

# The Conductor's Toolbox

*A conductor's guide to prepare for your first rehearsal with the ensemble.*

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Music for All Director's Academy

# Your Body is Your Instrument

- Personal Fitness
- Warm-up and Stretching
- Wear and Tear on the Hands and Wrist
- Know What You Look Like (*especially from behind*)
  - Your body
  - Your face
  - Your attire
- Know Your Strengths and Weaknesses

# Stance

- Feet shoulder width apart
- Don't move your feet without a purpose
- Stand up straight, shoulders back, chest open
- As a rule, don't bend knees or at the waist
- Up on your toes for emphasis
- What do you look like from the back?

# Your Equipment

- The baton.
  - Inside of arm to end of index finger
  - Thick shaft is less stressful on your joints and more visible
  - White is more visible than natural
  - No wrist watches ever!
- The podium. Adjusted to your height and layout of the band.
- Metronome. Have one even if you don't ever use it. A must for recording.
- The music stand.
  - For rehearsals (two?)
  - For performances

# Baton Grip

- Ball in the palm
- Shake hands
- Back of hand toward the ceiling
- Let it pivot
- Divining rod – an extension of your arm – it's the amplifier
- Use your joints naturally
- Napoleonic anchor

# Your Workplace *(The Stand)*

Opener  
National Anthem *into*  
Salute to Veterans  
A Savannah Symphony  
Xylophone Ragtime *into*  
Fairest of the Fair  
Glenn Miller Medley  
With Voice of Triumph Raised *to mike*  
Armed Forces Salute  
Song of the Unsung Hero  
Of Honor and Valor Eternal *into*  
Land That I Love *into* GBA  
Stars & Stripes *into*  
BOWS *into*  
Enc. Am the Beautiful *into*  
Enc. In the Mood Reprise

Digital Clock

Metronome

Grease  
Pencil

Scores  
stacked and  
opened up so  
they can be  
"peeled off:



# Erich Leinsdorf's "Top Ten List"

- Be prepared.
- Work with the librarian.
- Plan rehearsal time.
- Speak little.
- Stop seldom.
- Do not keep musicians idle.
- Stand to conduct.
- Understand players and their parts.
- Do not fake.
- Do not delude yourself.

# Score Study and Form Analysis

- Start big (what's the title?) and narrow it down each time (inverted pyramid).
- What's the composer trying to say?
- What's the big form? (Fast, slow, fast?)
- Where are the peaks and valleys?
- What are the tempo relationships?
- Now you can start figuring out what the meter is!
- You have effective knowledge of the score when you know how to teach it.
- Once you know the form and “where things are going,” most phrasing and shaping questions will answer themselves. Phrasing and shaping are ways of propelling you to your destination.



# A Blue Collar Approach to Score Study

- Visit a piece daily. Frequent, short, focused sessions are better than fewer extended sessions. Also let it lie fallow.
- Use a variety of approaches and rotate them:
  - Just look at the score without conducting or thinking of gestures. Look for things you might have missed on earlier readings or find expected performance problems.
  - Conducting through it both with and without recordings. This is what many do almost exclusively and while it's useful, you don't really learn much new about the score by doing this every day.
  - Play through lines on a keyboard or on your instrument (or practice your sight singing!).
  - Conducting it from memory both with and without recordings.
  - Listen to and compare several recordings. What do you think is good or not so good about each of them?
  - Read about the piece and/or the composer (and talk to them!).

# **Note and Phrase Shaping**

## **A Product of Your Form Analysis and Score Study**

- Does the note begin a statement (sentence)? Does the phrase begin a section (paragraph)?
- Does the note end a statement (sentence)? Does the phrase end a section (paragraph)?
- Is it supposed to push the music forward or pull it back?
- What else is going on? If it's a note that "has a hole in the middle" (half note or longer) is there movement going on in another voice while it's sustaining? IOW, if a phrase or note is in repose, is there some underlying movement to be revealed?



# Supermetrics

Second Suite for Military  
Band, Mvt. IV

Holst/Fennell

Pub. Ludwig Masters

- Avoid conducting in “1”
- If the phrase is in groups of 4 measures, use a 4 pattern
- Add a number when there’s a variation

48

150

Fl.

Picc.

Ob.

Bsn. 1  
2

E♭ Cl.

1

B♭ Cl. 2  
3

Alt. Cl.

B. Cl.

C.A. Cl.

A. Sax.

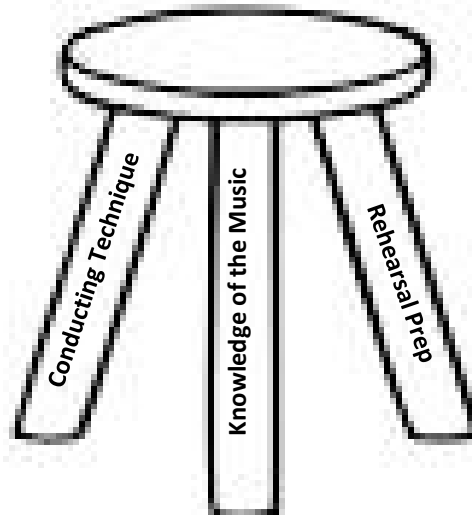
T. Sax.

Bar. Sax.

150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159

# Practicing Conducting

- Stick to the Basics
  - Marcato, legato, and neutral patterns for 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4
  - Prepared cues with eye contact on 1, 2, 3, and 4
  - Right hand pattern while left hand indicates measured crescendo and decrescendo
- Practice daily, often while doing something else.
- For every gesture, ask yourself “what do the musicians need?”
- Use a mirror – video is even better, although it requires large amounts of alcohol afterwards.
- Videotape yourself from the front but also from the rear.



# Practice Bowing and Gestures

## *With Apologies....*

- The Geisha. Half bow from the waist and looking up at the audience.
- The French waiter. One arm horizontal across the waist.
- The Drinking Bird. Arms tight by the side, bobbing up and down.
- OK - I don't have a PC name for this. Hands clasped in front of your lower abdomen like you've just been kicked there.
- The right way:
  - Bend slowly from the waist, head down, arms hanging freely from the shoulder and with fingers curled naturally, and say “look at my shoes, 2, 3, 4, and up.”
  - “Swing the gate slowly.”
  - Speak slowly, control your adrenaline, glide.
  - Smile.
  - Do everything at half the speed you think it should be.
  - Practice the curtain calls, bows, etc. with the band.

# A Few Conductor References

- **The Modern Conductor (7th Edition)** January 8, 2004 by Elizabeth A. Green Emerita and Mark Gibson
- **The Art of Conducting** by Donald Hunsberger and Roy Ernst
- **On Becoming a Conductor: Lessons and Meditations on the Art of Conducting** by Frank Battisti
- **Conducting Nuances: Little Things Mean a Lot** by Anthony Maiello
- **Guide to Orchestral Bowings Through Musical Styles:** A Manual to be Used with Video by Marvin Rabin, Priscilla A. Smith
- **The Composer's Advocate: A Radical Orthodoxy for Musicians** by Erich Leinsdorf
- **On Teaching Band: Notes from Eddie Green** by Mary Ellen Cavitt
- **Score Rehearsal Preparation** by Gary Stith

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