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The Conductor - Training for Virtuosity.

An Investigation into Conducting Technique and Pedagogy.

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to determine the extent to which one can be prepared for the conducting profession and examines the pursuit of virtuosic conducting. The paper identifies and examines a range of skills essential to the art of conducting, the interconnection of these skills and discusses the role of practical experience in terms of skill development. The paper looks at these aspects in light of demands associated with the conducting profession and investigates aspects of current training for the profession. Different approaches and philosophies concerning conducting training are explored and associated problem areas are identified. This paper supports the belief that these problems can be addressed with suitable training and argues that if conductors were adequately trained they would be more likely to be effective from the first time they work with a professional ensemble. The paper concludes that a virtuosic level of conducting would be a more probable outcome for conductors exposed to thorough training. This paper focuses on conducting skill and technique more than artistic and interpretative issues.

Preface

Throughout my undergraduate conducting training and from my own experience as an amateur conductor I have come to discover many elements that I believe to be essential for any conductor. While a student it was my assumption that professional conductors would possess these skills and that major conducting institutions would provide thorough training in these areas. However, from my own professional ensemble work, from various discussions with experienced professional colleagues over the years of my tertiary music study and from working with professional musicians consistently over six years, it has transpired that there are professional conductors working within the profession that are poorly skilled and do not meet the standards set by my own undergraduate training. This discovery distressed me greatly as I believe the conductor has such a vital role in the art of ensemble performance. Consequently I became interested in the issue of conducting training. Are conductors adequately trained for the profession? Can conducting be trained effectively? Are the only good conductors "born to the art", that is, "born conductors" with special innate gifts and talents? Are effective conductors well trained conductors?

This research paper looks at issues that arise from these questions and endeavours to determine the ingredients necessary to achieve virtuosity as a conductor. It sets out to determine whether it is actually possible to thoroughly train and prepare a professional conducting career and whether it is possible for conductors to be effective from the outset of their professional careers.

The information that appears in the first three sections of this paper is derived from consideration of a wide range of views and comments from conducting training texts, texts and documentaries about conducting and conductors, professional musicians and professional conductors. Many of the comments that appear in these sections are derived from a general consensus of views and were not possible to attribute to one specific source.

Introduction

What is it that attracts people to the art of conducting? The art of conducting is often labelled with indistinct and unusual terms. For example Arturo Toscanini, one of the greatest virtuosic conductors in the history of modern conducting, has had the following said of his work: “when he conducted, he entered into another world, and took the orchestra with him.”¹ This gives the impression that there is something mysterious, esoteric or magical about being a conductor. Other similar comments give the distinct impression that great conductors must possess anomalous powers and abilities: the most effective conductors appear to be psychic.²

Is conducting such a unique art form that it merits such comments? Is a virtuosic conductor so different from other virtuosi? Can virtuosic conductors be trained? A virtuosic

1 *The Orchestra Speaks* page 164 This text was written by the principal viola player of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1938. He consulted with all the other principal players of this orchestra to evaluate and publish their impressions of the conductors with which they worked. The conductors evaluated in this text are Beecham, Boult, Casals, Coates, Goosens, Barbirolli, Heward, Harrison, Harty, Koussevitsky, Mengelberg, Sargent, Toscanini, Wood. This text documents behaviours, philosophies and evaluations of these conductors.

2 *The Art of Conducting documentary* This documentary appeared on ABC Television in 1996. It is an IMG/BBC production. It researches the art of conducting using interviews with experts in the music and conducting professions and research into the lives of the most internationally acclaimed conductors in the history of modern conducting. The documentary has detailed statements from internationally acclaimed conductors and instrumentalists, from the past and present such as George Szell, Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Herbert von Karajan, Leonard Bernstein, Arturo Toscanini, Otto Klemperer, Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir George Solti, Serge Koussevitsky, Leopold Stokowski, Yehudi Menuhin (violinist), Oliver Knussen (composer, conductor), and Isaac Stern (violinist).

instrumentalist spends years training and refining all aspects of technique. Are virtuosic conductors generally trained to this extent? "In most cases...[conducting] virtuosity has been achieved through practical apprenticeship and the advice and guidance of experienced colleagues, and through the observation and emulation of distinguished conductors."³ It seems that an acceptable method of training conducting is simply to place prospective conductors in the role which they hope to master. It is a serious concern that professional conductors might be trained by chance. Are there more effective ways to train and prepare conductors for the profession? There are always examples of prodigy and genius in every field, that is, people with special innate gifts and talents who may not require copious amounts of training. However this paper focuses on the issue of quality training: it is not concerned with the concept of genius.

What skills are essential to the art of conducting? What aspects distinguish an effective professional conductor? To answer these questions one needs to examine the role and the function of the professional conductor.

3 George Szell (Art of Conducting documentary) Szell was, by common consent, one of the greatest conductors of the 20th Century, and some would claim that his only superior was Toscanini. (source: "Conductors" by John. L. Holmes)

Section 1

1.1 The role of the professional conductor.

For the purposes of this paper, the term "professional conductor" refers to a conductor engaged for remuneration by a professional orchestral organisation. The conductor's role is often described with indistinct terms and phrases such as "part musician, part actor"⁴ and "a conductor must be a personality".⁵ These, and all such descriptions are definitely part of the picture of a conductor's role, but what else is involved? Such descriptions of the

⁴ **Max Rudolf** page ix Rudolf (1902) is an American conductor of German birth. His posts as a professional conductor include Städtisches Theater, six years conducting a German theatre group in Prague, guest conductor with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (1929-30), Metropolitan Opera in USA for 14 seasons, Musical Director of The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. He is considered a Mozart specialist and a fine instructor of conducting. He headed opera and conducting departments at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. His book **The Grammar of Conducting** testifies a rare grasp of the mechanics of the art. (Source: "The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians", Vol. 16, Edited by Stanley Sadie) The author writes that he is deeply indebted to his friends George Szell and Nicolai Malko who he assisted in 1941 in his course in conducting. George Szell comments: "In my opinion the present book fills admirably a widely felt need. It seems to me to be an unprecedented and brilliantly successful attempt to describe and explain the complex technique of conducting." (Excerpt from the Preface, written by George Szell in Rudolf's **The Grammar of Conducting**.)

⁵ D. Porcelijn interview **David Porcelijn** is currently the Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Tasmanian and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestras. He has also conducted many of the world's major orchestras including the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, l'Orchestre de l'Opera de Paris, The Dutch Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Radio Chamber Orchestra Holland, New York City Ballet Orchestra, NRK Oslo, BRTN Philharmonic Orchestra Brussels, The Netherlands Wind Ensemble, The Northern Sinfonia (England), The Suisse Romande Orchestra in Geneva, as well as all the major Australian Orchestras. (Source: Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Concert Programme 12 April 1995)

professional conductor often fail to be accompanied with an explanation of the skills required to fulfil this role.

The definition of the role of the professional conductor is successfully explained by one of the world's most acclaimed virtuosic conductors, Leopold Stokowski. ⁶ "We [conductors] have to...try to understand and reproduce and give to the listening public what we consider was in the mind and soul of the composer"⁷ The conductor must try to fulfil this aim whilst directing an ensemble of voices and/or instruments. The conductor's knowledge and understanding of music must be so thorough that he can decipher from looking at silent notes and markings on a page, the structure, the meaning and the shape of any composition and have the technical capacity to be able to communicate this to an ensemble and direct this ensemble to communicate the same concept through sound to an audience. To do this requires intimate knowledge of the nature of music. "The conductor, first of all, is a fine musician."⁸ General knowledge of music must be developed to the highest possible level. A thorough knowledge of composition, possible ensemble forces, music history, different styles and genres is essential for the professional conductor. A highly developed knowledge of music theory, harmony, counterpoint, form and analysis, orchestration, and transposition must all be second nature. This will allow the conductor to constantly strive for the most faithful realisation and representation of the composer's intentions. The conductor

⁶ **Leopold Stokowski** (1882-1977) is considered to be legendary within the music profession throughout the world. He was one of the truly great conductors of the 20th Century. (source: "Conductors" by John. L. Holmes Page 265-7)

⁷ **The Art of Conducting** documentary

⁸ **EAH Green** Page 1 Elizabeth A.H. Green is a Professor of Music at the University of Michigan. The text she has written is a college text on conducting based on the principles of Dr. Nicolai Malko.

is a medium between the composer, ensemble and audience. He is not the central character of a drama. The conductor must be creative in his music making. He must be part of the orchestra, part of the music, part of the instrument of sound. He must have a strong grip on the ensemble, but be flexible enough not to hamper individual artistry. He must also appeal to the artistry and intelligence of his musicians.

