

# ILYA MUSIN'S LANGUAGE OF CONDUCTING GESTURES

by

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(Under the Direction of Mark Cedel)

## ABSTRACT

Ilya Aleksandrovich Musin (1903-1999), one of the most prominent teachers of conducting, developed his own conducting system which he explained in his four books on the art of conducting: *Technique of Conducting* (1967), *Education of a Conductor* (1987), *Lessons of Life* (1995), and *Language of Conducting Gestures* (2006). Musin's pedagogical career of more than sixty years produced an extensive list of conductors that are now considered to be some of the most influential figures in this field. Such figures include Yuri Temirkanov, Vassily Sinaisky, Valery Gergiev, Sian Edwards, and Semyon Bychkov, all students at the Leningrad Conservatory. This study provides a summary of Musin's work in order to give readers insight into how his writings have influenced the study of conducting. The focus will be on the ideas and concepts that make Musin's method unique, interesting, and successful. The chapters that I have selected demonstrate Musin's methods in depth. They also explore various aspects of his conducting philosophy, providing a more thorough understanding of Musin's insightful study of the art of conducting and innovative conducting concepts.

INDEX WORDS: Ilya Musin, Conducting, Leningrad School of Conducting

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## DEDICATION

For my parents,  
Ankica and Bogdan Ogrizovic,  
for their endless love and support.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ilya Aleksandrovich Musin (1903-1999), one of the most prominent teachers of conducting, developed his own conducting system which he explained in his four books on the art of conducting: *Technique of Conducting* (1967), *Education of a Conductor* (1987), *Lessons of Life* (1995), and *Language of Conducting Gestures* (2006). Musin's pedagogical career of more than sixty years produced an extensive list of conductors that are now considered to be some of the most influential figures in this field. Such figures include Yuri Temirkanov, Vassily Sinaisky, Valery Gergiev, Sian Edwards, and Semyon Bychkov, all students at the Leningrad Conservatory. These individuals, along with Musin, came to represent a Leningrad school of conducting.

Musin's conducting theory is frequently associated with the legendary Stanislavski method created by Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski developed his own unique system of training in which actors are encouraged to act while "recalling their own experiences,"<sup>1</sup> thus making their "motivations for acting identical to those of the character in the script."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Musin encouraged his students to explore their real life experiences, find adequate motion gestures to communicate these experiences, and then develop their own distinct conducting language.

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor Jones and Bradley W. Bishop. "Konstantin Stanislavski." *The Jason Bennett Actor's Workshop*, 2007; available from <http://www.jbactors.com/actingreading/actingteachersbiographies/konstantinstanislavski.html>; Internet; accessed 24 December 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Musin's writings include detailed and thorough explanations of conducting gestures, as well as diagrams, repertoire excerpts, and numerous exercises. Since Musin's books are written in his native tongue and have not been translated into any other language, his system is largely unknown to conductors not fluent in Russian. To date, little research has been done in regard to Musin's teaching methods with the exception of a few interviews done in recent years with some of his most famous students. His pupils teach and hold master classes throughout the world in accordance with their mentor's methods. These master classes are very popular and prove that there is great interest in acquiring more knowledge about Musin's conducting techniques.

Ilya Musin's *Lessons of Life* contains strictly biographical information and does not examine any aspects of conducting. Because of his obscurity among English-speaking audiences, I will use this biographical text as a tool to introduce Musin to those who are unfamiliar with his life. Musin relied heavily on the power of life experience in his methods, and it is important to reflect on his own life stories. By considering the events in his life, we may gain better insight into his inspiration.

Though the aforementioned publication does not provide information on his methods and philosophies, Musin's other three books discuss them in great detail. *Technique of Conducting*, *Education of a Conductor*, and *Language of Conducting Gestures* examine various stages in the development of a student into a performer. My survey will incorporate a summary of selected chapters of Musin's work to give readers insight into how his writings have influenced the study of conducting. Special attention will be given to the ideas and concepts that I believe make Musin's method unique, interesting, and successful. Explanations of terms and concepts will be given when the need arises. The chapters that I have selected focus on the various aspects of

Musin's conducting philosophies, providing a more thorough understanding of his insightful study of the art of conducting and innovative conducting concepts.

## CHAPTER 1

### BIOGRAPHY

Ilya Abramovich Musin was born in Kostroma in Central Russia near the Volga River on December 24, 1903.<sup>3</sup> When he was only six years old, both his younger brother and his mother died of diphtheria. Ilya and his sister, who was four years younger than he, were left with their father. Having a deep passion for music, Musin's father encouraged the study of music among his children.

Musin's first musical encounter came when he was very young in the form of violin lessons that he was given while at his family's vacation home. He considered this experience to be an unfortunate one; "I never heard playing on violin and did not have an idea of why I needed to lead the bow over strings."<sup>4</sup> The first instrument that Musin learned to play on his own was the balalaika. After some time, Musin began to take piano lessons at the local school in Kostroma.<sup>5</sup>

Those were turbulent times in the history of Russia. Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 installed Lenin as the leader of Russia and was followed by the Civil War between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks that lasted until 1921 and took millions of lives. In 1919, Musin's father decided to send both Ilya and his sister to Petrograd (Leningrad from 1924- 1991) to study music.<sup>6</sup> Musin

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<sup>3</sup> Ilya Musin, *Lessons of Life* (St Petersburg: Dean Publishing House, 1995), 3. The information in this chapter are from this book. The quote will be changed only when the page number is changed.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 11.

was only 16. He was admitted to the Conservatory, where at the time Alexander Glazunov was serving as the director.<sup>7</sup>

### **Conservatory**

After entering the Conservatory, Musin chose Alexander Nikolaevich Dubadov to be his piano teacher. At the time, Dubadov was an older man with a reputation of a once great pianist who insisted upon technical precision while performing a musical piece.<sup>8</sup> “In case of a mistake, he [Dubadov] would run up to the instrument, remove the student’s hands from the keyboard, and ordered playing from the beginning,” Musin recalled. He noted that Dubadov was an important influence on his playing, saying that his technique soon became cleaner and more precise. However, Musin regretted that he did not learn much about the structure of a musical phrase or performance principles from Dubadov. At the end of that school year Dubadov left the Conservatory and moved to a different city.

At the Conservatory Musin studied theory, harmony, music forms, history, aesthetics, etc. In addition he had piano lessons and was expected to practice no less than four to five hours a day. One of the first acquaintances Musin made was the young Dmitri (Mitia) Shostakovich, who was studying piano with Leonid Vladimirovich Nikolaev, composition with Maximilian Steinberg, and was writing music in the style of Glazunov, according to Musin.<sup>9</sup>

One day, while wondering on the streets of Petrograd, Musin bought his first two musical scores; a piano reduction of Wagner’s *Die Walküre* and a chamber score of Beethoven’s Symphony No.9. Musin soon began to visit the Mariinsky Theatre and became fascinated with

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 17.

the beauty and grandeur of the theatre. “For me, theatres had special meaning. It wasn’t entertainment- it was vital necessity,” he wrote.<sup>10</sup>

One of the first operas that Musin saw was Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Maid of Pskov* featuring Feodor Chaliapin, the most famous opera singer in Russia. Later, he had more opportunities to hear Chaliapin in operas such as *Boris Godunov*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Mozart and Salieri*.<sup>11</sup> During the winter of the first year at the Conservatory, Musin attended over eighty performances of opera. In addition to the Mariinsky Theater, Musin went to others, including the Mikhailovsky Little Operatic Theater, People’s House, and to the performances of Bolshoy Drama Theatre in the grand hall of the Conservatory.

