

**Making Musical Decisions**  
**Conducting: The Gateway to Communication**  
**Michael Haithcock, Director of Bands, University of Michigan**

*"I can usually tell if a performer is 'behaving' to the music or 'moving.'"*  
Anne Halprin, improvisational dancer

**IS this session for you?**

**IT's not about how you look or how you can get them to sound: its about how they respond with sound to "every move you make every breath you take."**

**1. Does your conducting creatively balance supporting execution (objective) and encouraging expressive exploration (subjective)?**

Conducting emerges from the equally important concepts of preparing the mind (score study) and training the body (gestural sophistication and availability).

The synthesis between these two preparations allows the body to respond in pure psycho-cybernetic fashion creating a "flow" or "body response".

The "*Blink!*" concept explores the relationship between this psychological phenomenon and the neuroscience that drives it.

We are all "primed" by three factors: environment, education, experience.

This priming allows us to "thin slice" (quick decision) with accuracy.

Conducting "primes" players to make "thin slice" decisions about music and music making.

**2. How would your students respond if asked whether your conducting is fixed or fluid?**

| <b><u>Fixed</u></b> | OR | <b><u>Fluid</u></b> | <b><u>Fixed</u></b>   | OR | <b><u>Fluid</u></b>      |
|---------------------|----|---------------------|-----------------------|----|--------------------------|
| Control             |    | Contour             | Balanced              |    | Balancing                |
| Patterns            |    | Possibilities       | "how I conduct"       |    | "what I conduct"         |
| Mirroring           |    | Momentum            | "start the ensemble"  |    | "start the music"        |
| Pointing            |    | Preparing           | "look like the music" |    | "showing change"         |
| Looking             |    | Listening           | Giving                |    | Receiving (taking in)    |
| Time                |    | Timbre              | Correct               |    | Beautiful                |
| Attack              |    | Articulation        | Together              |    | Stylistic sophistication |

Your answers and the answers of your students might be different, but theirs are more important.

When you watch your videotapes, how do you answer the same question?

**3. How can a conductor achieve creative balance between fixed and fluid?**

Prepare a detailed aural image through score study.

Train the body to be fluid instead of fixed.

Analyze yourself while analyzing others.

Work from a cycle of stimulus and response between you and the players.

**4. How can the body be trained to be increase fluidity? Implement the following:**

Contour yields contrast, which allows the communicated goal to be perceived.

Quality versus Quantity of motion.

Be available to move.

Prepare the “action point”.

Efficient movement is initiated at the point closest to the action.

**5. Helpful Laban-Bartenieff movement analysis terms.**

Fluid gestures illustrate *shape qualities* of opening and closing.

Vertical motions *rise and sink*; horizontal motions *spread and enclose*, sagittal motions *advance and retreat*.

The *kinesphere* is the space a conductor moves through and observes.

*Trace forms* outline complete intention, *shadow forms* simply outline.

**6. Beat patterns are often necessary. Focal point patterns and other patterns with arbitrary geometric shapes are not! Use angles and arches. Imagine ways of developing alternative patterns and “in-search-of-1” patterns. How do you practice?**

**Suggested Reading to Feed the Creative Soul and Imagination:**

Csikszentmihalyi: *FLOW, The Psychology of Optimal Experience*

Epstein: *Shaping Time: music, the brain, and performance*

Feldenkrais: *Awareness Through Movement*

Gladwell: *Blink!*

**Making Musical Decisions**  
**Score Study: The Gateway to Interpretation**  
Michael Haithcock, Director of Bands, University of Michigan

*“Music is revelation! It must say something, it must tell a truth that is human or divine or both. Just delivering notes, even if it’s perfect, doesn’t give this revelation at all. Performance is a personal witness; it is the way the conductor sees its meaning or message. It is in his mind, and he has caught a glimpse of the composer’s vision and gives it just as personally as if the composer would conduct it.*

Herbert Blomstedt, former conductor of the San Francisco Symphony

*“We are each born creative, then we forget our purpose, our mission. We believe our doubts and fears, and slowly we stop being creative as though it were a separate thing.”* SARK, contemporary philosopher

**1. What is interpretation and why is it necessary for creative balance?**

Creativity requires a balance of objective discipline and subjective exploration.

Imitation of others is not subjective and is out of creative balance.

Interpretation requires a personal commitment to subjective decision-making equal to any similar commitment to objective ensemble pedagogy.

Interpretation is ear driven not eye bound as it transcends the boundaries of notation.

Interpretation requires the development of a detailed aural image balancing objective information and subjective possibilities.

Aural image is defined as the amount of music heard without the music actually sounding.

**2. How does one develop a creatively balanced aural image of any score?**

Preparing an aural image with this level of detail requires three types of score analysis.

Pedagogical analysis. How do I get the band to play this?

Theoretical analysis. What is revealed through the notation?

