over and seek outside resources.

As mentioned earlier, the stepwise study approach is a "cyclic" process and having completed steps 9-17, a return to the numbers brings new insights as well as reinforcement of previous convictions. Share these ideas with resource persons who may be familiar with the composer, composition or other philosophical and/or historical implications. (*It is at this point in the process that recordings should be evaluated and/or dismissed.)

Step 20: Self Evaluation

Am I actually prepared to hear what **should** be going on? Am I in a position to approach the rehearsal process with the ability to:

- a) analyze
- b) diagnose
- c) prescribe

THIRD PHASE: MARKING THE SCORE

This tends to be an individual process. It is usually better not to make many markings in the score-proper early in the study process (as mentioned in Step 7 of the study prep). Most conductors experiment with various symbols and markings until finding a system with which they feel comfortable. Some markings and aids include:

I. Colored pencils to color code dynamics e.g.

- a. Blue -pp or p
- b. Red -for ff
- c. Brown -mf d. Green -mp

2. Felt-tip or "highlighter" for thematic materials

- a. Pink -primary themes
- b. Blue -secondary themes

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3. Highlighting soloists in concerto accompanists
4. Inverted L-shape marks for entrances
5. Abbreviations for instrumentation
6. Percussion symbols/icons
 - a) notation of equipment changes
7. Triangles and vertical lines for 3's and 2's
8. Brackets to indicate new sections
9. Phrasal analysis by measure in bottom margin
10. Editorial markings and corrections in Black, Bold felt-tip
11. Use of margins and empty space -to reinforce meter changes, marking new sections, marking additional editorial, interpretive, and programmatic notes, illustrating chords and clusters, etc.
12. Be careful not to turn score into a "roadmap" or "graffiti billboard" - Do not try to compete with Rand McNally!

FOURTH PHASE: INTRODUCING THE MUSIC TO THE ENSEMBLE (AND VICE-VERSA) TEACHING AND "SALES"

- A. What are your goals and aspirations?
- B. Does the work offer insight into the work of a significant composer?
- C. Composer Bio (anecdotes)
- D. Does the work have historical, social or national significance?
- E. Who premiered the work and for what occasion?
- F. Does the work offer a model of a particular musical form or an important musical style?
- G. Make it clear that you believe in the piece!
- H. Isolate and demonstrate important thematic material.

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I. Familiarize students with programmatic considerations, composer's intent and other aspects of the piece not covered by B, C, or D above.

J. Don't hesitate to prepare handouts and have students keep them in their folders for reference.

K. Prepare (or have students prepare) list of descriptive works relating to style, mood, and emotion of music.

L. Use fine recordings for demonstration purposes

M. Point out significant aspects of the work so that the ensemble CAN "see the forest for the trees".

N. Expedite the reading process and early rehearsal facility through warm-ups and preparatory exercises employing challenges that will be encountered within the composition key signatures/changes, meters, technique, listening, control, etc

O. Make music, strive for perfection and ENJOY!

YOU ARE INVITED TO EXPLORE:

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Band Library Links Page
selected internet reference resources

<http://www.bands.uiuc.edu/librarv/resources.asp>

Band Music Resources links to web sites include:

- publishers and distributors
- miscellaneous bands reference (publisher lists, Grainger, Sousa)
- program notes
- copyright reference
- band organizations and band-related sites
- international music information centers
- performing ensembles (band and wind ensembles) web sites
- band job resources
- selected composers
- selected tour companies and festivals
- selected band camps and workshops