

FORWARD

MOTION

A Sweet Adelines International Newsletter for Members of the Director's Certification Program and Front-Line Directors

OUTSTANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

In just a few short weeks many of you will be coming together at the fabulous Detroit Marriot Renaissance Center for *Side By Side* Director Seminar along with Sweet Adelines judges. Planning co-chairs Diane Porsch and Marcia Pinvidic have brought together the best faculty to give you a long weekend full of fun and learning.

In addition, the wheels are turning on next summer's general education event: IES-Global: *Personal Performance Power*. This seminar is all about finding the power in you! Co-chairs Nancy Field and Renée Porzel have designed a curriculum that will focus on vocal, visual and musical skills and how to bring them all together into one total package. We are also offering an additional day of training for visual leaders at IES West: Palm Springs. We hope that you'll encourage your chorus members to attend. We've already received messages from chorus leaders whose goal is to get their entire chorus to attend the session closest to them. Please watch *The Pitch Pipe*, eZine and Web site for more details about dates, locations, registration and housing in the coming weeks and months.

Finally, you'll find a new section in the *Forward Motion* this month called "Announcements and Opportunities" (found on page 14). We are providing the regions a place to showcase their upcoming educational events. It is our hope that you will seek out the opportunities that best fit your needs and assist you in your growth.

Sweet Adelines International prides itself on providing its members a chance to be lifelong learners through its various educational offerings—events, classes, workshops, seminars, contests, publications, videos, webinars—you're bound to find more than a few ways to increase your knowledge and skill level.

Wishing you the joy and happiness of lifelong learning and music-making!

In harmony,



Lori Decter Wright
Director of Education
Sweet Adelines International

JUN/JUL 2009

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Side BY Side

DIRECTORS' SEMINAR & JUDGE TRAINING

2009

DETROIT MARRIOTT RENAISSANCE CENTER IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN, JULY 22-25, 2009

We'll see you soon at this dynamic weekend of classes
planned especially for you!

FEATURING:

- ◆ **Renowned educators from the International Faculty Program and Judge Specialists: Sylvia Alsbury, Sharon Babb, Marge Bailey, Betty Clipman, Paula Davis, Peggy Gram, Carolyn Healey, Kim Hulbert, Lori Lyford, Sandy Marron, Ruth Ann Parker, Marcia Pinvidic, Diane Porsch, Tori Postma, Dale Syverson, and Harriette Walters**
- ◆ **Guest Faculty: Jim Arns**
- ◆ **International Quartet Champions MOXIE LADIES and SPOTLIGHT!**
- ◆ **Fantastic closing event featuring a Motown costume party and lip sync contest you won't soon forget!**
- ◆ **World-class facilities and accommodations**

[View/Print Class List](#)

Please be sure to arrive ready to sing the two seminar songs: *Side By Side* and *I'm All Alone*. If you need additional copies, once on site, they will be available for purchase from our sales area.

Upon arrival and check-in you will receive your seminar schedule, badge and program booklet which will include all of the handouts for the weekend. Should you require additional copies of the program, they will also be available for purchase from our sales area.



ADVANCEMENTS

Advanced to Master Director 700

Jim Arns, Melodeers Chorus, Region 3
Janet Ashford, Pride of Baltimore Chorus, Region 19
June Dale, North Metro Chorus, Region 16
Kim Hulbert, San Diego Chorus, Region 21
Carole Kirkpatrick, Pacific Sound Chorus, Region 13
Lori Lyford, Scottsdale Chorus, Region 21
Ruth Ann Parker, Rich-Tone Chorus, Region 25
Dale Syverson, Rich-Tone Chorus, Region 25

Advanced to Master Director

Joan Borden, Orangeville Chorus, Region 16
Eileen Gioe, Merrimack Valley Chorus, Region 1
Kathy Mendenhall, Capitaland Chorus, Region 16
Laura Pallas, Santa Monica Chorus, Region 11
Mari Pettersson, Harmony Heights Chorus, Region 32
Darlene Rogers, Texas Harmony Chorus, Region 10
Angela Suraci, Mission Valley Chorus, Region 12
Xanna Williamson, Lone Star Chorus, Region 10
Pat Vipond, Orangeville Chorus, Region 16