The Petrograd Philharmonia was formed in 1921 and proved to be profoundly influential on the professional development of Musin. Musin considered this orchestra to be very significant in his musical education. He was able to hear and learn more about orchestral literature. “For me, perfectly unfamiliar with symphonic music, the Philharmonia was, perhaps, the most important school,” he said.<sup>12</sup> The concerts were held twice a week on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and were usually programmed with pieces from the same composer.

During this time, Emil Cooper conducted both the orchestra of Mariinsky Theatre and Petrograd Philharmonia and held conducting classes at the Conservatory. In the first performance season, Musin heard approximately fifty performances. Of these, only two were conducted by someone other than Cooper. Musin thought that rehearsals were equally important, and he

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 23.



devotedly attended the rehearsals to get to know not only the piece, but also the process of preparation for the performance.<sup>13</sup>

Musin held a very high opinion of Emil Cooper. Aside from his authoritarian reputation, Cooper was renowned for his interpretations of Romantic repertoire and Russian classics. According to Musin, Cooper “could do with the orchestra anything he wanted.”<sup>14</sup> He conducted an amazingly large repertoire and was appreciated greatly by the orchestra musicians. Cooper also held conducting lessons for the composers from the Conservatory. After a year of conducting the Philharmonia, he left for France where he was considered second only to Toscanini as an opera conductor.

After Cooper left, Oskar Fried, a German conductor, was appointed to the Philharmonia. At times, guest conductors led the orchestra giving Musin a chance to watch “how ‘masters’ worked with the orchestra.” Musin believed that his rehearsal attendances made it possible for him to become a conductor himself. Rehearsals not only gave him the opportunity to hear new pieces, but also served as a major training in musicianship and rehearsal technique. Musin noted that while he did have his favorite composers, he understood that the conductor is an educator and a performer who must love every piece equally. “I am not simply a performer, selecting works of my taste. I am a pedagogue who must develop the broadest range of interest in his pupils,” he said.<sup>15</sup>

After Dubadov left at the end of Musin’s first year at the Conservatory, Musin chose to study with Boris Zaharov, a young pianist who was often absent because of his performance

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 44.

schedule. At the end of Musin's second year of studying, Zaharov also left.<sup>16</sup> That same year, in the spring of 1921, Samariy Savinsky, a former student of Nikolaev, was awarded the vacant piano position at the Conservatory. Musin auditioned for Savinsky and, much to Musin's surprise, was accepted into his studio. The rest of Savinsky's students were "stars," according to Musin. "They all were pianists at which I looked with admiration- that is what kind of virtuosos they were."<sup>17</sup>

Musin's first serious piano studies came from the lessons he had with Savinsky. Musin was in the company of the most talented pianists at the Conservatory. Surrounded by such an amazing amount of talent, Musin was inspired to intensify his practicing and take his individual performing skills to the higher level. To make up for his lack of technical ability, Musin practiced for hours, dressed in a winter coat in the cold, unheated rooms.<sup>18</sup> "Because of practicing in the cold room, I hurt my hand (which was lucky for me, because it sent me on the conductor's road)," he wrote.<sup>19</sup>

Medical treatments did not provide any relief for his injury and forced Musin to take a break from studying with Savinsky. This inability to heal completely precluded Musin from pursuing further studies in piano. Therefore, he decided to strengthen his theoretical studies with the hope of becoming a conductor.<sup>20</sup> In addition to going to the Philharmonia rehearsals and concerts, Musin was passionate about playing piano transcriptions of different orchestral pieces and operas with his friends. Quite often, he accompanied his singer friends in arias. The

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 28.

enormous amount of sight-reading was very useful in his later career and accompanying the singers was beneficial in preparation for his opera conducting.<sup>21</sup>

Musin was not satisfied with the amount of knowledge that he acquired at the Conservatory overall, but he was thankful for the outside opportunities that were available to him. All of his extra activities, such as opera and concert attendance, accompaniments, and sight-reading of important symphonic and operatic pieces, provided invaluable contributions for his transition into conducting.

### **Conducting**

In 1923, Musin was invited by his colleague to play piano in the amateur orchestra of the Electro-Technical Institute. Musin was unaware that this would turn out to be his first conducting experience. By the third rehearsal, the conductor fell ill and Musin was asked to conduct in his place. For the next rehearsal, Musin brought new, more demanding pieces to the orchestra. Soon, a couple of wind instruments were added, and the first performance was scheduled.<sup>22</sup>

The performance was a great success. Subsequently, Musin was invited to conduct Musical Nights, an orchestra of music lovers who met once a week to sight-read a variety of pieces from the classical music repertoire. Attendance was voluntary, and the orchestra was made up of amateur players, as well as retired professional musicians, music teachers, and others. No matter how many musicians attended, the rehearsal would start, and the music would always be played from the beginning to the end. “Every evening I came and conducted anything that they put on my stand,” Musin noted.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 66.

In the same year, the Operatic Studio of the Conservatory was formed.<sup>24</sup> The mission of the Studio was to aid students in gaining experience in operatic conducting as well as playing. It produced six performances a week all of which were conducted and performed by students. Some months, up to twelve different operas were performed. Operas such as *Eugene Onegin*, *Pique Lady*, *Faust*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Carmen*, etc., were part of the repertoire of the Operatic Studio.<sup>25</sup>

### **Studying with Nikolai Malko**

In 1924, famous Ukrainian conductor Nikolai Malko joined the Conservatory faculty. Malko was known to students from his Philharmonia performances. Musicians appreciated his rehearsal style, clarity, and precision of his conducting.<sup>26</sup> The entrance exam into Malko's conducting class consisted of two parts: conducting and sight-reading at the piano. Malko alone administered the exam.<sup>27</sup> At first, Musin failed the exam; however, Malko agreed to observe Musin's conducting in a classroom situation and later accepted him into the studio.<sup>28</sup>

In the first lesson, Malko formed a circle of students and showed them basic conducting patterns. Afterwards, the students conducted a prepared piece that they personally selected. Either conductors played piano or, on occasion, pianists came to sight-read. Malko encouraged students to make comments about each other's conducting preceding his own evaluation of the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 71.

conductor. It took Musin a couple of weeks to find the courage to conduct in front of Malko again. When he finally did, Malko was very pleased with Musin's conducting.<sup>29</sup>

At the end of that year, Malko invited Musin to conduct the first conducting studio concert. The audience loved Musin and proclaimed him to be the "most talented" of all the conductors. Musin conducted this concert from memory. Following this success, he decided he would conduct from memory only.<sup>30</sup>

In 1928, Malko emigrated to the West and was not to visit again until 1959. He then conducted a couple of concerts and met with his former students. Malko's departure stirred emotional responses in his students as they knew that this would be the last time they would be together.<sup>31</sup>

### **Central Musical Technicum**

Musin graduated from the Conservatory at the end of 1930.<sup>32</sup> In the year before graduation, Malko suggested that Musin apply for the Professor of Orchestral Studies and Conducting position offered at Central Music Technicum in Leningrad. The courses were intended for choir conductors and conductors of orchestras of folk instruments. Some of the teachers were the best professors from the Conservatory, and Musin accepted Malko's idea with great enthusiasm. "At that time, I did not know that destiny directed me to the road that became my calling, the part of my whole life," he wrote.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 106.

