

Contents

Preface	viii
Chapter One: Style	1
<i>An Introduction to Performance Practice</i>	
Chapter Two: Players	29
<i>Working with an Orchestra</i>	
Chapter Three: Stages.....	44
<i>Conducting Dramatic Music</i>	
Chapter Four: Psyched Out.....	66
<i>Rehearsal Strategies—Beyond the Fundamentals</i>	
Chapter Five: Locomotion.....	74
<i>Using Movement in the Choral Rehearsal</i>	
Chapter Six: Futures	92
<i>Commissioning New Music</i>	
About the Author	101

Visit www.conductingchoirs.com for additional content, free video demonstration clips, and exclusive bonus materials.

Preface

This volume of *Conducting Choirs* was written with the practicing conductor in mind. It addresses a number of pertinent topics with which choral conductors will find themselves grappling as they build their choirs and enhance their programs. It will serve as a guide to further study for those conductors who would like to increase their skills by conducting more advanced literature. It may also be useful at the university level for courses in advanced or graduate conducting.

Over the course of the past few decades, the job of the choral conductor has expanded remarkably. Today, a choral specialist may conduct large choral/orchestral masterpieces much more frequently than in the past, particularly those conducting at the collegiate level. High school directors often conduct the annual musical theatre production at their schools, a task that was previously often left to the band director. The number of community choirs has expanded around the country, joined by large and growing numbers of professional choirs, GALA choruses, and children's choruses. This has occurred simultaneously with a huge expansion of the choral repertoire, encompassing a global perspective. Few orchestras or opera companies are called upon to know, appreciate, and incorporate into their groups the disparate musical cultures of Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe into the Western traditions that are their domain. Yet choral directors have been integrating this musical world into their programs for many years now.

Knowing how to work with instrumentalists—whether a brass quartet, a musical theatre pit, or a full symphony orchestra—will be vital for the choral musician who seeks to perform more challenging literature with his choir. An understanding of musical style and performance practice is crucial to the choral director who wants to bring her choir to ever-more nuanced performances with choral masterpieces as well as contemporary works. Conducting dramatic music is something many choral directors do, whether in musical theatre or opera. Becoming comfortable with the musical conventions and conducting flexibility of that literature will expand the director's gestural and musical abilities in other ways, too. Understanding how large groups of people work together to reach ever-higher musical and artistic goals is vital to producing work of the highest quality.

All of these topics are presented here, as are chapters on using movement in rehearsal and on commissioning new music for choirs. There is no need to proceed through this volume as if it were a singular course of study. Rather, the reader is encouraged to explore those chapters that are relevant at a given moment in his development, tackling others as the need arises. Many of the chapters in this volume augment topics covered in *The Promising Conductor*, the first volume of this series. At the appropriate times in the text, the reader will be guided to the earlier volume and shown where the two textbooks complement each other.

There is no longer such a person as a choral conductor or an instrumental conductor. Rather, there are simply conductors, embracing all that the word implies. I am happy that much of my own music making happens in front of choirs. But I have gained much experience, satisfaction, and joy from conducting instrumentalists in large choral/orchestral works, as well as musicals, opera, and ballet. The richness that these broad repertoires have brought to my professional life has been a source of great delight. It is my hope that this volume may assist

others with learning the skills and plumbing the challenges explained here, and that doing so will enlarge their musical world as it has mine.

This series has been long in gestation, and many colleagues and friends have assisted me along the way by discussing these ideas, reading drafts, and providing me with suggestions. My gratitude goes to my colleague and friend Jane Wyss who has been most supportive and always offered me her honest, considered opinions. Thanks also to Magen Solomon, Josef Knott, Kelly Martin, William Weinert, Cheryl Anderson, Craig Johnson, John Grecia, and David DeCooman. Thanks to Kris Kropff, editor, for her attention to detail and efficient working style. Finally, I would thank Scott Foss of Roger Dean Publishing Co., a Lorenz Company, for his faith in this project and his advice and suggestions.

Chapter Three

Stages

Conducting Dramatic Music

Music written for the stage encompasses a unique set of challenges for the conductor. Dramatic music is more fluid than music in most other forms, with more flexibility of tempo than many conductors are used to allowing. There are other complicating factors, as well, including mundane things like reading a different score format and dealing with orchestra parts that are differently laid out than normal. In dramatic music, conductors also need to learn how composers create character in the music, discovering how to decipher the clues to drama and emotion that composers have used.

Conducting Musicals

The Score

Choral and orchestral conductors are used to reading from a score that notates every part that is being played or sung. For the choral conductor, this can be a four-staff score with a separate line for each voice part, or it might be a ten-line stave (for example, two four-voice choirs and a piano part). Orchestral scores will include a separate line for each instrument playing in that piece or that movement.

But the musical theatre score is usually different. Most commonly, the score for a musical contains all the voice parts being sung with a piano reduction of the orchestra parts. The piano part usually includes abbreviated notes indicating which instrument is playing a line (“W.W.” for woodwinds, “Tpt” for trumpet, etc.).¹ Here is one example from a popular show:

The image shows a musical score snippet for a piano reduction. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). Above the treble staff, there are four measures of music. Above the first measure, it says "W.W.". Above the second measure, it says "Glock". Above the third measure, it says "W.W. Glock". Above the fourth measure, it says "W.W. Glock". Below the treble staff, there are four measures of music. Below the first measure, it says "mf." and "Str.". Below the second measure, it says "p". Below the third measure, it says "leggiero". The bass staff contains mostly whole and half notes, with some rests.