Advanced to Certified Director

Carol Argue, Green Heart Chorus, Region 26,
Philippa Beckman, Christchurch City Chorus, Region 35
Kerry Denino, Scioto Valley Chorus, Region 4
Martha Eiter, Sound Celebration Chorus, Region 5
Patty Friedemann, Talk of Tulsa Show Chorus, Region 25
Jonelle Hamilton, Scioto Valley, Region 4
Mary Halsig, Wichita Chorus, Region 7
Stacey Haskins, Calumet Corner Chorus, Region 3
Sandy Hastings, Christchurch City Chorus, Region 35
Hazel (Angus) Hay, Christchurch City Chorus, Region 35
Jackie Knowles, Sounds of Superior Chorus, Region 6
Jill McLeod, Southern Accord Chorus, Region 26
Joan Minns, Carillon Bells Chorus, Region 2
Barbara Neilson, Jacksonville Harmony Chorus, Region 9
Tracey Neville, Christchurch City Chorus, Region 35
Cheryl Pearce, Magic City Chorus, Region 26
Brenda Rahm, Belles of Berkley, Region 19
Kay Seymour, Pride of Toledo, Region 17
Gena Sommer, Heart of Illinois Chorus, Region 5
Jennifer Squires, Headliners Chorus, Region 34
Joe Spiecker, Valley Forge Chorus, Region 19
Elizabeth Van Gelder, Inland Empire Chorus, Region 21
Linda Wells, Olympia Chorus, Region 13
Angie Williams, Yahara River, Region 22

REAL WOMEN

Our Journey to Excellence: Region 34's 2009 Contest in Hobart, Tasmania

By Lea Baker, Master Director, Endeavour Harmony Chorus, Region 34

As soon as we started into the first song on the Hobart stage, I knew we were going to deliver our best contest performance to date. It felt great, like the chorus and I were one. I could feel the audience reaction and energy flowing up onto the stage as ours flowed down. I knew that the chorus could sense it as well. A lovely circle of energy was flowing between the audience and the chorus. I'd heard about these instances and now I was in the middle of it! When the standing ovation lasted all the way back to

our seats in the auditorium I realized that we had done a *really* good job! There is truly no better audience to sing for than an audience of Sweet Adelines!



Endeavor Harmony Chorus — Brisbane 2006 Showcase

Our journey started 18 months ago. Our trip to Calgary in October 2007 gave us a taste of the international stage. Not just for us, as first timers on the international stage, but also watching the thrilling, inspirational sound and energy barbershop singing can deliver. Our eyes were wide open with awe. In late 2007, the music team and board launched a program that set the wheels in motion for our own chorus to move up a level from B+ to A-. It was called "Aiming for Excellence." This program was really about "rattling the cage" and covered four focus areas for improvement—attendance, accuracy, vocal skills and teamwork. It was about putting in place the foundations for success and taking personal responsibility for the basics. During 2008 we started measuring and publicizing within the chorus things like attendance, percentage by section of risers passed by due date, etc. As 2008 progressed, all four areas

improved measurably and this gave everyone a great sense of satisfaction. "Aiming for Excellence" also gave me an opportunity to state my vision for the future—a vivid description of the sort of chorus I wanted us to be, which was "a committed, enthusiastic group of singers who love to learn, strive for excellence, work on continually improving, challenge themselves and each other, take personal responsibility, and are wonderful team players" and a wish list of things that I thought we could achieve by the Regional in Hobart 2009. An

A- score was one of them.

Our competition music was chosen and ready to learn 12 months before contest. This time instead of doing our usual riser tapes, we held a "quartet riser" program (this idea came from the Melbourne chorus) where each member sings the competition songs with a quartet

and is assessed for note and tuning accuracy by their section leader or tape checker. This was new and in the three to four weeks it took to get through everyone, the difference in confidence of the singers was really noticeable. Having all risers passed six months before contest was also a boost, as it allowed us to concentrate on higher level skills.

**In 2008 we were great,
but in 2009 we will SHINE !**

Twelve months before contest we set a goal for the Hobart 2009 regional contest. We looked at our last regional score (613), watched our DVD and discussed levels and scores and what might be achievable. The chorus then got into small groups and discussed this and each group came up with a score. My job was to have the calculator ready and average out the numbers. It came

to 634, so that was our goal. We did agree however that a “stretch” goal of 640 was also a good idea as this would put us into the “excellent” category of A-. The important thing looking back now is that it was the chorus’ goal, rather than my goal. My job was to help them (us) achieve it. So now you know why were so ecstatic to achieve 652 points!

In September 2008, instead of having a normal show—we held a fully fledged musical called “Just Desserts.” This was a first for Endeavour Harmony Chorus. Under the guidance of our Visual Leader, Debra Griffiths, this project developed the chorus’s ability to act, learn lines, and take on a character. Talk about putting us outside our comfort zone! But the result was a humorous, well delivered product with some great singing. Once again, it was not only a skill builder but a confidence booster as well. If we could pull off “Just Desserts,” we could do anything!