Because of the number of students involved, Musin decided to alter Malko's concept. He had all the students stand in a checker board position so that he could see each of them. He would explain the basic concept and then walk between them to check and correct mistakes. He decided to select sections of Beethoven sonatas instead of big pieces. This allowed every student to have enough time on the podium.<sup>34</sup>

“And here it was revealed that I essentially do not know the principles of conducting technique. Nobody taught us that. We discovered everything by ourselves,” Musin lamented. He had to verbalize his teaching and think over and over about his conducting as well as how others conducted. He had the talent of mimicking gestures of fellow conductors- this talent was Malko's favorite entertainment. “It helped me very much in times of employment that I could show everybody how they conduct, and after that, demonstrate how it is supposed to be done.” Soon Musin's courses attracted composers and pianists of the Institute. One of them, Anya Kogan, was to become Musin's wife in 1930.<sup>35</sup>

In 1932, Musin was invited to teach at the Leningrad Conservatory. In the first year, he taught with Aleksandr Vassilievich Gauk, Malko's replacement. In 1933, Gauk left for Moscow and Musin took over his studio. Most of the students from this generation attained conducting positions in orchestras after graduating, including Odissey Dimitriadi and Constantin Simeonov.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 139.

## **Philharmonia**

Fritz Stiedri, an Austrian conductor, was the principal conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonia from 1934 until 1937. In 1934, Musin became Fritz Stiedri's assistant with the Philharmonia. Musin had conducted the Philharmonia before this, leading to his hiring by Stiedri. After Stiedri was deported from the country in 1937, Musin continued to conduct the orchestra.<sup>37</sup> There were times when Musin had to conduct pieces that were new for both him and the orchestra, often with only one or no rehearsals. According to Musin, the Leningrad Philharmonia at that time was a remarkable orchestra with exceptional sight-reading abilities.

In 1937, Musin accepted a well paid job at the Belorussian Philharmonia and Conservatory of Music in Minsk.<sup>38</sup> He had made previous arrangements to maintain his position at the Leningrad Conservatory. Musin's wife and two- year- old son joined him later. They stayed in Minsk for four years.

The Belorussian Philharmonia was in modest shape since they had had no continuous conductor in the years prior to Musin's arrival. The musicians were responsive to the new conductor and his two assistants, Musin's former Leningrad students Simeonov and Dembo.<sup>39</sup> While under the baton of Musin, the orchestra performed for Stalin in Moscow. The program, for which they carefully prepared for months in advance, was made of Belorussian compositions that were composed specifically for this event. Musin recalled an unpleasant situation in which he was asked by a military officer to conduct a piece that was not rehearsed prior to the performance. At first he had disagreed, but was persuaded to add this piece to the program. Musin was aware of the consequences that a negative answer to the officer would have. He

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 159.

wrote, “Would I be writing my memoirs now?”<sup>40</sup> After this concert, Musin was awarded a medal and title of the Honorary Artist of Belorussia, which later saved his life during the war.<sup>41</sup>

## War

When World War Two began, Musin was forced to flee outside Minsk soon after the German attack. Musin, his wife, son, and their nanny traveled by foot for longer than a month in order to escape the attacks. Eventually they reached Voronezh, where Musin’s sister lived with her husband.<sup>42</sup> Musin informed the Leningrad Conservatory of his whereabouts. He was offered a job at the Tashkent Conservatory.<sup>43</sup>

Musin’s work at the Conservatory in Tashkent was limited to teaching a small conducting class and conducting the orchestra. Constantly striving to perfect his sense of mastery, Musin was driven to do more than simple teaching. Realizing the amount of time he had available, he proceeded to collect emerging ideas regarding the writing of a conducting textbook. Unknown to Musin at the time was that this project would take him several years to complete. In 1943, Musin was awarded the medal of Honorary Citizenship of Uzbekistan.<sup>44</sup>

At the war’s end, Musin transferred back to Leningrad to continue his work at the Leningrad Conservatory and the Philharmonia. The city had been damaged heavily, but it was slowly being revitalized.<sup>45</sup> In the following years, Musin’s work with the Philharmonia continued and he also received many guest conducting opportunities. With the Philharmonia, he was invited to conduct concerts that neither the chief conductor Mravinski nor the second conductor

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 205.



Zanderling wanted to conduct.<sup>46</sup> At the conclusion of one such concert, Mravinski congratulated Musin on his ability to conduct a cantata by the Russian composer Manevich with only one rehearsal. He also expressed his admiration for Musin's ability not only to learn a score so quickly, but also to embrace the form as a whole.<sup>47</sup>

Unhappy with the way he was treated, Musin lamented that he was invited rarely to conduct more substantial repertoire. Many times, he was forced to take on concerts that no other conductor wanted. As a further disappointment, the manager of the Philharmonia enforced rules that made it an unpleasant place for work for conductors and musicians. Such rules also caused alarm regarding the employees' job security, including Musin's. Unfortunately, Musin's career at the Philharmonia came to an end in 1959. That same year Musin finished writing his *Technique of Conducting*.

The *Technique of Conducting* was published finally in 1967. The book was to become a rarity even in Musin's lifetime. "I perfectly understood that that book could not give the full presentation of the conducting experience," he said.<sup>48</sup> In the years to follow Musin wrote a great deal about the conducting experience and the mechanism of its process. Whenever a problem appeared in his conducting classes, Musin would come home and diligently write about it. He accumulated literary thousands of pages for his second book, *Education of a Conductor*, which was published in 1987.

In the following years, Musin made a number of guest conducting appearances throughout USSR. However, his Conservatory obligations and devotion to his students significantly decreased these guest appearances. As he was getting older his pedagogical work

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 221.

became the most important aspect of his professional life.<sup>49</sup> During his pedagogical career of sixty years Musin taught around one hundred and thirty conductors, ninety of whom became symphony conductors. Among his most famous students were Valery Gergiev, Yuri Temirkanov, Rudolf Barshai, Yakov Kreizberg, Vassilij Sinaisky, Martyn Brabbins, Mariss Jansons, Sian Edwards and Semyon Bychkov.

Musin died in 1999 at the age of ninety- five.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 214.

## CHAPTER 2

### LEVELS OF CONDUCTING TECHNIQUE

Musin was a conducting pedagogue who devoted a great part of his life to his art. He was so devoted that his performance career was to suffer because of his commitment to his students. Aspects of that commitment are displayed in his writings, especially in his four books that portray various stages in his teaching experience. Through these texts, it is possible to follow the evolution of his pedagogical system over the ensuing years.

The focus of this chapter will be on Musin's last book, *Language of Conducting Gesture*, published in 2006, seven years after his death. This text presents one of his most advanced ideas, the seven levels of conducting technique. This technique is the work of an experienced pedagogue who, over the years of educating young conductors, developed an almost philosophical theory of conducting technique. Throughout the text, Musin emphasized the importance of knowing and understanding different "levels" of conducting. According to Musin one is not born as a conductor, as often perceived by musicians. Instead, he believed that anyone who possesses some innate conducting talent and thorough knowledge of the levels of conducting could become a fine conductor.