The conductor's position in the music profession is referred to as "the maestro": the master. The conductor is the sculptor of the overall sound of an ensemble composition. He decides how the music should be performed and therefore has control over the entire realisation of the composition. In a way he is akin to a composer: he is creating an entire body of sound, but is guided by silent markings on a manuscript. The role of the conductor therefore is vitally important to the art of ensemble performance. The more effective the conducting, the more effective the performance of the composition is likely to be. If a conductor is effectively trained, he is more likely to be effective. The conductor has the capacity to cause an orchestra to collapse or enable it to function as one instrument creating sound together, co-existing with the conductor's concept of the music. Therefore conductors should be masters of their skills, thus worthy of the term maestro.

1.2 The Pursuit of Virtuosity

A virtuoso is defined as one who has special knowledge or skill. Therefore a virtuosic level of conducting can be attained like virtuosity in any field, through mastery of skill.

There are many skills that must be acquired and developed before a conductor can fulfil his role at the highest level, that is, a virtuosic level. A conductor must master not only the knowledge of the music itself but also all the technical skills associated with his art so that a lack of technique does not pose a barrier for the music making process. Mastery of skill is vital for the conductor as his role should involve total focus on directing the technique of others to produce what is in his mind.

He must know as much as all the musicians know about their own role, and know how all the roles relate. He is then in a position to be able to shape a performance that he believes to be the closest approximation to the composer's intentions - intentions ascertained through research and study into the nature of the music. To achieve this at the highest level, the conductor must be equally virtuosic as any virtuosic instrumental or vocal soloist: a master of the skills of their role.

The conductor's aim should be to communicate one's art to the audience. The art itself is formed around serving the intentions of the composer. A virtuosic level of conducting, like virtuosity in any field, can only be achieved if all necessary skills are highly developed to a point when they become secondary to the overall aim.

Section 2

Conducting Skills

2.1 Aural Skill and Inner Hearing

There are many reasons why a conductor must have highly developed aural skills. The conductor is always directing other musicians to perform a piece of music in a manner that fulfils the desires and intentions of its composer. Therefore the conductor must be alert to any inaccuracy in pitch, time, timbre and balance. Ideally, the conductor must be able at any time to sing any part of the music to his musicians as singing effectively communicates such subtle details as intonation, phrasing, rhythm, and expression. To sing a part to a member or to a section of the ensemble avoids the ambiguity that other forms of communication can create and serves to waste less rehearsal time.

However, aural skill should be developed beyond just being able to sing any part of the score. The conductor must be able to hear the entire piece in his head, in his inner ear, so that where the ensemble's rendition does not come up to the standard fixed in the musical imagination he can then set about attaining that ideal during the rehearsal. The conductor must study so that he hears all the sounds that make up the composition in his mind. As he does this, he can evaluate the music and make a beginning towards balancing the many strands of the composition. While he studies the conductor must "listen" objectively to the work, pacing its progress, spacing its climaxes, deriving an aural concept of the musical

architecture. The eye must therefore be able to listen.⁹ Aural skill must be developed to such a level that the eye becomes a tool that enables the silent notes and signs on the manuscript to become inwardly audible. Zoltan Kodály writes, "Only by practicing for a long time does the musician develop his ability to transform the notes seen into soundsit can be acquired by hard work only " ¹⁰

Ideally a conductor should be able to carry the sound of the music in his mind. The conductor should be able to hear in the inner ear such details as timbre, tempi, dynamics, articulations, pitch, and rhythm. He should be able to hear the music vertically - the chords and the harmony, and horizontally - the melodic line and the polyphony of the melodic line. He should know where each note of the composition sits in the chord and in the overall chord progression. "The conductor who is unable to read his chords and counterpoints clearly, and waits for the rehearsal to learn what the trickier bits sound like, can not be taken seriously."¹¹ Furthermore the conductor should understand where all of this lies in relation to the total artistic form. A conductor must also be able to hear in the inner ear and think ahead of the sound being produced in front of him so he is able to show the ensemble the direction of the music and thus present the musical architecture to the ensemble. The conductor who hears the sound within himself can help his musicians to produce that sound. Highly developed aural skill coupled with intimate knowledge of the forces that a conductor works with (instruments and voices) provide a solid base from which to develop inner hearing.

⁹ Goldbeck Page 15 **The Perfect Conductor:** An introduction to his skills and art.

¹⁰ Zoltan Kodály, Selected Writings of. page 193

¹¹ Goldbeck Page 30

2.2 Conducting Skills: Score Reading

A conductor must know every note and every mark on the score. He must be able to follow all the lines, keep them distinct, yet know how they relate to each other. This demands a skill in mental gymnastics, but it is vital as he is shaping the sound of all the individual notes into the overall concept of the composition.¹² A professional conductor usually has limited rehearsal time with the ensemble, so he should not be working anything out in rehearsal that can be deciphered outside rehearsal time. He must know all there is to know about a composition, therefore know every detail of the score, and know the sound and the technique behind all the components of the music. Once the score is thoroughly known the conductor should be able to hear the score in his inner ear, and then be able to apply gesture and technique to the sound of the music itself.

2.3 Conducting Skills: Evaluation of Sound

The conductor should stand before an ensemble with a clear concept of how the sound should be. However, at the same time he must be aware of all the sounds in front of him, listening to all the parts, and then deciding if the desired sound is being produced. He must possess the ability to listen objectively to what is actually happening. Evaluation of sound in

¹² Goldbeck

the practical situation and inner hearing are separate skills that must co-exist constantly both in rehearsal and in performance. The conductor must evaluate the sound and pace of the music being prepared to make instantaneous adjustments, large or small, in order to realise his inner concept. "...he keeps an autocratically firm hand that what comes out is what he's listening to in his head just a few seconds before it happens, and with his ears making sure it happens the way he wants it to be."¹³

Good skill in evaluation of sound enables the conductor to give freedom to the ensemble where necessary and strengthen weaker sections. The ability to allow freedom while remaining in control is a valuable skill for a conductor to possess.¹⁴ When something happens that is not desired by the conductor he must be able to take control of the situation without causing the music to suffer. In rehearsal it is beneficial to be able to evaluate the sound and communicate any changes that need to be made while the music continues being played. Many musicians prefer this as it enables the ensemble to get a much better idea of the musical architecture as a whole.¹⁵

2.4 Conducting Skills: Knowledge of Forces

A conductor must have a total understanding of the forces with which he works. The conductor must be able to communicate on a technical level with each member of the

¹³ Isaac Stern (The Art of Conducting)

¹⁴ Results from interviews with principal players of the TSO

¹⁵ Results from interviews with principal players of the TSO

ensemble, understanding technical difficulties, characteristics and technical terminology of all the various forces. The conductor must be able to communicate in a musical language that every member of the ensemble understands. He must know what is possible, how it is achieved and should be able to suggest to the ensemble ways to approach any problems in order to achieve the desired result. The conductor must have clear expectations of what he wants to hear as “unremitting attention to detail of every kind results in magnificent and confident playing”¹⁶

Many of the professional musicians consulted for the purposes of this paper feel that it is important for a conductor to be aware of the technical make up of the ensemble's forces and feel some professional conductors are not highly skilled in this area. ¹⁷ Professional musicians feel that conductors should be aware of aspects such as: turning pages of music; when instruments need to be tuned; where particular pitches are in the overall range of an instrument, and what possible implications may result from playing in the extremes of an instrument's range, for example dynamic implications of playing in high registers; where glissandi are possible; tonal possibilities of all forces and how they are produced; for string players, putting on and taking off mutes, the effect that the use of bow has on the tone and attack of a note, advice on ways to bow parts in order to produce the desired effect; for brass players, putting on and taking off of mutes; for wind and brass, breathing considerations, and advise on places to breathe, where trills are possible, the use of air, the effects that the use of air has on the tone and attack of the note; what type of sticks

¹⁶ The Orchestra Speaks P.116

¹⁷ Results from interviews with principal players of the TSO, Survey 4, The Orchestra Speaks, The Art of Conducting, The Gift of Music

percussionists should use.¹⁸ The art of ensemble performance utilises many different forces. In order to effectively communicate the desired result to every member of the ensemble the conductor must have a thorough understanding of all his forces on a technical level. It has transpired that there are some professional conductors who do not possess this level of understanding.¹⁹ The ensemble must have confidence that the conductor knows how to direct the production of the composer's intentions. "You must know the animal that your dealing with so well that they know that there's no point resisting."²⁰

Into knowledge of forces also comes knowledge of people, as it will be people that a conductor has to deal with every time he works with any type of ensemble. "Knowledge of a few simple principles of group psychology is of great assistance in rehearsing efficiently and in stimulating the players to a good performance."²¹ This includes a knowledge of the overall standard of the ensemble, as the conductor should be aware of the realistic possibilities in terms of results.