Coaching played a very important role as always, and we had overseas coaches two or three times in 2008 and once in 2009 before contest. At each rehearsal, we worked really hard to apply exactly what they had suggested. Early in 2009, we had developed a motto and our contest “Rev Up” team was in place. Our motto was “In 2008 we were great, but in 2009 we will SHINE !” Our Rev Up team came up with all sorts of creative ways to remind us of our goal and motto at each rehearsal. They used stars as the theme and music was always playing at chorus rehearsals with songs about *shine* or *shining* or *stars*. iTunes comes in very handy here!

As with previous contests, we visualised a great performance and the score that we wanted. We talked this through at rehearsal a couple of times in the last few weeks before contest. It takes a bit of time, but we found this is a very worthwhile activity.

Another thing we did which worked well in the past was to bring in a non-musical coach, such as a sports team coach. This year we used an elite sports coach, John Davie. John is the husband of one of our chorus members and he helped us to “DARE—Dreams, Attitude, Responsibility, Ethics—and the difference between talking about success and being successful. John also reminded us how to be good team players. He urged each of us to take responsibility for our own performance and trust others to do the same.

Our Family and Friends Concert the weekend before contest was a wonderful way to test the audience reaction to our competition songs and give our show package a final run through.

At our last rehearsal before contest, the Rev Up team handed out gold stars and we each wrote down our chorus goal on it, or what score we thought we could achieve in Hobart. An interesting thing happened. Many chorus members wrote down a higher number than we had decided on in May 2008. Writing this down was very powerful.

DARE—Dreams, Attitude, Responsibility, Ethics

In the last six to eight weeks before contest, I tried to concentrate on teaching the details and characteristics in the A- level, based upon the instant level descriptors, at rehearsal. The chorus was never going to reach A- if I kept teaching B and B+ things. This required some considerable changes in my mindset, listening skills, conducting techniques and my expectations of the chorus. But the most important thing I did was to *really* trust the chorus—trust that they would have the basics all done on their own and that they would apply the A-skills, and it worked!

The other night I looked up the vision statement and the wish list from way back in December 2007 and we have now become that very chorus I had described and together we have achieved everything on the wish list! Oh what a feeling!

We had many teams of people from within the chorus, along with every single member involved in our success in Hobart. It was truly a team effort. It’s just amazing what can be done when a group of people have a clear goal, know how to get there, believe they can do it and take personal responsibility for their part in achieving it.

Endeavour Harmony Chorus will shine upon the International Stage once again in 2010 at the 65th International Convention and Competition in Seattle, Wash.

real women.
real harmony.
real fun. 

REAL HARMONY

FEED THE METER?

by Mary Ellen Pinzino

How do you prioritize the following for rhythmic vitality?

- A. Note values
- B. Tempo
- C. Time Signature
- D. Meter

Meter is often neglected in the choral rehearsal, yet meter inspires momentum, secures tempo, and drives rhythmic vitality. We often lose sight and sound of meter in our efforts to secure note values, maintain tempos, and explain time signatures. Developing a sense of meter in our singers propels musicality. Making meter come alive can transform choral performance.

Meter is not defined by time signatures or conducting patterns, but by the strength and pattern of weight given to beats. A regular pattern of weight that defines strong beats (macro beats), divided into three beats of lesser weight (micro beats), establishes triple meter, whatever the time signature or conducting pattern. Performance in any meter without weight that defines the meter is unmusical, even if with beautiful tone and precise intonation.

“Counting” beats does not guarantee their relationships to meter, to weight, nor to musicality. Weight in meter is best manifest physically through body weight. Rehearsing a song in any meter with singers moving both macro and micro beats, with appropriate distribution of weight, sustains momentum, secures tempo, and propels musicality. Swaying or moving only macro beats will rush the tempo, as weighted micro beats in relation to more heavily weighted macro beats are essential for singers to sustain tempo. Moving only micro beats will not define the meter, as without stronger, weighted macro beats, all beats sound alike. Both macro and micro beats are necessary, with appropriate weight distribution, in order for singers to perform rhythm precisely and musically.

Techniques that weight syllables to clarify text cannot be generalized to the next piece of music, whereas weighting macro and micro beats can be applied to all choral music. A strong sense of meter propels performance, providing for text to fall into place, for shifting meters to be easily navigated, and for syncopation to play against the expected weight. Proper weighting of macro and micro beats is as important to achieving rhythmic vitality as vocal technique is to achieving a beautiful sound.