Woodwinds play the top line, although the specific instrument is unclear. Strings play the left-hand music, again without specific designation of who plays which pitch. The only note

¹ Common abbreviations for orchestral instruments are included in the glossary that begins on page 42.

that is clearly designated is for the glockenspiel, which plays the quarter notes that punctuate the phrase.

The reasons that the musical score evolved in this format are easy to trace. First, composers for the genre normally begin by writing a piano score, from which the show is orchestrated. Second, conductors of musicals on Broadway commonly begin their careers by accompanying the singers in rehearsals (coaching) and/or by playing one of the keyboard parts in the orchestra. Many of them have not been specifically trained as conductors, and may lack the score-reading abilities (such as the ability to transpose parts at sight) that other conductors develop over many years of practice and exposure. Also, because these pianist/conductors spend so much time engaged in the rehearsal process, they come to know the music intimately without having to have the full score in front of them.

One advantage of this closed-score format is that it saves the conductor many page turns during the course of a show, allowing him to focus on the stage and maintain eye contact with the singers. For the conductor who does not specialize in musical theatre, the score format presents a few challenges. One must rely on score study coupled with a good memory, remembering that a given line marked “W.W.” in the score is played by the oboe rather than the flute.

Part Books

In general, the orchestral parts for a musical are similar to those for an orchestra: the percussion players get their own parts, the violins get theirs, and so forth. The woodwind parts (and sometimes the brass), however, are more complicated. It is common practice for professional players who occupy the Broadway orchestra pits to be proficient on several different wind instruments. The woodwind parts are therefore divided into two, three, or more “books” that may include parts for as many as three or four different instruments. *The Secret Garden*, to cite one example, divides the woodwind books like this:

Woodwind 1: Flute, Piccolo, Recorder, Pan Pipes, Penny Whistle

Woodwind 2: Oboe, Oboe d’Amore, English horn, Heckelphone

Woodwind 3: Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, Flute, Recorder, Piccolo

Woodwind 4: Bassoon, Bass Clarinet, B-flat Clarinet

While Broadway players may be able to slip with ease from single-reed to double-reed instruments, or to go from playing flute to saxophone, most high school, community, and many college players are simply not skilled enough or experienced enough to do this. Therefore, one of your principal early tasks as the director of a musical is to split up the book between multiple players, ensuring that all the parts can be covered by someone at all times. This can be accomplished in two ways.

It may be possible to assign more than one player to a book, where two players can between them play the required instruments of that book. A second possible solution is to have several players share the books, where the flute player plays the flute lines in all the part books, and the clarinet, sax, and bassoon players likewise. Both of these solutions are awkward to an extent. Problems arise, for example when between three part books there is a passage for three clarinet lines and there is one clarinetist in the pit orchestra. However, by carefully going through the parts and extracting them, and by using at times both of the methods cited here, one should be able to cover all the parts needed in the pit using the fewest number of players.

Common Markings

Most musical scores are marked with commonly used Italian or English words, similar to those found in choral and orchestral scores. However, there are several unusual words that appear frequently and bear a quick mention:

- *Segue*: Literally "to follow," in the musical score it indicates that the next music should begin immediately (or, given the dramatic situation, following a moment of applause).
- *Attacca*: Translated literally as "attack," if used correctly, the music should continue without waiting for applause.
- *V.S.* or *volti subito*: Meaning "turn quickly," in the orchestral parts it means that there is something to be played immediately at the top of the next page. While part books aim to avoid these situations, there is sometimes no way to do so. Keep in mind that in the orchestra pit, there may be no stand partners to turn for each other as there are in the violin section of an orchestra. Keep an eye out for these situations when preparing the part books and make a copy of the coming page so that the player may continue uninterrupted.

Conducting Challenges

Conducting musicals or operas requires the conductor to give up a measure of control over the musical product. The conductor's task is different than conducting a choral, band, or orchestra piece. In musicals, the singer often leads the music. The conductor's responsibility is to lead the orchestra and to keep it and the singer together. With experience, one learns to discern those times that the conductor needs to be in charge and those times when the singer can lead.

Conducting dramatic music requires gesture that is flexible and fluid, at times following singers and at times leading them.

There are also physical complications when conducting dramatic music. In a choral or orchestral concert, the conductor is placed so that everyone can clearly see him or her and watch attentively. With musicals, there are physical barriers in place that often prevent this. Singers and cast members may be scattered across a 40-foot stage, occupying not only the back of that space but perhaps be placed on a set piece ten, fifteen, or more feet in the air. Furthermore, the cast may be in motion, dancing or moving about the stage. Rarely is an actor stationary for very long, front and center, with a good sight line.

The orchestra is not always seated conveniently, either. In an orchestra pit, many of the players will be lower than the conductor and seated under the stage, while others may be seated so as to be visible to the audience, but also below the conductor's elevated stand. Orchestra pits are usually not very deep, but often are quite wide—the width of the stage itself—placing players who need to hear one another at some distance from each other.

The conductor must then be seen on two planes: slightly above the stage (for the cast) and slightly below the stage (for the orchestra). One solution to counter this situation may be to mirror the conducting pattern, using the right hand for the orchestra on its plane, and letting the left hand be higher, providing a clear beat and cues for the cast on stage.

A schematic illustration showing a typical pit seating arrangement is on the top of the next page, with the conductor at the bottom center of the diagram. Keep in mind that instrumentation for musicals varies widely for individual shows, and the way players are seated will change depending on the instruments called for in a score. When seating players, keep simi-