2.5 Conducting Skills: Communication

There are many forms of communication that a conductor has at his disposal. A conductor

¹⁸ Results from interview with principal players of the TSO, Survey 4, The Orchestra Speaks

¹⁹ Results from interviews with principal players of the TSO, The Orchestra Speaks, The Art of Conducting, The Gift of Music

²⁰ Oliver Knussen (Art of conducting)

²¹ Max Rudolf Page 1

can communicate to the ensemble through eye contact, facial expression, physical expression, physical gesture, and verbal communication.

The conductor must be aware that these are all channels of communication, and know the effect that they can have on the ensemble. All these channels must work in perfect harmony. The conductor must have a total understanding of how these elements work and be absolutely clear as to what every form of communication can disclose to the ensemble. All the forms of communication must work together so that there is no conflicting messages being communicated to the ensemble. For example, any verbal communication should strengthen what has already been attested through physical gesture.

The face and the eyes can reflect feelings of expression and intensity adequately on their own but can be enhanced by physical gesture. The eyes are also invaluable means of establishing personal contact between the conductor and the other musicians. The eyes should match preparatory gestures, communicating in advance what kind of expression the conductor expects. Visual contact is also an effective way for a conductor to assure the ensemble that he knows what is going on.²² Due to the importance of eye contact, a minimum amount of time, if any, should be spent looking at the score. Therefore it is an advantage for the conductor to have the music committed to memory.

At a professional level, conductors spend a great deal of time having to communicate with people who do not speak their native language. Language barriers can seriously interfere

²² Survey 4

with the smooth passage of ideas. Therefore as a part of good conducting training, it would be advantageous to train other languages, as verbal dialogue is an essential form of communication for a conductor.

In any form of communication, the more clear the communication channels are, the better the result. Therefore an effective way for the conductor to communicate with an ensemble would be to use gestures, signs and words that the members of the ensemble are familiar with and thus can easily relate to. By gestures or words, the conductor must be able to convey every intention without difficulty.

2.6 Conducting Skills: Physical Gesture

"The conductor needs freedom of motion more than any musician, because his work consists of communicating musical expression directly by gestures"²³ The conductor must have a thorough knowledge not only of all the gestures he can express himself with, but a total assurance that the gestures he uses communicate what is intended, allowing no room for doubt, misinterpretation, or ambiguity. "Every precise and easily understood gesture is clear speaking, but every unnecessary motion is like idle chatter."²⁴ Evaluation of gesture in training is therefore essential. Self-evaluation by video tape, practice in front of a mirror and

²³ Max Rudolf Page 240

²⁴ Quote of Nicolai Malko as appears in EAH Green Page x Malko (1883-1961) was an American conductor of Russian birth. He is one of the acclaimed conductors of his time and is considered an expert in the technique and instruction of conducting. (Source: The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Vol. 11, Edited by Stanley Sadie)

evaluation from others are methods that ensure that what is being communicated is in fact what is intended. The appropriate gesture for each musical expression must be mastered in training. The wrong gesture often produces the wrong result, and disunity can result from conflicting gestures: both lead to frustration for the ensemble and for the conductor.

Gestures should appear in natural unity and coherence. Stiffness or insecurity can cause the conductor's gestural communication to become jerky and unrhythmic which can mean that beats and movements are not prepared in enough time. As a consequence, an ensemble may respond unrhythmically. Any insecurities that a conductor lets affect his gestural communication are often detected by an ensemble, and this can cause the ensemble to also feel insecure, and therefore not perform to its fullest potential.²⁵ Like all the skills discussed, physical gesture should become second nature so that the conductor can concentrate totally on the music.

Some conductors believe that if a conductor knows the score thoroughly then his gestures will follow automatically. However, this is akin to understanding a language but not being able to speak it. Complete control of physical gesture and movement is important as it greatly affects communication and thus the entire relationship between the conductor and the ensemble. At a virtuosic level every gesture the conductor makes once he is in front of an ensemble must be intended. Many conductors find conducting from memory to be advantageous as it allows freedom of physical gesture. Turning pages of a score can disrupt the hand gesture, and thus the overall gestural communication.

²⁵ Max Rudolf and Survey 4

2.7 Conducting Skills: Baton Technique

Good baton technique is essential for effective conducting.²⁶ Hands and arms contain the widest scope of gestural expression and variance and have been proven over the years to be the clearest way of indicating and communicating most musical ideas.²⁷ The baton is merely an extension of the arm that allows greater precision and is often easier for the members of the ensemble to see.

There are advantages in conducting both with and without a baton. The conductor must have full knowledge of the expressive advantages and disadvantages of both approaches. The musician's hands, with or without a baton, are the means of eliciting expression from an instrument be it a piano, violin, orchestra or choir.

When comparing professional conductors one tends to find quite a lot of variance in many respects but particularly in regard to baton technique. However, what effective conductors have in common is a very strong basic technique of beat patterns and gestures that clearly indicate the pulse, the tempo and any variation of tempo, style, articulation, and dynamics.

The hand or stick technique must be taught in such a way that it is not just a time mechanism like a metronome. The hands and the baton are the conductor's chief

²⁶ David Porcelijn

²⁷ Max Rudolf

instrument of describing the music itself. The conductor must not ever just beat time. The beat is secondary to the feeling of the pulse which should be so clearly communicated that it cannot be affected by any irregularities on the part of the ensemble. The conductor should direct the pulse, showing the ensemble how all the beats relate to each other within the phrase, thus creating the overall architecture of the work.

2.8 Conducting Skills: Independence of Arms

For a conductor the right hand usually directs the rhythmic pulse and the left hand usually suggests expression, indicating details of interpretation. But the roles do not always have to function this way. The conductor's arms can express a wide range of ideas and therefore should not be set in their respective roles. There are many ways the arms, hands, and baton can communicate ideas. All must be explored and added to the gestural vocabulary.

Independence of arms is a skill often overlooked. The conductor must be able to perform very different functions and manoeuvres with each arm thereby mixing levels of tension and relaxation: for example, indicating the beat with the right arm and making quite a different gesture with the left arm with different levels of muscular tension. A practical case where this arises is to simultaneously indicate and conduct pizzicato chords in the strings and long sustained chords in the winds. In order to perform this well, the conductor needs to be aware of each arm separately, yet they should work together toward the desired result.

The conductor should avoid doubling any gesture. Not only is it a waste of motion, but often the gestures can vary slightly and thus produce ambiguity. Every gesture must say something essential. Overuse of any gesture or too many extraneous superfluous gestures should also be avoided, as there is a strong possibility that the ensemble will quickly become immune to the gesture, and may partially ignore the conductor. Not only must the conductor therefore have a knowledge of what each gesture can communicate, but also when to use it.

Once fundamental beat patterns have been learnt, the conductor should set about developing artistic expression, that is, learning how to communicate ideas through physical gesture with his hands, arms and baton as the focal point of communication. A conductor should be trained so that he is equipped to become a musical leader, rather than a time beater. Keeping the beat should ideally be an expectation placed on the ensemble by the conductor.

Section 3

3.1 Interconnection of Skill

A conductor can not be effective unless all the skills essential to his art are highly developed. These skills also need to relate and work together to achieve the overall aim. "The art of conducting is the highest, most complete synthesis of all facets of musical activity."²⁸ The individual skills outlined in Section 2 cannot exist in isolation. An effective conductor must have the ability to use different combinations of these skills at all times. For example he must listen to the sound in front of him making sure pitch, rhythm, intonation and ensemble requirements are being fulfilled, and simultaneously listen to the desired sound of the complete work in his head, communicating any changes that he feels are necessary, keeping the pulse, showing the direction of the music, and being aware of the time available for rehearsal to make sure everything can be adequately rehearsed.

Interconnection of skill is essential to a conductor's success. The conductor must prepare and guide the ensemble, composing in their minds a concept of the work parallel to his own. The professional conductor, usually with limited rehearsal time, can be focusing on nothing but this.