Choral warm-ups can be designed to develop a sense of meter through experience with a variety of meters in movement, including unusual meters in five and seven as well as duple and triple meters, each with its own pattern of weight in macro and micro beats. Select one meter to use as a warm-up in each rehearsal, rotating meters through successive rehearsals. Orally deliver a handful of rhythm patterns in the meter for singers to chant repeatedly on a neutral syllable while moving both macro and micro beats with appropriate weight distribution. Without interrupting the meter by talking, improvise more difficult patterns for singers to chant while moving in the meter, extending the meter experience for several minutes. Chanting and moving in a variety of meters, without melody or text, stimulates the perception of relationships between macro and micro beats, the easy placement of challenging patterns within the matrix of macro and micro beats, and the discrimination between meters – not in theoretical definitions, but in the sense of meter.

Weighted movement applied directly to any piece of choral music will spark a dramatic difference in performance. As a sense of meter develops in singers, overt movement for meter becomes covert movement – momentum. Choral performance takes on new vitality when propelled by meter.

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Mary Ellen Pinzino is the Founder/Director of the Come Children Sing Institute, a center for research and development in music learning since 1984. She is the composer of the Come Children Sing Institute SONG LIBRARY, a CD-ROM resource of more than 500 new songs for preschool, elementary school and children's chorus, and creator of the Come Children Sing Institute music curriculum for children from birth through thirteen. She is the developer of Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for infants, babies and toddlers, and leads the production of I, the television program for preschool music.

For more information, please visit her Web site:
<http://www.comechildrensing.com/>

PERFORMING TRUTHFULLY

by Fred Ritter

"I would rather hear one note sung sincerely with feeling than a thousand sung indifferently."

– Fred Ritter, MENC Member

When you select music that has a significant text and is arranged musically to deliver the message effectively, the challenge is to interpret the music, and communicate that message to your audience.

Understand the overall meaning and message of the text.

- Focus on the “central truth” of the music first, rather than pounding out notes and rhythms.
- Study the text.
- Speak the text together as a group.
- Have singers offer their own interpretations of the text.
- Have singers discuss how the text might apply to them or to others.

When the singers understand the message in the music, they will put forth a better effort, and singing will be more satisfying.

Watch the singers, and have them watch each other.

Are they convincing? Do you believe them when they sing a parody, a love song, a sentimental song, a comedic song?

Sing truthfully and convincingly.

If singers are singing with full understanding, skills such as excellent diction, tall vowels, proper phrasing, facial expression, proper breathing, and a careful interpretation of dynamics and tempo will naturally occur. Of course, it helps to practice these skills technically, but the application of such skills comes to life when the singer is connected to and invested in the music and text. A crescendo is more than just getting louder—it is a strengthening of a moment to enhance the message of the song.

How do you know when the singers have connected with the music?

You will hear it in the appreciative applause at a performance, and in discussions or talk at the next rehearsal or out in the community. If people are talking about the performance, you will have given the audience something to think about.

Truthful singing connected to the text of a piece of music will help singers develop the qualities of honesty, sincerity, compassion, trustworthiness, and a willingness to ask questions and be a searcher of the truth—not only in their music-making, but in their lives.

“Telling the truth...will often create a disturbance in your listener. Telling the truth can change the way people feel, act or perceive something. Communication with sincerity and honesty can make a difference in people’s lives. I have found this life lesson to be very useful in my choruses.

When I select a piece of music, I want to make sure the text has something to say that is relevant to me and to my singers.”

Fred Ritter teaches vocal music to grades 9–12 at Columbus High School in Columbus, Nebraska. The original article (“Tell the Truth! Create a Disturbance! Make a Difference!”) first appeared in the April 2000 issue of Nebraska Music Educator, and was reprinted by permission in the MENC book “Spotlight on Teaching Chorus”.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Have something to add? Write an article to share with your fellow directors and DCP participants. Send your suggestions and submissions to lori@sweetadelineintl.org

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and

DIRECTOR’S FORUM

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REAL FUN

MIMES AND CONDUCTORS: SILENT ARTISTS

Music educators who conduct ensembles can learn from mime technique how to convey more meaning through their gestures.

by Gillian MacKay, an associate professor of wind conducting and music education on the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. Article reprinted from May 2008 Music Educator's Journal.

In conducting workshops, attention is sometimes drawn to the relationship between conducting and the art of mime theatre. At some, professional mimes lecture on fundamentals and provide feedback on participants' conducting.

Although I always found mime concepts compelling, my attempts to transfer them to my own conducting were frustrated by a very superficial understanding of the art form. This frustration led me to study mime theatre myself, hoping to develop an understanding that would enhance my own conducting and teaching.