Musin warned his readers that the levels of conducting are flexible and do not have to be followed in a particular order. He did point out, however, that it is necessary to organize one's conducting technique systematically. This systematization, he explained, provides better understanding of the special conducting qualities needed for each of the levels, "clarifies the

working mechanism of every level,”<sup>50</sup> and helps to further develop the skills used for their execution.

In the following pages I will discuss Musin’s seven levels of training in conducting. The labeling and listing of sub- issues for each level are translated from the subheadings and lists of concepts found in Russian text on the pages indicated.

### **Level One: Time Beating**

Functions of the first level of conducting are as follows:

- Marking the beginning point of every beat in the measure
- Establishing the meter as the relation between strong and weak beats
- Establishing the tempo of the performance
- Establishing the dynamics of the sound
- Establishing the character of the sound (sharp, connective)
- Marking entrances, sounds, rests, fermatas, etc.<sup>51</sup>

The first level of conducting in Musin’s philosophy is known as “time beating.” Musin was aware that this expression had a negative connotation among conductors and musicians. “Time beating” is often perceived as a skill that does not require a high level of manual technique, therefore it is generally not considered to be an artistic activity. However, Musin believed that “time beating” is the essence of conducting and differentiated it from one’s “lack of expressive gestures” for which the expression “time beating” is used most often.

Musin considered “time beating” the most essential skill for the proper functioning of the other conducting levels. He realized that elements of this level might not appear to be important in advanced artistic conducting. However, “time beating” is in the essence of every conducting

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<sup>50</sup>Ilya Musin, *Language of Conducting Gestures* (Moscow: Muzika, 2006), 27. The information in this chapter are from this book. The quote will be changed when the page number is changed.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 31.

motion. When absent, it is impossible to build manual technique and advance to the higher levels of conducting. Musin compared “time beating” to the “foundation of a house that is often invisible to the eye, yet its quality is of most importance for the house.”

Musin pointed out that “time beating cannot be observed as an activity directly related to a musical experience.” “Time beating” skills, according to Musin, do not require any special talent from a student. In Musin’s words, “Anyone, with basic feeling of rhythm and ability for transferring motions, can easily learn to ‘beat the time.’” The relative ease of acquiring foundational conducting skills forms the opinion among some students that conducting is quick and simple to learn, especially when compared to the complexity of instrumental skills. As Musin phrased it, “We usually don’t appreciate things we get with no excessive personal effort.” In other words, some students approach the basics of conducting with limited seriousness, dedication, and engagement. That mindset eventually leads to the lack of proper foundational skills and, furthermore, to underdeveloped advanced elements of conducting.

“The main function of time beating is showing the beginning of each beat of the measure as well as showing the tempo of that measure,” Musin added. He further discussed how the conductor, by marking the beats of the measure in succession and in a certain speed, influences our perception of the tempo. In addition, each motion to the point of the beat is done with a certain intensity and in a certain manner. With these simple motions, Musin concluded, the conductor is already transferring numerous aspects of the sound to the performers.<sup>52</sup> Musin also noted that the rules by which these motions function are explained in more detail in his first book *Technique of Conducting*.

Impossible to separate from any of the subsequent levels, Musin believed that the first

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 32.

level of conducting is an integral part of the conducting technique. When conductors first began to indicate beats at different points in the air, the possibility of developing a range of expressive motions was conceived. “These motions, necessary for transferring beats from one point to another, became essential for further development of all conducting actions,” Musin wrote. The variety of expressive gestures, created simply from the necessity of connecting the ictuses of the measure, enriched and changed the nature of conducting. The connecting motions are flexible, with numerous executions possible, and done in various speeds, intensity, and character.<sup>53</sup>

### **Level Two: Management of the Rhythmic and Sound Aspects of the Beat**

By simply connecting the points of the beats within the measure to a variety of motions, the conductor is already progressing into the second level of conducting. “In performance, it is very important to convey the sounding quality within the beats, its rhythmical context, and intensity of its sound. All of that is possible to express not with ictuses, not with the distanced beats, but with the motions that connect them,” Musin says.

According to Musin, Level Two includes:

- Means of managing sound motions within passing beats
- Means of representing rhythmical structure of the passing beat
- Means expressing sound intensity

“It is not enough to show only the speed of the passing beats; equally important is to show the rhythm of motion within the beat,” Musin wrote.<sup>54</sup> By controlling the tempo of the motion within beats the conductor enforces ensemble playing. The conductor clarifies where the beats are, as well as what should happen in between the beats. In addition, controlling the motion

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 34.

of the sound within the beats is essential for developing expressive means of the levels still to come. “Because of that, gestures of the second level might be considered expressive,” Musin said.

The conductor is not capable of creating meaningful expressive gestures without a highly developed Level Two technique. “Conducting an expressive performance, while not knowing how to control the motion of sound within the beat, is not possible,” Musin wrote. Expressive gestures of the higher levels, such as articulation, phrasing, legato, meaningful connections of beats, would be impossible without the ability to show exact rhythmic subdivision of the beat (duplet or triplet, for example) and the ability for changing the speed of the rhythmical content within the beat when expression calls for it. “Technical means of Level Two not only control the ictus points but all motions of sound. They not only control meter but the rhythm, not only transmit smoothness of sound, but also its intensity,” Musin added.

The most important aspect of Level Two is the need for developing the “feeling of the sound in hand.” Musin defined this as the unique feeling of materiality of the sound that the conductor gains once the ability to control every part of the measure is developed. The conductor experiences physically the music, and their every muscle and each bone equally takes part in creating it. The adequate expressive gestures are formed and sound materializes in the conductor’s hands. “Means of the second level in their expressive character give the conductor that specific and important feeling (sound in hand), and alongside it, the ability to manage motions of sounds within the beats,” Musin stated.

The skills of the Level Two are more difficult to acquire and require suitable practice by using the method of comparison. This method is explored in Musin’s book *The Education of a Conductor* and will be discussed further in Chapter Five of this document. Proper homework,

knowledge of performance styles, and the ability of the conductor to recognize the important role of these motions are essential for developing the skills of Level Two.<sup>55</sup>

### **Level Three: Delivery of the Character of the Musical Phrase**

The following are the elements of Level Three:

- Articulation and phrasing
- Agogic as the means of development of the musical phrase
- Imitating various bow strokes with gestures
- Dynamics as the means of development of the musical phrase

“It is possible to say that to some extent the expressive gestures of Level Three are ‘diction’ and ‘declamation’ in the performance of a musical phrase,” Musin wrote. Similar to Level Two, Level Three focuses on the character (“intonation”) of the sound motions and rhythms within the passing beat.

While the elements of Level Two require the conductor’s awareness of the evenness and precision of rhythmical subdivisions within the beats (duplets or triplets), in Level Three, however, motions are enriched by the addition of various musical nuances that affect the steadiness of the motion within the beat. Motions of Level Three have unique directional character and are created by the “unfolding of the musical phrase.”<sup>56</sup>

For both levels, acquiring the skills is equally difficult but possible and demands both musical experience and appropriate training. Musin noted that the same method of comparison used in Level Two is used also in mastering the skills of Level Three. He also reminded young conductors that the ability to make the right interpretative choices is very important and requires a thorough knowledge of musical styles and forms.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 36.