3.2 Rehearsal Technique

There is no set way to direct a rehearsal. The conductor's personality must be versatile enough to produce optimum results with any ensemble and be able to match the essence of the music at the same time. However, an essential element of directing a good rehearsal is thorough preparation of the score, with goals for each rehearsal firmly set in the conductor's mind before he steps on the podium. Indecision from the conductor can result in an uncertain and timid response from the ensemble and breed insecurities within the ensemble itself and often, as a consequence, a substandard performance.²⁹

3.3 The Role of Practical Experience

All fields of expertise are strengthened with experience. The value of practical experience in conducting cannot be underestimated. Practical experience is essential in the development of conducting skill. It is particularly beneficial to the development of appropriate physical gesture. Physical and verbal communication along with an understanding of the finer nuances of sound organisation benefit from practical experience, but these elements can all be discussed and developed away from the rehearsal. This requires the conductor to be able to hear the music in their mind. It is important to evaluate practical experience, and to learn from others, including other conductors and members of the ensemble. Video taping any practical experience is beneficial as it provides a "third

eye" to measure effectiveness of every aspect.³⁰

However, there is a common longstanding belief that practical experience is the only way to effectively train and prepare a professional conducting career. "...there is really nothing to learn but the simple rule: the first beat in a bar goes down and the last beat goes up; the rest is experience."³¹ One does not have to concur with this view. To reach a high standard or a virtuosic level in any field requires a detailed and thorough background of research and study into all aspects of the particular field. Learning conducting through intensive observation of accomplished conductors in their daily routine for a number of years and acquiring experience under their authoritative direction is likely to produce a conductor in a position of knowing a language with no understanding of grammar. This sets limits in regard to levels of understanding achievable by a conductor trained in this way. Conducting, like any of the arts, is a very individually stylised craft and must be discovered in the way that any of the arts are discovered, through years of thoroughly disciplining technique and through experimentation with view to developing one's own style and expression.

However, being placed immediately in the role which one hopes to master with supervision from another conductor is considered by many professional conductors to be an acceptable way to train conducting.³² In fact this is how many professional conductors have been

³⁰ M. MacCárthaigh

³¹ Max Rudolf Page ix

³² **Bruno Walter.** Walter is reputed as being "one of the greatest German musicians of the 20th century" (source: "Conductors" by John. L. Holmes Page 301)

trained.³³ There are negative aspects in this approach. It does not allow time for all the elements identified as being essential to the role of the conductor to be thoroughly developed. Once the conductor is standing before an ensemble there are many aspects that he has to consider. The conductor has little or no time to consider developing his own skill levels. The conductor's prime concerns should be the ensemble and the music which they are creating together. Therefore it is unfair to any ensemble for the conductor to be focusing time and energy on his own personal skill development. Before a conductor stands before an ensemble he must have complete faith and belief in his technique and faith in what he hopes to achieve musically in order to be effective. At a professional level the conductor should be a master of the skills essential to his role, deserving of the term maestro. Once skills have been mastered, practical experience can then be directed toward the pursuit of virtuosity. As previously discussed, the art of conducting is a synthesis of many skills. In order to achieve virtuosity these skills need to be developed to the highest possible level. However, there have been cases in the past where conductors have achieved virtuosity through practical apprenticeship. If this was the only type of training that these virtuosic conductors had received, one could assume that these conductors had some special innate gifts and talents. This method of training would not be adequate for those conductors without innate abilities.

Professional conductors, conducting training texts and the professional musicians consulted in research for this paper are in agreement that all the skills outlined in Section 2 are essential for an effective professional conducting career. If a conductor's training includes

³³ Bruno Walter (The Art of Conducting documentary), George Szell, Survey 3

thorough attention to these aspects then these skills are not being left to chance.

Therefore, if a conductor is thoroughly trained he is more likely to be effective. The art of conducting is a fine balance and synthesis of many skills. Effective training therefore would contain a balance of all the skills, and accommodate integration.

Section 4

Research Technique

The theoretical sources consulted in the research of this paper fail to address the suspicions, questions and expectations outlined in the Preface (page 2). Do professional conductors that are currently working within the profession possess all the identified essential elements? Are there methods of conducting training that thoroughly cover all these elements, thus thoroughly preparing professional conducting careers? What type of training have professional conductors received themselves? The academic sources consulted outline skills that a conductor should possess and investigate the necessity of these skills. However they do not determine whether it is actually possible to adequately prepare a professional conducting career so that conductors can be effective from the outset of their professional careers. Therefore to address this paper's main area of focus, other research methods became necessary.

A set of surveys were therefore assembled. The first survey (Survey No. 1) was sent to concertmasters of professional orchestras around the world, asking them to evaluate their regular conductor or the conductor with whom they last worked to determine the state of the

conducting profession from the viewpoint of very experienced professional orchestral musicians. Generally concertmasters have been involved in professional ensemble work for a substantial time, as historically there is a great deal of importance and authority associated with this role. Concertmasters hold the highest standing, excluding the conductor, within orchestral hierarchy. To determine which concertmasters should be sent Survey No. 1, I consulted the international listings of professional instrumental ensembles in the 1995 edition of Musical America's **International Directory of The Performing Arts**. These comprehensive lists include detailed information on professional ensembles in eighty different countries across the world. I chose to send Survey No.1 to the concertmasters of the more experienced orchestras, that is, orchestras that perform over eighty concerts per annum. Survey No. 1 was sent to the concertmasters of professional orchestras in the USA, Canada, Switzerland, Belgium, People's Republic of China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Australia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Hungary, Austria, and Croatia.

To address the issue of current training for the conducting profession two separate surveys were assembled, one to be completed by professional conductors (Survey No. 3) the questions relating to aspects of their own training, and the other to lecturers and directors of conducting courses across the world (Survey No. 2) investigating what selected institutions offer in the area of conducting training. The professional conductors were chosen by again consulting the 1995 edition of Musical America's **International Directory of The Performing Arts**. I chose to send Survey No. 3 to permanent conductors of professional orchestras that met the following criteria: orchestras that perform over eighty concerts per

year; and orchestras with a budget classification in the \$3,600,000-\$10,000,000 per annum category, or in the bracket of \$10,000,000 and above, assuming that the higher the orchestra's budget the more acclaimed their conductors would be, as the more acclaimed conductors usually have a higher fee. This survey was sent to conductors in the USA, Canada, Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, New Zealand, Great Britain, Hungary, Australia, and individual conductors in Israel, New York and Australia, some of whose private advertisements appear in the **International Directory of The Performing Arts**. This survey was sent to world renowned conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Claudio Abado, and Mislav Rostropovich.

The destinations for Survey No. 2 were chosen by consulting the **International Directory of Music Education**, a publication of the Callaway International Resource Centre for Music Education, University of Western Australia. These directories list all the current tertiary music institutions across the world and give details on their fields of speciality. I chose to send Survey No. 2 to institutions listed in these directories as providing specialised training in choral or orchestral conducting.

Survey Distribution and Responses.

	A	B	C	D
1	Survey number	1	2	3
2	No. of surveys distributed	64	53	40
3	Responses	5	8	6

All the responses to the surveys were anonymous, but the country from which they came could be determined from facsimile numbers and postage envelopes. Survey No. 1 responses came from Australia, Poland, New York, Frankfurt, and the United Kingdom; Survey No. 2 responses came from Australia, America, and Hungary, with additional information about all of these courses; Survey No. 3 responses came from London, New York, Frankfurt, and from professional conductors currently working in Australia, with additional information from Maestro David Porcelijn³⁴ of Holland, Dr. John Curro³⁵ of Australia, and Ms. Piroska Varga³⁶ of Hungary.

The results from all the surveys were small, but all yielded enough information for the purposes of this paper, excluding Survey No. 1. However the responses to this survey did reveal that there are professional conductors working within the profession with acclaimed professional orchestras that have low levels of skills. For this reason, and due to the small response, another survey was assembled (Survey No. 4) and distributed to principal players

³⁴ See footnote No. 2 above

³⁵ See footnote No. 55, below

³⁶ P. Varga **Piroska Varga** graduated from the Ferenc Liszt Academy in Budapest, Hungary in 1984 where she studied under world renowned educators Peter Erdei, Erzsebet Hegyi, Miklos Szabo, Igo Lenke, Erzsebet Szonyi, Gabriella Thesz and Istvan Parkai. Piroska taught for 10 years at the Zoltán Kodály Music Primary, Secondary and Professional Music Conservatory in Kecskemét, Hungary, specialising in Aural Training, Music Theory, Choral Conducting and Pedagogy. Piroska currently lectures in Solfége, Methodology and Conducting at the Canberra School of Music, Australian National University. She teaches in the school's Music Education Program and is a leading choral conductor of both children's and adult choirs. Piroska has presented hundreds of demonstrations at teacher training courses, postgraduate seminars, International summer schools and choral workshops all over Europe. She has worked in many countries including Hungary, Poland, Great Britain, France, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Greece, Finland and Australia.

of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra to identify additional experiences and attitudes.