My brief studies have taught me that mime can assist us both physically and artistically as we strive to bring clarity, economy, and expression to our musical leadership. With the help of mime techniques, we can talk less and conduct more, allowing our students to make better music.

There are some obvious parallels between the two art forms. Mimes and conductors both refine silent techniques to maximize clarity and optimize their message. There is a great deal of similar vocabulary: Mimes talk about phrasing, unison, counterpoint, and canon. They also deal with issues of pacing, shape, style, articulation, and dynamics—many of the same things that define and animate music. What follows is a selection of mime concepts that have inspired the most reflection on my approach to conducting.

Begin in Stillness

Most mime plays begin with the lights coming up on a still figure—rarely does a mime enter or exit the stage.¹ This creates a stillness on stage that frames the mime's initial motion and gives it meaning. As conductors, we need to do the same thing. If we start without truly achieving stillness, meaning is taken away from the first gesture we make.

Because of our motion of entering the stage before the music begins, we must take a moment to establish a physical quietness in preparation for the music. Beginning from stillness also helps our players and singers become calm and focused before the music starts.

Gestural Meaning and Intention

Every motion a mime makes will have meaning ascribed to it by the audience.² When the lights come up on a motionless mime, the audience strains to observe the first gesture, which will seem very "loud" because it comes out of stillness. Mimes thus choose even their tiniest motions extremely carefully. Mime audiences learn to be attentive to every gestural detail, and they can become frustrated if they invest meaning in a gesture that turns out to be meaningless. Mime is a "less-is-more" art form. As with conducting, clarity comes from efficiency and economy of gesture. Our mime teachers admonished, "You're babbling!" if our gestures were too fast, too numerous, or too busy.



Every mime gesture must be driven by a character's intention.³ Excellent mimes have such technical control that they make no gestures or motions of which they are unaware. If we seek to apply this to conducting, we see immediately that there are some gestures that lose their meaning either through repetition (beat patterns) or through a lack of connection to specific musical intentions. If we chose our gestures as specifically and carefully as mimes do, how much more efficient and effective would our conducting be? A challenging way to assess our own effectiveness in this regard is to *stop* conducting and gesture only when something specific needs to be indicated.

This daunts conductors who tend to believe they are needed to keep the music going. If we are able to overcome this fear, we are free to choose distinctive gestures, driven by a particular musical message. Our gestures will be more meaningful to our musicians because they will be free of other physical “chatter.”

The Eyes and Face

Mime is an art that breaks an action into discrete components. This fundamental concept makes it unique among movement art forms. Each portion of a normally connected series of motions is considered separately: Mimes talk about using their art to show a series of snapshots, rather than a video. By this they mean that there must be moments of clarity and discovery that connect to create the flow of a play. In all cases, the eyes of the character are the starting point for the expression of a thought or idea. Even a simple series of actions must be clearly articulated. For example, rather than seeing an imaginary object, reaching for it, and picking it up, the mime will first (1) show that she has seen the object by responding to it physically, (2) show the *idea* to pick it up, which comes directly from the eyes, (3) reach for the object, (4) make contact with it, thereby defining its shape and texture, and finally (5) pick it up, thereby defining its mass. This separation of thought and action is crucial to understanding in mime, and takes real work to enunciate physically. Mastery of this concept is often the real key to making a mime play understandable.

Since the eyes show the birth of a character's thoughts and decisions, it is crucial that the audience is able to see the mime's eyes. Mimes work to keep their eyes wide open for maximum expression and communication with the audience. Every set of eyes has a natural shape and size, and those with small or narrow eyes must work particularly hard to make them visible to the audience.

If the audience cannot see the mime's face, the audience cannot effectively see the mime. If a mime's face drops to the floor and out of view, the audience immediately loses connection with the character on stage. Novice mimes often unconsciously work with their heads down or their eyes closed because they are preoccupied by their own technique. Novice conductors also tend to look down due to insecurity or lack of knowledge of the score. Conductors need to appreciate how much our face and eyes mean to the ensemble. The potential for clarity and richness of communication is immediately magnified when the conductor's face and eyes are visible to the group. Mimes work without eyeglasses and generally do not have facial hair, either of which would obscure their faces from their audi-



ence's view. The eyes and face are keys to most of our communicative power as conductors, and we need to do everything we can to make them visible to our musicians.

The Whole Body

Mimes deal with “whole-body” presentation; the entire body is their expressive canvas. Tremendous effort is put into creating specific shapes with legs, arms, and torsos. Our mime teachers frequently admonished us to “make an interesting shape” to encourage us to develop awareness of the entire body. In mime theatre, asymmetry is generally valued much more highly than symmetry, because it is more dramatic and potentially more expressive.