#### **Level Four: Representation of a Progression of a Musical Work ("Unfolding of a Musical Work")**

The elements of Level Four are links and connections between sounds, beats, and measures. They contribute to the creation of the unique progression of a musical piece. Musin gave this list of the main ones:

- Meaningful connections between beats
- Strong and weak beats, supporting and transitional beats
- Expansion to the moment of the culmination
- Transmission of the structural elements throughout the musical work (motivic work, sequences, diminutions and augmentations, etc.)<sup>57</sup>

“The possibility for the development of elements of Level Four, even more than in previous levels, depends on the musical education and interpretational habits of the student.”<sup>58</sup>

The ability of the conductor to analyze properly and understand the unfolding of a musical idea, its sensitivity, and the delicate nuances of its unique form, are essential to developing the elements of Level Four. This quality becomes increasingly important for the conductor as we progress up the scale of conducting technique and is crucial for “conductor’s vision” of the score.

The conductor needs to study the score carefully and discover the structure of every individual musical phrase. He or she must be able to recognize important aspects of the music and communicate them to the orchestra through appropriate expressive motions. While researching the shape of the musical motion, the conductor discovers the variety of possibilities. “In front of the performer [conductor] stands the task to find that unique understanding that most clearly and perfectly conveys the structure, the idea of an artist [composer],” Musin wrote. Previous musical experience and education allow the conductor to make powerful and

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 37.

meaningful musical choices.

In addition to the intensive search for the unique expression within the musical phrase, the conductor searches for the most appropriate conducting gesture. “The search for the interpretative solutions and manual tools for their realization happen simultaneously, undivided,” Musin said. The goal is to select a gesture that will convey all elements of the explored phrase and represent the “conductor’s vision.” This search for the most significant expressive gesture will aid in the development of the conductor’s new motional sensations.

### **Level Five: Expressing Character of the Musical Motion**

This level includes:

- Character, appearance, form of the motion (to take off, to fall down, to circle, to slide, to stretch, to squeeze, to push away)
- Weight of the sound
- Sound color (light, dark, striking, brilliant)<sup>59</sup>

The elements of Level Five are developed on the basis of everyday life gestures used to further explain the meaning of words. Similarly, these gestures describe the character of the music when put into the musical context. “They [the gestures] give musicians the idea of the image of musical motion, the image that helps express the context of the piece, and makes interpretation more alive and direct,” Musin said.

Level Five may be the most difficult to achieve of the levels discussed thus far. One reason for this is that such gestures cannot be learned from conducting manuals. Instead, they can only be created by the skill and imagination of the conductor. “To develop the means of the imaginative conducting, it is primarily necessary to understand what those means are, why are

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 38.

they needed and on what basis are built,” Musin wrote. The conductor develops the skills to “visualize” and “feel” the images of music. “Therefore, primary focus should be on teaching the conductor to visualize, experience those imaginative forms,” according to Musin.

In Level Five, very fine and sensitive interpretative ideas are inspired by gestures that people use in every day conversations. We use our hands to describe words that are not meaningful enough until combined with the expressive gestures that accompany them. Every human being has the ability to gesture. “A person that has the tendency to accompany everything he or she talks about with imaginative motions [gestures], will have better success at developing a variety of means of Level Five.”<sup>60</sup> These common motions are illustrative and give a better understanding of the speaker’s intentions. Comparably, musical gestures of Level Five help to further explain the context of the music. Taken from life and added to music, they create meaningful elements that strongly suggest the character of the musical idea as interpreted by the conductor.

The method of comparison proved to be successful in finding correct motional sensations for Level Five. Similar to previous levels, it can be used to search for the gestures that represent musical images. Training drills can be done in order to develop better sensitivity of the hands, as well as their capability for more complex interpretative intentions.

The fact that a conductor constantly searches for a language that is not only meaningful to the conductor but also to the performers, demonstrates the complexity of conducting. The mechanism of skills needed for progressing to the highest levels of conducting and the process of acquiring them must be clear to the conductor. Musin believed many conductors are not aware of the variety of methods for mastering manual technique. As a result, they never progress to the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 39.

levels that they are capable of reaching. According to Musin, the notion that, “One cannot become the conductor; the conductor needs to be born,”<sup>61</sup> puts too much emphasis on a conductor’s talent. Instead, the importance of the organization and the essence of conducting mastery should be addressed.

### **Level Six: Expressing the Character of the Musical Image and its Emotional Meaning**

Elements of Level Six are:

- Expression of the character of the music (happy, melancholic, celebratory, dramatic, etc.)
- Expression of the emotional connotation of music

Musin stated that Level Six “adds the last touch to all elements of the previous levels, similarly to how the last stroke of painter’s brush makes images alive...The expressive gestures [of this level]...give music such psychological and emotional nuances, which are impossible to adequately record in the score, and explain with the words.” The underlying meaning for every note of the score is painted by the emotion given in the conductor’s gestures.<sup>62</sup>

The knowledge of musical forms and styles (the musical education of the conductor), deep understanding, and feeling of the music are still necessary qualities on this level. In addition, the conductor’s ability to find the specific, unique gestures that will depict successfully the emotional and meaningful character of the music is very important. “Even more, it raises the necessity of ‘seeing,’ feeling the music, which of course depends on the musical education and interpretative talent [of the conductor],” Musin wrote.<sup>63</sup>

In this level, the conductor breathes life into the performance and creates an inspiring,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 42.

meaningful event for the performers. Both the orchestra and the conductor experience the creative work process, and both experience the living, ever-changing character of the music. Musicians may be inspired by the conductor's unique personality, by the conductor's vision of the score, or by an appreciation of the conductor's artistic personality. When the creative atmosphere is established it "brings the orchestra to that condition, in which the slightest of gestures of the conductor finds appropriate response, everything happens easily and naturally." Musin concluded that all of the above are functions of Level Six.

### **Level Seven: Influence of Conductor's Will on Performers**

Musin believed that reaching this final level of conducting technique was possible once all previous levels were trained. Formed with a sense of self-confidence, the conductor uses "will power" to influence the performance of the music. All of the skills of the previous levels have been developed sufficiently. The conductor is now able to express clearly musical images and intentions of the interpretation. The impact on the orchestra, however, varies and is based on the will power present in the conducting: "Different conductors having, we could say, identical technique, all have different impacts on orchestra."<sup>64</sup>

Musin noted different types of attitude towards the interpretation of the musical score:

- Formal, precise interpretation of the musical score as opposed to imaginative, emotional, artistically active interpretation of the musical structure of the piece
- Different levels of the impact of conductor's will power on musicians from gestures that only "illustrate" musical "events," to gestures that actively impact the musicians through creation of needed emotional atmosphere and creative attitude towards the process of interpretation<sup>65</sup>

Similar to any collection of individuals, there are many different personalities and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 28.

temperaments in an orchestra. It is a constant challenge for the conductor to adjust to the orchestra, even on a daily basis. The relationship between the musicians and the conductor is crucial for the performance and has a dramatic impact on the final result. If the conductor shows active musicianship and interest for the artistic interpretation, this will impact the orchestra in a positive way.<sup>66</sup> “The conductor does not have to limit conducting only to the showing of the character of the music, but needs also to actively influence the performer,” Musin said.