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra is a professional symphony orchestra founded in 1948. The orchestra performs on average 80 concerts per year.³⁷ Maestro David Porcelijn³⁸ was appointed Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser of the TSO in 1994, and in 1997 was appointed Chief Conductor and Artistic Director. This internationally recognised conductor writes of the TSO: "Every year I travel across the world...to make music with orchestras in Europe and Australia. Whenever I return to Tasmania...I don't have to make any great professional adjustment: in fact....the standard of playing of the TSO is very similar to those of the best orchestras with which I work...The conductors and soloists with whom they appear regularly are some of the best of my colleagues from all over the world. There is not a single conductor or soloist [that appears in the Subscription Series of 1996] who is not eminent in national and international terms."³⁹ The TSO works with on average 24 professional conductors per year.⁴⁰ Fifteen surveys were distributed to principal players of this orchestra and eleven anonymous responses were returned. Principals of the sections of any orchestra are players that hold high professional standing within orchestral hierarchy.

All four original surveys appear in the Appendix (Page 59) and the results to all four surveys are discussed in Section 5.

³⁷ TSO Fact Sheet, provided by TSO General Manager, Julie Warn

³⁸ See footnote No. 2

³⁹ Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Subscription Series 1996 brochure

⁴⁰ Information courtesy of the TSO management

Section 5

5.1 The State of the Profession

Responses to Survey No. 1

All the concertmasters that responded to this survey agreed that all the essential elements listed were indeed essential for an effective conductor. Elements that the respondents felt were also essential were for the conductor to be able to present the musical structure to the orchestra, and to define the shape of the music in the performance.⁴¹ A conductor must have mastery of all the technical skills to be able to fulfil these additional elements. No one can explore artistic and interpretative issues until they have a thorough understanding of the technical base essential to their art.

Some concertmasters evaluated their regular conductor/the last conductor they worked with as having highly developed skills. Their evaluation consisted of 5 highly developed skill areas, 3 moderately developed, and 1 adequately developed. However another conductor received a very different evaluation: 1 adequately developed skill area, 3 poorly developed, 4 very poorly developed, and 1 below very poor. The additional comments from this respondent were: "[The conductor] conducts to sounds in his own head and is unaware of what is actually going on."⁴²

⁴¹ Survey 1

⁴² Survey 1

The aspects which all concertmasters found particularly lacking in conductors were musical/interpretational issues such as using the orchestra as a musical instrument, demanding phrases, colours and shapes in the music, and exploiting subtleties and nuances in the music.⁴³ To address these areas a conductor cannot be concerned with any technical aspect. These artistic issues are all part of the role of an effective conductor but cannot be achieved until the conductor has mastered the skill areas associated with his art.

Tabulated Responses - Question No. 2 Survey No.1

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1		Highly developed	moderate	adequate	poor	very poor	
2	Precision of beat	2			1		
3	Gestural expression of musical conviction		2				1
4	Part thinking	2				1	
5	Verbal communication			3			
6	Aural skill	2			1		
7	Stick technique	2				1	
8	Inner hearing		2			1	
9	Score reading	2			1		
10	Evaluation of sound		2			1	

⁴³ Survey 1

Responses to Survey No. 4

From all the responses to this survey it was obvious that all the respondents had worked with ineffective, poorly skilled conductors. All the responses were very specific and detailed. Professional orchestral musicians find it very easy to identify under-skilled and/or under-prepared conductors. The musicians surveyed have all worked with inadequate conductors during their professional careers.⁴⁴ It is obvious from their evaluations that there are many professional conductors currently working within the profession who have not mastered some or all of the elements that are essential to the role of the professional conductor. Responses revealed that common problems were: the conductor having his nose consistently in the score; not knowing the score; inability to take the blame when at fault; inability to hear mistakes; inability to follow any part other than the melody; inability to follow soloists in concerto works; inability to conduct basic beat patterns; getting lost in repertoire post-Mahler; inability to be able to assist the ensemble when something goes wrong due to inappropriate attempts to conduct from memory; inability to control tempi or fluctuations in tempi; the conductor displaying panic through facial expression, not being able to hide his anxiety; preparation of beats being unclear; focusing on tiny details for substantial amounts of time, not focusing on the overall concept of a work; little knowledge of such concepts as phrasing and dynamics; making corrections where there was no error; breaking the flow of the rehearsal by stopping frequently to fix tiny errors. The responses reveal that some conductors: seem to be learning the pieces by going over and over sections for no one else's benefit except their own, that is, not giving any explanation of why

⁴⁴ Survey 4

the ensemble should rehearse a particular section again; tend to talk too much about irrelevant issues; follow the orchestra rather than lead. Other conductors tend to be defensive and not be open to the needs of the ensemble. On occasion musicians have had to take over rehearsals completely due to the conductor's inability to be of any assistance. Some conductors often make innocuous statements such as "be musical" without explanation of any specific tangible concept on how this could be achieved. These comments came from professional orchestral musicians in reference to some professional conductors.⁴⁵

The respondents to Survey No.4 believe that the conductors that they have described in the above manner cause problems for both the individual musician and for the entire ensemble.⁴⁶ The conductor's inadequacies reduce the ensemble's overall standard both in rehearsal and in performance. Poor direction means the musicians have to spend the whole time concentrating on trying just to play together. However individual sections of the ensemble tend then to go their own way and things can easily fall apart. The musicians believe under-skilled and/or under-prepared conductors have the ability to reduce the ensemble to the lowest common denominator. Intonation, ensemble, articulation, rhythm, and discipline can all be affected, and can be reduced to a very low standard. Members of the ensemble become frustrated and find it very difficult to have any energy or enthusiasm for what they are doing. Some members of ensembles tend to "switch off" completely, totally ignoring the task at hand. The standard of the rehearsal and therefore of the

⁴⁵ Survey 4

⁴⁶ Survey 4

totally ignoring the task at hand. The standard of the rehearsal and therefore of the performance suffers dramatically.⁴⁷

Such conductors are not trusted by the ensemble. Lack of trust causes the musicians to feel stressed, anxious, uneasy, nervous and unconfident. All of these elements lead to unnecessary mistakes. ⁴⁸ Under these circumstances musicians within the ensemble tend to attempt to direct the rehearsal themselves which generally causes more tension and conflict within the ensemble. ⁴⁹ Some musicians have developed methods to test weaknesses in conductors such as purposely making mistakes to see if the conductor will notice, playing with inappropriate dynamics, and asking misleading, irrelevant, pedantic or obscure questions. ⁵⁰ However most professional ensemble musicians believe that bad conductors reveal their inabilities easily enough on their own without needing to be exposed by anyone else. Many of the professional musicians surveyed expressed a low tolerance level when it comes to dealing with conductors that are in any way indecisive or unskilled: in fact some are driven to considering other career options.⁵¹

These responses establish how vital the role of the conductor is to the art of ensemble performance, and prove that the suspicions outlined in the Preface (page 2) were justified.

This research into the experiences of working professional ensemble musicians across the

⁴⁷ Survey 4

⁴⁸ Survey 4

⁴⁹ Survey 4

⁵⁰ Survey 4

⁵¹ Survey 4

obviously under-skilled and therefore ineffective.⁵² Could this be caused by bad/ineffective training?

5.2 Training for the Profession

Some people in the music and in the conducting professions believe that training conducting is difficult and poses many problems. For example, "Instrumentalists have their whole boyhood and their whole adolescence to study their instrument...to perfect themselves in its technique...But the...conductor cannot do the same. His instrument is this dragon with...a hundred heads, and how should he practice on this instrument which is for the first time at his disposal when he begins his career. He comes out as a naive beginner, and this is a disadvantage which he can make up for only in years of practice."⁵³ "The problem with conducting training, is there are no orchestras to train on."⁵⁴ These sentiments support the belief that there is no other way to effectively train conducting except for practical apprenticeship.