When a character undertakes an activity, her whole body must be involved. This is most crucial in situations where mimes are working with imaginary objects on the stage. If the mime is twisting something, her whole body will twist to extend the message of what is happening to the object. If throwing something, the mime needs to follow the imaginary object with her eyes to physically reflect the direction and manner in which the object is traveling. In this way, both the object and the action on it become more visible to the audience. Similarly, if a character is expressing an emotion such as joy, fear, anger, or sadness, her entire body needs to express the same emotion.

We do not often use our entire body expressively in conducting—our traditional canvas is from the waist up. However, two interesting issues arise from the whole-body concept when we consider it as conductors. First, we are challenged to consider what our entire body would look like if we did use it in its entirety to express the music. What choices would we make for our legs? Second, the idea of whole-body expression challenges us to consider our consistency. A conductor's face, eyes, shoulders, arms, chest, and torso all need to be working together to present a cohesive message. If our arms are liquid but our face is tight, we send a contradictory message that will confuse our musicians. We need to get our entire expressive canvas coordinated to look like the music.

The Breath

Mimes use their breath as the impetus for every gesture. Some are subtle about it, and the mime looks “right” without the audience being aware of the breathing. Others are more obvious (louder) in their use of breath, and use it expressively. There is no such thing as a gesture without a breath attached to it, and most gestures begin with an inhalation. Excellent mimes are very deliberate and specific about the quality of their breathing to increase the depth and meaning of specific gestures.

MIMES AND CONDUCTORS: SILENT ARTISTS (CONTINUED)

Although all gestures should originate with a breath, novice mimes tend to go through an entire play while unconsciously holding their breath. In this case, the gestures become visibly disconnected from the core of the mime's body, and lose their effectiveness. The audience, even one that is not used to watching mime, becomes very uncomfortable. Palpable energy and life pours out of a mime's body once the breath is integrated with the physical motion.

The transfer to conducting here is clear, especially for those of us who work with wind players and choirs. Our players and singers desperately need us, as conductors, to breathe with them—in the initial preparatory beat, but also for cues and other entries. Also, we can help create character and style in the music by the way we breathe. The breaths we take as conductors help us connect our gestures to the inner source of the music and will naturally set the players and singers more at ease.

Suspension and Inflation: The Torso

Like dancers, mimes work in suspension, training their bodies to stay tight, abdominal muscles flexed, shoulders down and back, with an imaginary string pulling them to the ceiling as gravity roots them to the earth. Mimes are extremely strong, and they need considerable core strength to create and sustain interesting shapes. At the same time, mimes need to be capable of real lightness; one of our teachers used the expression “we are sails,” meaning that there should be air filling the back and the chest. The inflation of the torso provides animation and energy to the shapes created with the body.

Although conductors do not work in tight suspension, we do need to consider the posture and presentation that we use. The idea of being lifted to the ceiling by an invisible string being pulled up to be visible and strong, works very well for conducting. This also helps open up the sternum, which makes us appear more open and available to the ensemble.

Amplify Your Inner Sound to Amplify Your Gesture

One of the first exercises we did in the mime classes I took was to assign audible sounds to a short series of gestures. This served two purposes: While causing us to think about the sound a gesture might make, we were forced to increase our awareness of exactly what motions we were making. As the exercises became more complex and lengthy, we were challenged to maintain a strong sense of the sound each gesture might make as it moved through space.

This idea offers a compelling contrast to the way we think about conducting, where we work from the point of view of *eliciting*, rather than *creating*, a specific sound with a gesture. Here is an opportunity to think about conducting gestures differently: is there a connection between how the gesture might sound by itself and the type of music it might draw from our ensemble? In all aspects of music making, the strength and specificity of the aural concept has a clear connection to results. If this idea is extended to the very gestures we make as conductors, how will this affect our technique, and how will it help with the gestural choices we make?



Center of Gravity

As they work to achieve excellent suspension, mimes manipulate their center of gravity to help their whole body reflect the weight of what they are doing. If a character is working with imaginary heavy objects, such as a rock, her center of gravity needs to be very low. Mimes will spend hours, still in suspension, “being rock,” mentally connecting themselves to the center of the earth, pulling weight and focus down toward the ground. If a character is working with an imaginary helium balloon or feather, her centre of gravity needs to be high, and up above the centre of her body. Everything she does while working with the light object needs to contribute to the illusion of lightness. Having established the two extremes, mimes then work to develop a palette of gestural variety between them.