Stylistic analysis. Why should subjective possibilities sound “like this”?

*“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”* Albert Einstein, genius

*“The food of and for our soul is our imagination. When we do not feed our souls, we die a little.”* Jill Mellick, philosopher and author

**3. Consider your rehearsal “state of mind.” Is it by definition creative? Is the imagination involved? Do you have “something to say” or do you say the same thing? How does your score analysis lead to stylistic stimulus and response with your players?**

*"The bar line is a door, not a wall".* Donald Peck, former principal flutist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Turn objective obstacles into subjective opportunities for expression:

- tone color
- articulation
- note endings
- rhythmic groupings
- balance
- tempo
- dynamics
- phrase structure

Suggestions for exploration:

- use text whenever possible
- experiment with articulations and styles from other musical genres
- play "wrong" to demonstrate "right"
- reference other art forms
- "two places" at once
- play "take away"

Encourage "four ways" to know (imagine) the part

- imagine the music as printed
- imagine the music matching your section
- imagine the same music played with other instruments
- imagine watching the conductor

Experiment with seating options that maximize "hearing"

### **Suggested Reading to Feed the Creative Soul and Imagination:**

Adolphe: *The Mind's Ear*

Adolphe: *What to Listen for in the World*

Hart: *Human Brain and Human Learning*

Kohl: *Growing Minds*

Nachmanovitch: *Free Play*

Schneidermann: *Confident Musical Performance*

Steinberg: *Music and the Mind Machine*

Thurmond: *Note Grouping*

Wolf: *The Teaching of Artur Schnabel*

**Making Musical Decisions**  
**Programming: The Gateway to Creative Activity**  
**Michael Haithcock, Director of Bands, University of Michigan**

**1. What is creative activity and why is it important?**

*"For something to be truly creative, it must have an equal balance between the objective (craft) and subjective (substance)."* Rollo May, psychologist and philosopher

*"Creativity is the soul expressing itself in speech, gesture, sound, color, and movement. Before all else it is simply to be able to say something."* Stephen Nachmanovitch, philosopher and author

*"In order to create there must be a dynamic force, and what force is greater than love."*  
Igor Stravinsky, creative genius

*"In ordinary life, creativity means making something for the soul out of every experience."*  
Thomas Moore, philosopher and author

How does the music selected inspire a love of music?

Does the music selected have "something to say"?

How do you evaluate the potential for "soulful expression" as you choose repertoire?

Consider your rehearsal "state of mind." Is it by definition creative? Do you have "something to say" or do you say the same thing?

**2. Is the "successful" band director encouraged to be creative?**

Common practice says no.

Realistically, a band performance void of subjective expression can be labeled "superior" if the objective accuracy rate of the performance is so "judged".

Reality promotes composing and performing music of questionable expressive worth.

Reality fosters an unhealthy "worship" of technique (craft) over expression (substance).

Reality inspires us to teach activity (band) instead of subject (music).

**3. What are the roots of this reality?**

Bands have historically been focused on the organization rather than the music.

Band conductor training is more pedagogical than expressive.

- professional leaders have not consistently considered this reality problematic
- professional leaders often have similar views and training
- success is based on the imitation of others
- non-musical duties often define "success" and drain the artistic spirit

#### 4. How can one be “successful” and be creatively balanced?

*“Creativity is found where the search for a new and better ordering of life exists.”*

Linda A. Firestone, creative philosopher

Consider a new “reality of success” balancing the emphasis on technical execution with opportunities for subjective exploration.

acknowledge the difference between cathexis and love

consider musical decisions as important as pedagogical systems

look beyond convenient professional role models for new ideas

allow students the opportunity to be expressive through reflective thinking

think long term by balancing subjective/objective concepts:

- perception as well as performance
- curriculum as well as contest
- phrasing as well as fundamentals
- imagination as well as intonation
- expressive possibilities as well as technical challenges

#### 5. Build opportunities for creative balance through programming by determining:

the expressive possibilities desired for each student to experience and comprehend

the expressive possibilities in each piece under consideration

the reality of time required by technical demands

the value of time required to perfect versus expressive content

the fear versus feeling ratio of assigned individual parts

the best music available for age level and develop an appropriate core repertoire

the best interval of repetition

*“One of the main factors that contributes to interpretation is time; there are no short cuts.*

*Real insight comes only after doing the pieces over and over and over again...*

Edo de Waart, founding conductor of the Netherlands Wind Ensemble

#### **Suggested Reading to Feed the Creative Soul and Imagination:**

Barron: *Creators on Creating*

Boerstien: *The Creators*

Fritz: *Creating*

Gardner: *Creating Minds*

May: *Courage to Create*

Moore: *Care of the Soul*

Myers: *The Soul of Creativity*

Peck: *Road Less Traveled*

Quinn: *Deep Change*

Quinn: *Building the Bridge as You Walk On It*