⁵² Survey 1 and 4

⁵³ Bruno Walter

⁵⁴ **Nicholas Braithwaite** has held positions of Associate Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, permanent Guest Conductor of Norwegian State Radio Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. He has frequently appeared as guest conductor with all the major orchestras in the United Kingdom - touring with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. He has held the position of principal conductor with the Manchester Camerata, associate principal conductor of the English National Opera, Musical Director of Glynbourne Touring Opera, Musical Director of Gothenburg's Stora Theatre Opera and Ballet Companies, worked with ORTF Orchestra in Paris, The Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, appeared at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. He has also conducted the Welsh National Opera, Hamburg State Opera, Norwegian Opera, National Youth Orchestra of Scotland, Ulster Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Nova Scotia, The Aalborg Sinfonie Orkest and the Wellington City Opera.

As previously discussed the role of practical experience in conducting is vital for further development of skill. However, this does not necessarily mean practical experience with a professional ensemble. A small student ensemble provides adequate means to develop skill. Furthermore, a student ensemble generally only perform well if the conductor does his job adequately. Professional ensembles are more likely to perform adequately without a skilled conductor due to their own levels of experience.⁵⁵ Generally, students have a limited understanding of the art of ensemble performance and of the conductor's role in ensemble performance. Therefore to conduct a student ensemble well, the conductor must possess a thorough knowledge of all the elements of his role from the most fundamental level. This type of experience is ideal as every aspect of conducting will be heightened in importance, nothing can be taken for granted.⁵⁶

The problem of not having ensembles to train on can also be partially resolved if one's inner hearing skills are developed to a high level. To do this demands a high level of aural skill coupled with a knowledge of the sound of ensemble forces (instruments and voices). As such, experience of singing in choirs, playing in ensembles and listening to a wide variety of music that employs many different forces provides an added dimension of experience. The ability to hear the ensemble in one's mind greatly reduces the time needed standing before

⁵⁵ **John Curro** has conducted the Queensland Youth Orchestra for 30 years, within this time completing seven international tours. He has conducted The Bavarian Youth Orchestra and the Australian Youth Orchestra. He conducted an opera and ballet season for the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts. He has also conducted London Virtuosi, Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra, Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra, Queensland, Tasmanian, and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras, and opera seasons in Canberra, North Queensland and Brisbane.

an ensemble, as all the sounds are already present and can be developed and investigated in the mind, rather than relying on the rehearsal to hear what it sounds like. In many ways inner hearing could be regarded as the most essential element of conducting as it enables the conductor to structure the whole formal concept of the piece in the mind. If the sound exists in one's inner ear then gestural communication can also be prepared in the mind. This enables rehearsing to be clear and purposeful to the desired result. The problems people believe exist in relation to conducting training can be resolved through thorough development of inner hearing and through practical experience at any level.

5.3 Current State of Training for the Profession

From the results of surveys 1 and 4 one can plainly see that there are professional conductors working within the profession that have not been adequately trained in many areas that are essential to their art.⁵⁷ This is supported by further investigation into the training that professional conductors have received and into the course structure of many conducting schools around the world.⁵⁸

Survey No. 2 was constructed in such a way that it would become obvious (a) what was covered in the conducting classes around the world and (b) what the lecturers of these courses assumed to be essential for a conductor's development. By asking the lecturers to

⁵⁷ Survey 1 and 4

⁵⁸ Survey 3 and 2

determine what aspects they believe are or are not specifically covered by their course, yet also asking them to reveal how much time is devoted to the particular areas, I hoped to discover whether they understood the importance of the particular skills to the art of conducting.

Responses to Survey No. 2

All the responses to this survey differed greatly. A respondent from one institution believes aural skill and evaluation of sound are not aspects that need to be specifically covered in conducting training. These skills are both allotted 2-3 hours out of a total of 72 hours of class time. All the other elements are considered essential: both part thinking and inner hearing are focused on for 12 out of 72 hours. As discussed earlier, these skills could not be trained as effectively unless students have a high level of aural skill. This course offers 12 out of 72 hours on score reading skills and 8 out of 72 hours on communication skills. However, 20 out of 72 hours are spent on physical and muscle training, gesture and arm usage and facial expressions. This course is basically ignoring two skills essential for effective conducting. Without good aural skills and evaluation of sound skills a conductor would stand in front of an ensemble and not be able to detect finer rhythm and pitch discrepancies, and be less likely to know how to produce his desired result. This course possibly expects their students to already have these abilities, but this leaves much to chance.

Another institution that responded offers three levels of conducting classes. In the first

level, the most basic elementary level, they are not trained in aural skills or score reading skills. Minimal time (4 hours per 2 semesters) is devoted to inner hearing skills, part thinking skills, and evaluation of sound. However at this basic level, 32 hours is devoted to communication skills. Both the intermediate and advanced conducting classes at the same institution devote 8 out of 84 hours to aural skill and 4 out of 84 hours to both part thinking skills and inner hearing. Yet aspects such as emotional content, interpretation and communication are specifically covered (amount of time not given). Historical, pedagogical and social aspects of conducting are also specifically covered. Graduates of these conducting courses are not receiving training in skills that are totally essential to the art of conducting.

At another institution fluency in score reading and score study, baton technique and programming are the only elements that are specifically covered. Another institution's conducting course spends half the course time on baton and gestural techniques, yet vital skills such as evaluation of sound and part thinking are completely ignored. Communication skills and score reading skills are claimed to be specifically covered (quarter of the course time is devoted to these areas) but it is difficult to become fluent in score reading unless one also has good aural, part thinking and inner hearing skills.

Another lecturer believes all the essential skills are specifically covered in a two hour session. 15 minutes per 2 hours are devoted to both aural skills and inner hearing which leaves only 1.5 hours to specifically cover all the other four areas listed on the survey. This course also claims to specifically cover vocal techniques. Unfortunately this respondent did

not explain how many two hour sessions occur per year at this institution. This course does acknowledge the importance of all the identified essential elements: however from the response to the survey it is hard to deduce how specific and thorough this course would be.

Responses Tabulated - Survey No.2 (Responses thus far discussed) ⁵⁹

	A	B	C	D
1		specifically covered	course time allotted (to allegedly specifically covered elements)	not specifically covered
2	Aural skills	4	15/120mins; 1/4course; 8/68hrs; 8/68hrs	4
3	Part thiking	5	12/72hrs ;15/120mins; 4/44hrs; 8/68hrs; 8/68hrs	3
4	Inner hearing	5	12/72hrs; 15/120mins; 4/44hrs; 4/68hrs; 4/68hrs	3
5	Fluency in score reading	6	12/72hrs; 15/120mins; 1hr per week; 1/4course; 16/68hrs;	2
6	Comunicatlon skills	6	8/72hrs; 15/120mins; 1/4course; 32/44hrs; 16/68hrs; 8/68hrs	2
7	Evaluation of sound	4	15/120mins; 4/44hrs; 32/68hrs; 8/68hrs	4

Responses to Survey No.3

The professional conductors that responded to Survey No. 3 all felt their conducting training was inadequate in some way. One respondent felt his training did not teach him how to

⁵⁹ This is a table of the results as they appear on the surveys themselves. The hours listed in the 2nd column indicate how many hours the respondants consider necessary to specifically cover an area.

rehearse, or how to approach and relate to musicians from the platform. This respondent has no specialised conducting degree, having studied privately with Maestro Michel Tabachnik, a student of and assistant to Pierre Boulez.⁶⁰ Another respondent also only studied conducting privately with Maestro Rachlin for some years, and often had lessons via telephone to London. Rachlin was one of Fritz Reiner's⁶¹ best students.⁶² This respondent felt his training lacked development of the theoretical aspects of music, such as the study of harmony. Another respondent to this survey had no formal conducting training. This respondent studied the art of conducting through practical apprenticeship. He felt this method of training did not develop any aural skills, programme preparation or people skills.

All of the respondents to Survey No.3 felt the essential elements listed were vital to the art of conducting, two felt that they were all of equal importance. This should be the case in any vocation. One cannot achieve total efficiency in any field if any one particular skill, vital to their area, is underdeveloped. The art of conducting is no different. All the skills are of equal importance and they all must work in harmony toward the one purpose. No one skill can be ignored. To achieve virtuosity in any field, all the skills must be developed to the highest possible level, the relationship of the skills must be understood, how they all work together and how they connect. It is a fine balance and synthesis of skills that leads to high level conducting.