The results that the conductor achieves are presented through the collection of the conductor’s actions. First and foremost, however, the results are produced by the active impact on the performance, according to Musin. “The conductor needs to overcome certain unresponsiveness of the performers, caused by various circumstances, convincing them of the importance of playing only conductor’s way, and no other way,” he wrote. The performers have to be persuaded that the conductor’s vision of the piece is the only correct approach.

Musin explained that there are many qualities that the conductor needs to have in order to lead successfully the orchestra and submit the musicians to his or her “will power.” The conductor must have trust in his/hers decisions and abilities, impeccable and detailed knowledge of the score, and total preparation for orchestral rehearsals to make the right interpretative choices. These qualities are also necessary for the conductor to make the appropriate choices of expressive gestures. Aural sensitivity, mental activity, and spatial attention of the conductor must be highly alert while communicating his or her will to the musicians. An atmosphere in which musicians are drawn in by the numerous qualities of the conductor, and therefore are obliged to follow the conductor’s will, must be established.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 43.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SKILLS OF MOTIONAL SENSATIONS

Musin explained the mechanism of conducting with these words: “Musical ideas, that raise in conductor’s mind at the moment of leading the performance, stimulate conductor’s corresponding motional sensations, and on their basis expressive gestures of technical or imaginative character.”<sup>67</sup> Musin furthermore added that, “Musical sensations (stimulated by musical ideas) through motional [muscular] sensations transform into expressive gestures.” “Motional sensations” are therefore sensitive muscle movements that serve as the link between one’s musical idea and their corresponding expressive manual skills (gestures).

Motional sensations, more than any other of the conductor’s abilities, help in the creation of conductor’s manual technique. In the *Language of Conducting Gestures*, Musin listed the following functions of motional sensations:

- Appear as ‘connecting links’ between musical idea and gesture
- give to the conductor instrumental performing sensations
- create sensation of immediate embodiment of a musical idea
- assist in managing sound motions within the beat
- assist in managing rhythmical subdivisions within the beat
- assist transition of meaningful beat connections and logical movement of music
- create feeling of the ‘sound in hand’
- create feeling of ‘materiality of sound’
- help representation of images of musical motion
- help more immediate manifestation of emotions through gestures
- improve understanding and sensation of music
- improve understanding and sensation of appearance of musical motion

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<sup>67</sup> Ilya Musin, *Language of Conducting Gestures* (Moskva: Muzika, 2006), 65. Most information in this chapter are from this book. The quote will be changed when the page number is changed.

- help the transformation of musical images into expressive gestures
- help in searching for expressive gestures corresponding to the musical idea
- help develop conducting fantasy and ability to see and feel music as a conductor
- serve as instrument of controlling (musicians’) reception of the conducting
- serve as tool for developing conducting skills and habits
- appear as an instrument of development of conducting skills in individual practice
- appear as an instrument for developing more active conducting
- need constant attention, which develops the attention even further<sup>68</sup>

“The level of development of conductor’s hands manifests itself not in craftiness and quickness of motions, but in their special sensitivity. Motions of the conductor essentially are not complex, but at the same time a lot is needed from them.”<sup>69</sup> Even though conducting motional sensations are not as structurally complex as instrumental motional sensations, they do need to be eloquent enough to depict musical ideas of the conductor.

Musin further explained how the rhythmic precision of the performance, for instance, depends largely on the feeling of the evenness of the rhythmical subdivisions of the beat that should be present in conductor’s motional sensations. Similarly, leading the expressive side of the performance requires usage of expressive gestures that portray musical ideas of the conductor in a descriptive and illustrative way. “All these, naturally, require special motions (along with mimic and pantomimic), all regulated and created by motional sensations,”<sup>70</sup> Musin said.

The virtuosity of a performer/instrumentalist requires extremely complex and precise motional sensations. In comparison to that, conducting motional sensations appear to be not as complex or diverse. “All conductors utilize approximately identical motions,”<sup>71</sup> making their technique built on essentially similar foundation. However, every conductor’s technique

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 112-113.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 111.



influences musicians in a very different way and can range from the simplest time beating to the most meaningful music making.

“The hands of a conductor should be sensitive to the motion of sounds on the same level as the hands of an instrumentalist are,” said Musin.<sup>72</sup> For example, the pianist moves his fingers in a certain tempo. The speed of the music corresponds to the speed of the fingers. His motional sensations give a clear idea of tempo, rhythm, and dynamics, as well as of any other characteristics of the interpretation. In between the conductor’s gestures and tempo of the motion of sounds within the passing beat, there is not always a strong connection. Musin gave an example of conducting in a moderate tempo, while the beats are filled with the activity of fast notes. Musin pointed out that conducting brings immediate sensation of music as well. “With the shape of the gesture the conductor conveys the character of the music, the substance of the musical image.”

Musin believed that a veil of mystery surrounds the conducting language because it is still unknown and insufficiently explained in most conducting methods. As a result, conducting students find it more difficult to deal with the foundational elements of the conducting technique. In Musin’s opinion, some student conductors neglect the development of the motional sensations and are often satisfied with learning time beating patterns alone.<sup>73</sup> Musin once again emphasized the importance of recognizing the complexity and structure of conducting elements, as well as realizing that motional sensations “are not simply system of signs, but the living, active, expressive language, with help of which it is possible to directly influence responsiveness of the musicians.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 115.

## **The Role of Motional Sensations and Feeling of the Spontaneity of the Performance**

Musin referred to motional sensations as the “connecting link between the musical ideas of the musician and the mechanism of their motional embodiment on an instrument.”<sup>75</sup> A performer on an instrument feels immediate connection between a musical idea and its transmission into musical sounds. The conductor, however, cannot produce music with their motional sensations and cannot experience immediate embodiment of their musical ideas. The conductor’s gestures are descriptive but do not create music on their own. It is musicians who follow conductor’s signs and create the music based on the gestures given. This all makes the conductor’s sensation of the music unique and different from other performers.

A pianist uses “technical motional sensations” (evenness of fingers pressing the keys, speed and power with which the keys are pressed, etc.), as well as “expressive motional sensations” (representation of various concepts that describe ways of pressing the keys, such as to connect, to pour, to transfer, to take off, to throw over the sound, etc.) Musin pointed out that “All these concepts talk not so much about the different character of the sound production, as they do about the different representation of the motional sensations,...the different understanding of the appearance of the musical motion.”<sup>76</sup> There are many examples of expressive concepts used in one’s instrumental performance and, as Musin noted, “all of these concepts, similar to the motional sensations, are borrowed from the practice of life.” A musician would not be able to understand them fully if he or she had not personally experienced them before in everyday life. When used as musical concepts, Musin said they “help the performing process, making it more alive, direct, and active.”

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 121.

Expressive motional sensations promote a performer's learning through constant adjustment and flexibility of motional sensations. "This or that way of extracting the sound impacts the sound, but more importantly, the knowledge of the performer," Musin wrote. The process of the embodiment of music is also the learning process, which is ever changing for the performer and filled with numerous new discoveries that stimulate the production of new motional sensations.