Conductors are continually seeking to “look like the music.” To show heaviness, we need to connect ourselves with the earth and not only feel its pull on us, but drive

our energy through our legs down to its core while resisting the pull. To show lightness, we need to allow ourselves to lift off the earth—to feel ourselves filled with helium and let it cause us to float. We tend to rely on our arms alone to show these things—but in what other ways could we show weight? Experimenting with these concepts off the podium can help us develop a range of weights that our musicians will reflect back to us in sound.

Never Completely Extend

Sometimes a mime play will require extreme physical positions. The general rule is never to go to 100 percent extension. This helps prevent injury, keeps the mime from ending up in unsustainable positions, and also keeps the audience from becoming uncomfortable. It is important to keep potential in each gesture.

Mime is a grounded art form. Unlike the ballet dancer, who seeks to defy gravity, the mime uses gravity to keep herself grounded (in apparent contradiction to the earlier discussion of suspension, mimes often speak of the opposing forces of gravity [down] and suspension [up], both of which work on the body). The mime also keeps her hips level at most times, seeking to “table” her physical plane so that she is stable. Plays usually end in freezes and blackouts, and mimes seek to find a stable final position that satisfies the play’s dramatic needs. Finishing up on one’s toes or on one foot is seen as physically undesirable and dramatically injudicious.

The parallel here to conducting is nearly exact. There is nothing that feels worse than finding oneself out in full extension in any direction. We need to avoid, at all costs, ending up on our toes, off-balance, leaning into the group, or fully extended outward or upward. The music should end with the conductor in a stable position, looking like the music while maintaining balance. If we mistakenly finish in a fully extended position, the very next gesture we make will be enormous simply because the music is over (and the lights are still on!). Retreating to a neutral position between movements or as applause begins makes conductors look disorganized.

Light up Your Sternum

Like actors, mimes talk about “finding their light” onstage, putting themselves in the spot where the stage lights illuminate them best. There is a sensation of correctness, felt both as light and heat, which results from being “in the light.” Having found the spot onstage, mimes are encouraged to “light up” their sternum, opening up the chest to the light, and exposing it by lifting it toward the

audience. The raised sternum is also a feature of correct suspension, as discussed earlier. There is a philosophical ideal that runs parallel to this physical goal: Mimes talk about putting their hearts in front of their heads. In the physical sense, the chest should be high and vertically in front of the face. Philosophically, the vulnerability expressed by this physical position is sought by mimes to increase their expressive capability and is seen as a necessary risk to creating great art.

Conductor visibility and vulnerability are crucial to our musical expression and communication with our musicians. Keeping the sternum open and lit can be easy for conductors to forget, owing to the extent to which our arms are in front of our bodies. However, the idea can encourage us to keep our arms wide and our chest and face as the focus of the group’s attention. The idea of putting your heart in front of your head is appealing as you seek to create great music with the musicians in front of you.

Shoulders

Mimes work hard to keep their shoulders back and down, another aspect of achieving the suspension that is central to the art form. As soon as the shoulders start to rise, expressive potential drops radically, as well as the perceived strength of the character. As one of our instructors expressed it, the shoulders are the

“barometers of a character’s will.”

The lower they are, the stronger a character’s will is perceived to be; the higher they are, the weaker the character appears. On the podium, shoulders that are pulled down and back will help create strength while helping us open our sternums to the light and to the ensemble.

Character and Fidelity

In an economical art form, character must be established as soon as the work begins. If the audience has to wonder for too long about the nature of a character, they become disinterested or irritated. Mimes do many things to accomplish this, such as a specific facial expression, a walk, or a character gesture (a small physical gesture used only by

that one character). This is especially important in a play when a single mime becomes several different characters, since the audience will begin to seek the character gestures that quickly become familiar. The more detail a mime creates in a character, the more real the character will become to the audience. As conductors, we need to establish the character of the music immediately and remain consistent (but not static) while the music retains that character. If



MIMES AND CONDUCTORS: SILENT ARTISTS (CONTINUED)

we are specific and consistent about how we show the character of the music, our musicians will be able to orient themselves quickly as the music changes, and they will have the opportunity to be similarly specific in how they create their sounds.

Fidelity in space is crucial to illusion. Once the mime has established the character, the environment, or the object with which she is working, her ability to continue communicating clearly to the audience rests on the consistency of the illusion. If the mime is handling an imaginary spherical baseball-size object that appears later in the play in a different size, the audience will be confused and frustrated, having come to assign meaning to every detail. The mime's initial definition of the object is a type of contract with the audience. Conductors form a similar contract with the ensemble when we define where the ictus will occur, what dynamic is meant by a gesture of a specific size, and what is meant by a cue in a specific style. Our group depends on us to be consistent with these gestures to keep the meaning clear, and musicians become frustrated if our technique seems unreliable.