⁶⁰ Pierre Boulez (1925-) is undoubtedly one of the finest conductors of the day. Klemperer called him "the only man of his generation who is an outstanding conductor and musician" (source: "Conductors" by John. L. Holmes Page 52)

⁶¹ Fritz Reiner (1888-1963) was one of the most significant conductors of his time, ranking with the greatest conductors in the history of modern conducting: Toscanini, Stokowski, Mengelberg, Beecham, and Furtwängler. (source: "Conductors" by John. L. Holmes Page 232)

⁶² Survey 3

From the results to the surveys thus far disclosed one could conclude that:

- conducting institutions, and training that professional conductors have received, fail to thoroughly cover all the identified essential elements of conducting, leaving much to chance, thereby not thoroughly preparing a professional conducting career;
- many professional musicians are dissatisfied with and have little respect for some professional conductors who obviously have poor levels of skills.

There is very possibly a link here. Poor training breeds ineffectiveness. If it was the general case that conducting skills were being adequately trained, then more highly skilled and thus more effective conductors would be appearing in front of ensembles. A high level of skill produces efficiency in one's role. Mastery of skill enables one to constantly strive for virtuosity.

The responses to Surveys 2 and 3 were not from every conducting institution nor every professional conductor in the world. However the responses already discussed indicate that conducting training that thoroughly prepares a professional conducting career does not exist. Maestro David Porcelijn believes that there are not really any conducting institutions today that stand out as being superior to any others. In his opinion there are conducting institutions that are popular or famous due to the fact that acclaimed conductors within the profession have done some of their conducting study there.⁶³ Conducting is such a complex synthesis and delicate balance of skills that one could feasibly conclude that conducting is too difficult to train thoroughly within an institutionalised situation.

⁶³ Results of interview with David Porcelijn 1996

At this point in my research I started to concur with the popular view that conducting training was too difficult and posed many unresolvable problems. That was until I received a response from Dr. Edward Bolkovac, Senior Lecturer at The University of Queensland. He writes: "I was pleasantly surprised by the questions on your survey because so many conducting courses neglect areas of musicianship which are so vital for building the foundation of a solid conducting approach." The conducting courses offered at this institution "include a strong emphasis on musicianship skills as an integral part of the program." He explains how all the skills previously determined in this paper as being essential for effective conducting are specifically covered in conducting courses that he directs, excluding communication skills. He writes: "communication skills in terms of conducting technique are well covered. Verbal communication skills are usually touched upon as discussions arise in class." His statements in relation to the courses he directs are further supported by the Queensland University's course information brochure that accompanied this response. It is obvious that Dr. Bolkovac understands how important all the established essential elements are for a conductor, and the course that he now directs offers thorough training in these areas.

I wondered what experiences had lead Dr. Bolkovac to these conclusions. He went on to write, "My own background includes conducting study at the Liszt Academy in Budapest." At this stage I had not received a response to Survey No. 2 from the Liszt Academy. Therefore other channels were taken to investigate the conducting course offered at the Liszt Academy, perhaps to discover a method of conducting training, equally as thorough as

Dr. Bolkovac's course, or possibly a more thorough course that provides such effective training that its students graduate with such skills and knowledge that enable them go on and direct such a thorough course as the one offered under Dr. Bolkovac at the Queensland University.

Section 6

The Liszt Academy: A Model for Training

From investigation into the conducting course offered at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, one can conclude that this institution thoroughly covers every aspect of all the skills identified as being essential to the role of a professional conductor, and prepares them to a very high level.⁶⁴ This course thoroughly prepares a professional conducting career and enables the pursuit of virtuosity as a professional conductor to become a reality.

Within the course at the Liszt Academy one intensively studies the following subjects for five years: solfege and aural skills, transposition, score reading, theory of music, counterpoint, history of music, piano, choir, chamber music, orchestra, teaching methodology, languages (Russian, Italian, and English), pedagogy, student teaching, instrument knowledge, study of education, sociology, education practice, aesthetics, ethics, voice health, voice training, and conducting.⁶⁵

The conducting students are expected to be able to sing one part of their assigned composition and play, on a keyboard instrument, all the others. This develops part thinking skills and inner hearing skills. If the student cannot demonstrate the ability to do this with

⁶⁴ Piroska Varga

⁶⁵ Piroska Varga

their piece then they are not allowed to conduct it. If they can, they are allowed to conduct the other conducting students who sing or play the parts of the composition. After three years of this kind of training a student may then be selected to conduct one of the Academy's choirs or orchestras. There is always strong competition for such a privilege, therefore all the students are very dedicated and learn the scores extremely thoroughly, usually from memory. In the final year of the degree, the specialising conducting students who have made it through to the final year, conduct a full choir with all other Academy students as members and prepare a full concert with them.⁶⁶

The entire degree at the Liszt Academy thoroughly covers and develops every aspect of all the discussed elements necessary for an effective professional conductor. This course thoroughly covers aural skill, develops inner hearing, part thinking skills and score reading, and demands these skills to be at an extremely advanced level before they are even allowed to conduct an ensemble. Students learn specific detail on musical history, giving them a thorough understanding of all the stylistic qualities of the different periods and genres. Theoretical training enables the students to thoroughly analyse and understand all aspects of any musical style. Orchestration, arranging and instrumental studies covers all possible forces that one would ever have to conduct. In addition they study three different languages as well as their own native language, all the teaching methodology, sociology, aesthetics and ethics. This thoroughly trains all aspects of verbal communication. Specialised conducting training is provided which trains elements that have not been covered in the rest of the course including gestural techniques and interconnection of the

skills that have already been developed in other subjects of the degree. All the elements that can be trained away from an ensemble such as inner hearing and part thinking skills are expected to be at the highest level, to be second nature - otherwise the students are considered unprepared. All the students play in orchestras, sing in choirs, study piano and play chamber music. This provides practical insight into all the forces a conductor must work with. It would seem that every aspect of conducting is intensively trained in this course. Students that graduate from the Liszt Academy with a conducting specialisation are not only adequately prepared for a professional conducting career, but are more likely to reach a virtuosic standard.

One of the reasons why the Liszt Academy can offer such an intensive and thorough course is that the whole music education system in Hungary is different to that in any other country. There are 220 specialised music schools in Hungary that children can attend during their youth, as well as other conservatories and private institutions. All Hungarian children from kindergarten to tertiary age are trained in music. Aspects such as aural training are being taught to Hungarian children from the age of three. In primary and high school the specialised music schools teach a main instrument, music theory, analysis, aural training, counterpoint, composition, conducting, music history, choir, orchestra and chamber music. Therefore the skills of students that enter the Liszt Academy are already highly developed, especially considering the competition for entry into and within the Academy itself.⁶⁷ “The competition is stronger and only the really good ones stay alive.....”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Piroska Varga

⁶⁸ Piroska Varga

When one looks at the Liszt Academy one must also consider the musical culture around it in Hungary. It is the nature of the entire music education system in Hungary that enables the Liszt Academy be so effective for the pursuit of conducting virtuosity. Therefore other conducting courses across the world are starting from a point behind the Hungarians. It is the balance of all the music subjects offered from such a young age in Hungary that enables students to reach the highest level. The children are exposed to training in aspects of conducting from as young as three years of age. At this age aural skills such as pitch and rhythm are starting to be developed amongst other musicianship skills such as inner hearing and part thinking.⁶⁹ Over the years more elements are introduced and thoroughly trained until tertiary level where the skills can be further developed and refined to the highest level. The highest level of any skill can only be achieved through years of thorough training. A very high standard of musical skills is necessary even to qualify to study music at a tertiary level in Hungary. Once accepted into a tertiary institution these skills are then further developed through intensive training for up to five years.

The reason that the music education system in Hungary is structured in this manner is due to the influence and philosophies of Zoltan Kodály. Kodály's philosophies on music education were realised and put into practice in Hungary over fifty years ago and have been developing steadily ever since. Kodály believed that every institution must have solid foundations and music education should be no exception. The foundations of an effective tertiary institution is thorough education in all years that precede tertiary level.⁷⁰ Music

⁶⁹ Szábo

⁷⁰ Selected Writings of Zoltan Kodály

education therefore became a part of every child's life from the age three. "It is at kindergarten with us...that the first laying of foundations, the collecting of the first, decisive experience begins. What the child learns here, he will never forget."⁷¹ Kodály based his philosophy on the psychological research that finds that the years between three and seven are educationally much more important than the later ones. "What is spoiled or omitted at this age can not be put right later on."⁷² Kodály believed that the only way to become a highly skilled musician was to be introduced to the phenomena of music in childhood, then to be exposed to systematic music education at primary and secondary school level. The formal start, he believed, should be made immediately in kindergarten because there the child can learn in play what would be too late to learn in elementary school.⁷³ "The lack of basic training in youth takes its revenge later on."⁷⁴ Music education is structured around these philosophies in Hungary today. Musical skills are being trained from the age of three. A natural consequence for a child trained so thoroughly can be a successful career in music, including a high level conductor.