### **The Role of Expressive Motional Sensations**

Actions of the conductor are diametrically different from those of performer/instrumentalist. "For the conductor, expressive motions are the tools of leading the artistic side of the performance, with use of which he communicates with the performers by impacting their mind," said Musin. Different from the performer/instrumentalist whose expressive concepts are invisible and known only to themselves, the conductor's expressive motions need to be not only sensed by the conductor, but also obvious and visible to the musicians. In addition to that, the conductor's expressive motions have to be understandable to the musicians, who must be capable of transferring the conductor's musical ideas and depicting the most important characteristics of the musical structure. "Expressive motions need to be dynamic not illustrative," Musin added.<sup>77</sup>

The conductor's motional sensations have an advantage of freely transferring the structure of the musical form without being "tied to the fingerboard or keyboard." Also, the range of expressive motional sensations of the conductor is far richer than of any of the performer/instrumentalist. The conductor has more possibilities than any instrumentalist to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 122.

convey his or her musical ideas through expressive motional sensations and to convey his or her unique understanding of the musical structure to the musicians. The conductor can communicate to the musicians, for example, “the sensation of ‘airiness’ of music, ‘taking off’ of the passage, ‘pressing’ the energy of the sound, ‘graciousness’ of a phrase, etc.” The conductor can also convey the emotional side of the music, feelings of “energetic or tender, dramatic or joyful.”

Musin continued to remind his reader that the feeling of the music, even if it is absolutely correct and deeply thoughtful, does not guarantee that the conductor will develop satisfying expressive motional sensations. The thorough practice and development of substantial motional sensations are essential for success. “For that [satisfying expressive gestures], one needs to have a hand sensitive to a variety of nuances of the purposeful actions, a hand able to respond to ‘commands’ of the conductor,” he said. In addition, Musin emphasized the importance of the conductor’s musical fantasy as the final factor in developing comprehensive expressive gestures. This ability to see in music something more than just the succession of sounds helps the conductor “find associative connections between musical motions and motions of hands, between the shape of music and gesture.”

### **Do Not Illustrate--Lead**

It is vital for a conductor to possess the talent to feel the structure of music and ability to convey its character through the use of expressive gestures. In ideal situations, musicians are able to read the conductor’s gestures properly, and the music portrays the conductor’s vision completely. Musin believed that many conductors simply depict the music without making a profound impact on the performers. “It is possible to feel the music and transmit its character

through expressive gestures. However, it can remain only the illustration of the music, not the performance leading.”<sup>78</sup>

In Musin’s opinion, describing the contour of the music with “plastic” motions belongs to a different type of performing artistry. Musin believed that in the art of ballet the performers, through their gestures and body movements express the musical form and illustrate the structure of music. “The conductor needs not so much to communicate music through gestures, but to *lead* the performance, effect, actively influence performers, overcome their [musicians’] natural resistance, performing inertness, caused by habit of performing the piece in ‘their’ tradition.”

### **Antagonism within the Conducting Language**

Musin mentioned multiple times the antagonism that exists in the essence of the conducting language. The technical and the expressive sides of the performance are often opposing. Even in the midst of the most emotional musical phrase, the conductor needs to be aware of the technical aspect of the specific phrase. He or she also needs to keep the ensemble playing on time and together “because without the ensemble playing, without the rhythmical precision, artistic and meaningful performance cannot be reached.”<sup>79</sup>

It is important to understand that working on the development of the time beating patterns does not provide the conductor with the feeling of the rhythm. “Time beating, as an instrument for leading the ensemble performance, still does not guarantee its precision,” Musin wrote. The feeling for the rhythmic precision has to be developed independently from learning the basic conducting patterns. It needs to be internalized in the conductor’s mind. If the conductor possesses this essential feeling of rhythm, then “even during the expressive conducting, it [the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 124.

feeling] will not allow rhythmic mistakes and it will be able to overcome the antagonism between the expressive and technical aspects of the conducting.”

### **Motional Sensations as the Foundation of Rhythm**

Musin emphasized the importance of controlling the rhythmic aspects of the performance while leading the performance. Motional sensations play the most significant role in the execution of the rhythm. “As psychologists claim, the feeling of rhythm has a motoric nature.” To feel the rhythm can mean to experience, including one’s motor functions, those or other types of motions, muscular contracts (arms, head, body, etc.) The evenness in delivering motional sensations is crucial for producing precise rhythmic motions.

Musin believed that the development of feeling the rhythm should be the first job of the conductor. Proper feeling of the rhythm eventually initiates and helps the development of the correct and reliable motional sensations. Often though, “Some young conductors naively suppose that if they master time beating patterns, that guarantees rhythmic precision of their conducting.”<sup>80</sup> The diagrams for time beating patterns do not help the development of the feeling of rhythm. In reality, conducting patterns and diagrams that represent them do not promote evenness of beats as some beats are distanced further from one another than others. Musin concluded that by practicing time beating patterns, one does not secure the steadiness of the rhythm in conducting actions.

Many expressive motional sensations may affect the correctness of the rhythm if not carefully controlled by the conductor. The conductor must be able to correct and control them by

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 125.

a trained feeling for the rhythm. The conductor needs to have “reliable tools”<sup>81</sup> that allow him or her to preserve rhythmic stability of the conducting patterns and expression of gestures. Those means need to be highly developed, precise, and trustworthy motional sensations. The most important thing is that “the conductor needs to feel the duration of passing of every beat of the measure.” By awareness and control of that duration, he or she will secure and prevent “marking the beginning of the following beat before the end of the previous.” Musin gave following example, “Acceleration of the motion of the preparation beat he [the conductor] can compensate by sustaining the preparation immediately before marking the following beat or at the top of the movement, etc.”

The feeling of the rhythm is one of the more important elements that need to be developed at the very beginning of conducting studies. Already at the point of studying simple beat patterns the conductor needs to have a high awareness of the steadiness of the rhythmic aspect of motional sensations. “And to master it [the feeling of the rhythm] is possible only under condition of executing the diagrams of time beating with motions, ensuring the precision of the rhythm, rhythmical feelings, and accordingly motional sensations,” Musin stated.

### **Rhythmic Filling of the Passing Beat**

The conductor can show the ictuses of the measure with precision but the performance may still lack precision in ensemble playing. “This imperfection might be a result of the inequality of the rhythmic motion of sounds within the beat, which might be hurried, uneven,”<sup>82</sup> said Musin. It is the conductor’s duty to manage “the rhythmic structure within the beats, the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 127.

tempo within the passing beat of the measure,” to ensure the complete rhythmic precision of the performance.

The ability to control the rhythm of the sounds within the passing beat is not a very common skill in a beginning conductor’s technique. This skill is necessary, but it does not happen by itself and requires serious work and education, Musin added. For the young conductor, it is important to first understand the importance of building the dependable rhythmic foundation of his or her technique. Then the conductor must make the effort to develop this skill. Musin noted that the explanation of how to develop this skill can be found in his book *The Technique of Conducting* in the chapter “Rhythmic Preparation Beat.” “It is not necessary to repeat technical tools for managing the rhythmic structure of the beat that are based entirely on conductor’s motional sensations.” The more we develop dependable rhythmic motional sensations the better we improve and advance our motional sensations in general.

The rhythmic motional sensations find their use not only in fast-paced compositions but also give the conductor support when conducting music that is not very rhythmical or it is too slow for clear presentation of the rhythmic context of the passing beats. When conducting the music in a slower tempo of lyrical structure, every passing beat must be prolonged and move slowly. The feeling of the rhythmical pulse as well as its subdivision in two or three rhythmic units must be present in conductor’s hands. The ability to control rhythm within the beats gives the conductor the possibility to utilize “new expressive means, with use of which he can add intensity of the sound to the passing beat, more or less saturation and its various alterations.”