The Writer's Art Form

There is one significant difference between the art forms that we can consider to make our conducting better. Mime is a writer's art form. There is no historic canon of mime masterpieces that everyone studies—no Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms. The evolution of mime and the work of specific individuals have resulted in standard techniques that all mimes work to master (the wall, the ladder, walking in place) but public performance of an established play from another mime's repertoire, unless specifically in historical homage, is not generally done. Mastery of the standard technique and creation of new technique serve the art as the mime *creates* a play. The ideas for the play come first, and the gestures arise from the struggle to communicate them clearly. The mime chooses what to show, how to move, based on what *meaning* she wishes to relay to the audience. For conductors, the music already exists. We sometimes tend to project *ourselves* on the music as conductors, or project our students onto the music, focusing on technical aspects of what we will physically show: crescendos, decrescendos, beat patterns, fermatas, cues. What if we considered the music as the mime does the play, by putting meaning first? Based on our score study, we can determine what meaning we feel the music conveys, then embark on the path of determining how to show the meaning, rather than focusing on the beat patterns, the cues, or the changes in dynamic. Once we have made deci-



sions about musical meaning, conducting gestures should come more readily and naturally, and will be directly connected to specific character and moments in the music. This does not mean we should completely abandon repeated beat patterns and cues—but it does mean we have the opportunity to imbue each one with specific meaning.

Proprioception

To movement artists, *proprioception* is a well-known concept. Also known as "deep sensibility," this is our awareness of our own posture and position of our extremities in space.⁵ Try this exercise: Extend both arms straight out from your shoulders to the right and left, creating a T with your body. Now, while looking straight ahead, bend your arms and raise them above your head, touching the tips of your index fingers together at the top. Your ability to touch your fingertips successfully is based on your level of proprioception—your sense of the position of your fingers in space. Like other kinds of awareness, proprioception can be developed. Along with their other training, mimes, dancers, and conductors all do some work in front of the mirror, pairing the visual with physical sensation. Reinforcing the sensation away from the mirror is the crucial next step. Conductors need to be aware of how we are positioned in space so that we can control what the ensemble sees.

Experimentation

There are a multitude of things to try if you do not have the opportunity or desire to study mime yourself. It does take a little courage. Banish onlookers from the house, and indulge in some play in front of a mirror. Experiment with raising and lowering your centre of gravity looking light and looking heavy. Work to accomplish the same feeling away from the mirror. Experiment with incorporating this into your body as you conduct. Listen to the results in a rehearsal. Experiment with lifting your sternum and lowering your shoulders. What effect does this have on your

presence? Play with gestures of pure expression: Can you show joy, fear, sadness, longing? How much of your body can you use to express these emotions? Experiment with assigning specific sounds to unusual physical gestures you invent.

Videotape a rehearsal or concert, and ask yourself questions about what you see. How much of the time can your ensemble see your face? How specific is your facial expression, and how consistent is the message your body sends to your musicians? Turn off the sound on the tape, and imagine the music based on what you see. What does it sound like? Repeat these experiments over several days to get used to any initial self-consciousness or discomfort you might feel.

The world of mime has a great deal to offer conductors. Despite differences in the artistic materials with which we work, many of our goals are similar. At the points at which the two art forms intersect, mimes seek to develop many details of the gestural language that conductors also try to master. On issues where the two art forms diverge, the differences can serve as the impetus for reflecting about our art in ways we may not have examined before. Questions arising from these reflections may lead to a path of experimentation and discovery that enriches our own work and, ultimately, the experience of our musicians.

Notes

1. Mimes use the noun *play* to describe all their work, whether a short exercise or an extended professional piece.
2. The audience for mimes is seated in the theatre. For conductors, of course, our “audience” is the ensemble in front of us.
3. Character is a general term mimes used to describe the animate beings in their plays; depending on the type of play, characters have very little or a great deal of specificity.
4. For an excellent discussion of the expressive use of breath, consult Stefan Niedzialkowski’s book *Beyond the Word: The World of Mime*, Chapter 3: Breathing, pp. 17-22.
5. A. K. McIntyre, "Perspective and Summing Up," in *Proprioception, Posture and Emotion*, ed. D. Garlick, (Kensington, NWS: Adept Printing, 1982)

For Further Exploration

Beyond the Word: The World of Mime by Stefan Niedzialkowski (Royal Oak, MI: Momentum Books, 1993); www.momentumbooks.com.

"Perspective and Summing Up" by A. K. McIntyre, in *Proprioception, Posture and Emotion*, in ed. D. Garlick (Kensington, NSW, Australia: Adept Printing, 1982), 246-250.

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