Therefore aspects of the art of conducting can be developed from a young age. Most instrumental virtuosi have started their training at a young age, from the musical masters of yesterday to the masters of today. Chopin, Franck, Bizet, Saint-Saëns and Albeniz all made their debut as soloists on the concert platform at the age of four, violinist Ginette Neveu

⁷¹ Zoltan Kodály Selected Writings of Page 129

⁷² Zoltan Kodály Selected Writings of Page 129

⁷³ Zoltan Kodály Selected Writings of Page 128

⁷⁴ Zoltan Kodály Selected Writings of Page 195

(1919-1949) appeared with the Colonne Orchestra in Paris at age seven, gained a *premier prix* at eleven, at only sixteen won the International Wieniawski Competition over such established virtuosic violinists as David Oistrakh. Training the art of conducting to a virtuosic level should be considered the same as training for any virtuosi. Thoroughly preparing a virtuosic conducting career requires years of training and practice. "For like a tree, the child, unless he's cared for, will grow ugly; the mistakes of a tender age can never, or only with difficulty, be put right in the years to come."⁷⁵

The survey method used in researching this topic had a poor result in terms of the number of responses. The small amount of information that was returned meant that this paper could not give an absolute representation on an international scale of the current conducting profession and training for the profession. One of the reasons for the poor numbers of results is explained by two responses to Survey No.1 and three to Survey No.3 from Frankfurt, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, and London. These responses were from the administration of orchestras in these countries and secretaries of professional conductors such as John Eliot Gardiner. They explain that these orchestras and conductors were at that time on vacation, and therefore would be unable to answer my surveys by the deadline specified. Preparation of the survey method did not consider that the northern hemisphere would be having their longest vacation period of the working year at the time the surveys were sent. If anyone was to follow this line of this research it would be beneficial to send surveys in another part of the year to targets in the northern hemisphere. A better result may also be achieved if the researcher accompanied the surveys with self-

⁷⁵ David B. Szabo as appears in Zoltan Kodály The Selected Writings of Page 129

addressed stamped envelopes, so the cost of returning surveys would not be a deterrent.

Therefore research for this paper only partially explored the current conducting profession and training for the profession. However from the responses it was possible to address the main area of focus, that is, to determine whether it is possible to thoroughly train and prepare a professional conducting career and whether it is possible for conductors to be effective from the outset of their professional careers. From research and from the responses to the surveys constructed for the purposes of this paper, the course offered at the Liszt Academy surfaced as the only method of conducting training which thoroughly prepares a professional conducting career and enables the pursuit of virtuosity to become a realistic concept. However this does not mean it is the only institution or training method in the world that fulfils this definition of effective conducting training.

It has also been established that there are conductors working within the profession who have not had this type of training and do not possess one or more of the established essential elements. This does not mean that these conductors are therefore unable to achieve good results with ensembles. However, if conductors were trained in a way that fulfils this definition of effective conducting training, the aspects left to chance are minimalised and the possibility of effectiveness and virtuosity is increased.

Conclusion

There is nothing more esoteric or magical about the art of conducting than any other of the arts. To specialise in any field requires development of particular skills, and conducting is no exception. All the skills essential to the role of the professional conductor are discernible and are able to be trained. The conductor has a very strong influence on the art of ensemble performance. Due to the importance of the professional conductor's role, these conductors should be masters of their skills, worthy of the term "maestro." The art of conducting requires a fine balance and synthesis of skills. Effective training should include thorough study of all musical aspects and technical study specific to conducting, yet develop these aspects in such a way that balance and synthesis of skills can also be achieved.

The conducting course offered at the Liszt Academy proves that conducting can be trained effectively and that it is possible to thoroughly train and prepare a professional conducting career, leaving nothing to chance. If trained in this way, conductors would be effective from the outset of their professional careers. One does not need special innate gifts and talents to fulfil the role of a professional conductor. The Liszt Academy's conducting course covers all the skills identified as being essential to the role of a professional conductor and prepares them to a very high level, thereby thoroughly preparing a professional conducting career and enabling the pursuit of virtuosity to become a reality. However, the Liszt Academy expects a certain level of skill to have been reached prior to tertiary study.

Therefore it is the whole music education system in Hungary that offers an approach to conducting training that thoroughly prepares a professional conducting career.

If the art of conducting is trained thoroughly, then a professional conductor can stand before a professional ensemble for the first time and be in total command. Years of professional practical experience are still necessary to achieve virtuosity. Only in exceptional cases could this be achieved without thorough training. A soloist does not stand before a professional orchestra for the first time as a beginner: they have been training for that opportunity for most of their lives.

To achieve virtuosity, one must develop all the skills particular to the field of specialisation to the highest level. Mastery of skill enables one to focus on the pursuit of virtuosity. A virtuosic conductor should not be trained any differently to other virtuosos. Virtuosi spend years training and refining all aspects of their expertise, often from a very young age. Hungarian music education meets this ideal. Children are being trained in aspects of conducting from the age of three. Furthermore, research indicates that some aspects essential for conducting are more effectively trained at this young age.

The pursuit of virtuosity requires years of detailed training, thorough development and eventual mastery of all the skills essential to one's chosen field. Then, and only then, does the possibility of virtuosity arise. This can be a lifetime commitment. The pursuit of conducting virtuosity should be approached accordingly.

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Appendix

The surveys constructed for the purposes of this paper

SURVEY NO. 1

To be completed by the current concertmaster of your orchestra

Question 1

What do you see as the essential elements of a conductor? With 1 being the most preferred, please number all of the following in order of preference.

High level of aural skill

Clear and consistent beat

High level of part thinking

High level of inner hearing

Fluency in score reading

Good verbal communication

Good evaluation of sound

Other (please specify)

Question 2

In reference to your principal conductor or the last conductor you worked with, how would you evaluate their skill in the following areas?

	Highly developed	moderate	adequate	poor	very poor
Precision of beat					
Gestural expression of musical conviction					
Part thinking					
Verbal communication					
Aural skill					
Stick technique					
Inner hearing					
Score reading					
Evaluation of sound					

Question 3

Which element(s) do you find to be most lacking in conductors that you work with?

Question 4

(a) Please indicate your age group

20-30 30-40 40-50 50-60 60-70 70+

(b) What is your country of origin?

Thankyou very much for your assistance and time

SURVEY NO. 2

To be completed by the current lecturer or coordinator of the conducting course in your institution.

Question 1

Which of the following areas do you specifically cover in your conducting course? Please specify, in hours, the amount of course time devoted to each of these areas.

	Specifically covered	not specifically covered	course time allotted
Aural skills			
Part thiking			
Inner hearing			
Fluency in score reading			
Communication skills			
Evaluation of sound			

Question 2

Are there any other areas that you specifically train in your conducting course?

Thankyou very much for your assistance and time. I am considering further study in choral and orchestral conducting. Could you please attach any additional course information about your conducting programs. Thankyou.

SURVEY NO. 3

To be completed by the current conductor of your orchestra

Question 1

What do you see as the essential elements of a conductor? With "1" being the most preferred, please number all of the following in order of preference.

- High level of aural skill
- Clear and consistent beat
- High level of part thinking
- High level of inner hearing
- Fluency in score reading
- Good verbal communication
- Good evaluation of sound

Other (please specify)

Question 2

Please give a brief outline of any formal conducting training that you have had, including information such as years of study, teachers, institutions, and lengths of courses.

Question 3

As a professional conductor, which elements of your conducting training do you find has benefited you most?

Question 4

Which elements of conducting do you feel your own training did not adequately prepare?

Question 5

(a) Please indicate your age group

20-30 30-40 40-50 50-60 60-70 70+

(b) What is your country of origin?

Thankyou very much for your assistance and time.

SURVEY NO. 4

Meet conductor x !!!

Conductor X is a conductor who is under prepared, or a conductor who doesn't know what is going on - a complete bluff act.

- 1-What signs help you to identify conductor X?
- 2-How is your performance affected by conductor X?
- 3-How is the orchestra's performance affected by conductor X?
- 4-Are there any methods you use to "test" conductor X?

Thankyou for your assistance and time.