## **Melodic Motions, Structure and Their Phrasing**

Musin spoke about controlling the rhythmic and expressive elements within a measure and, more specifically, within the passing beat. The following chapter of the book deals more with applying these elements to the bigger musical contexts- the phrase. Every beat exists within the context of a bigger musical form where along with many other beats contributes to the unfolding of the musical structure. “The musical phrase is the composite of the beats of the measure,”<sup>83</sup> Musin wrote. Its expressiveness is the sum of the expressive elements within each beat, as well as the expressive connections between these beats. Musin noted that in addition to showing the expressive beats of the measure, the conductor has to affect and control the transition from one beat to another.

The conductor may show the ictus of one beat followed by the ictus of another but still not transfer the expressive elements of the beats. The conductor keeps transferring ictuses through the air but at the same time “does not affect the very moment of the conversion of one beat into another.” In this case, Musin warned, the conductor does not help the transfer of the expression throughout the measure. “Marking every ictus of the musical phrase still does not communicate that phrase as an organically unified, or as integrated musical form.”<sup>84</sup>

The dynamics of passing from one beat to another is the most vital aspect of the unfolding of the musical phrase, Musin believed. The conductor’s hands need to show expressive filling of the space within each beat, followed by the transition of the expressiveness from one beat to another. By doing that, the conductor shows how the melodic line unfolds. Since “every phrase has its beginning, culmination point, and ending,” the conductor needs to have an overall vision of the phrase and the logic of its unfolding. While transferring energy and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 129.

expressiveness from beat to beat and from measure to measure, the conductor also shows the direction of the phrase. “The conductor supports unsteady, transitional character of the beats to motion’s ending past the culmination point,”<sup>85</sup> Musin said.

Musin explored this concept more in depth in his book *Technique of Conducting*, wherein he talks about “complex gestures.”<sup>86</sup> This type of gestures is used when it is necessary to create meaningful connections between beats in a musical phrase. Any musical phrase is defined by the relations of strong and weak beats within the phrase. The conductor should not only show the ictuses of the beats but also the direction of each beat. Musin compared two different motions between beats, iambic and trochaic. Iambic motion is the weak beat- strong beat relation, while trochaic is the strong beat- weak beat relation. To define the character of the iambic motion as active and growing in intensity Musin marked it with +, while the trochaic motion is marked with -. The following diagram is showing first iambic, followed by the trochaic, and finally the amphibrachic motion (weak- strong- weak) created by the combination of first two motions.

### Example 3.1

*Iambic, trochaic, and amphibrachic motion*

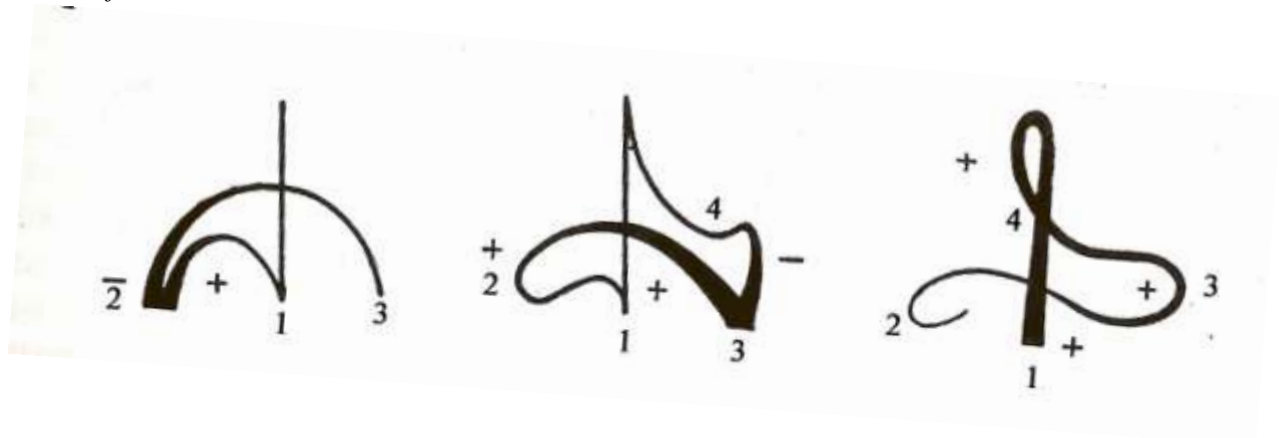


The following example shows the increase in the activity of the motion towards the point of culmination.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>86</sup> Ilya Musin, *Technique of Conducting* (Leningrad: Muzika, 1967), 257.

**Example 3.2**  
*Points of culmination*



**The Feeling of the Sound in Hand**

The conductor should be able to manage the inner structure of the passing beat and then transfer the rhythm, intensity, and character of the sounds throughout the measure, phrase and overall form. In this way, the conductor works, develops, and gains the exclusive conductor's feeling of "the sound in hand."<sup>87</sup> From then on, the conductor stops "cutting the air with his hands and drawing conducting diagrams." The conductor's hands feel as though they are moving through a "thick material," which can be molded according to the conductor's musical ideas.

This sensation is analogical to that of a person who stands in the water and moves hands through it. The conductor starts feeling the "materiality" of the sound and at the same time with that the dynamics of the development of musical texture. This gives the conductor the opportunity to transmit into gestures unfolding of the musical motion, character of musical forms, emotional meaning- all that, which is known to every instrumentalist while playing the instrument.

Development of the feeling of the "sound in hand" is achieved easier if the conductor has some previous instrumental experience, and also if the conductor knows instrumental motional sensations. In addition to that experience, the feeling of the "sound in hand" must be built carefully through the meaningful and purposeful process of the conductor's education. The conductor needs to understand first the meaning of the "sound in hand" to have an idea of its

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<sup>87</sup> Ilya Musin, *Language of Conducting Gestures* (Moskva: Muzika, 2006), 132.

existence. This will also help them understand what needs to be achieved. “Carefully chosen musical exercises,” as well as some music “associations” could help the development of the feeling of the ‘sound in hand.’

The sensation of the “sound in hand” is attained through different exercises that enforce both the rhythmic and expressive structure of the passing beat. Musin stressed the importance of mastering the preparation beat as one of the first things that the conductor should learn. It is also important for a young conductor to work on drills that put special attention on the development of motional sensations needed for proper transition of the rhythm, direction of the musical material, intensity of the beat, etc. All of these drills help with mastering the “sound in hand.” This feeling is a skill that will not happen by itself or without a thorough education. Some amazing performers/instrumentalists are not equally as good at conducting. The reasons that their musicality cannot be conveyed is that their hands did not go through the hard conducting practice where many important conducting aspects are drilled, including feeling of the “sound in hand.”<sup>88</sup>

Musin found that the conductor with a high level of technique and feeling of the “sound in hand” can enjoy the “immediate expression of their musical ideas on a level higher than an instrumentalist.”<sup>89</sup> Musin added that the conductor does not have to worry about a complicated passage. He or she does not have to worry about memory lapses and can enjoy the beauty of shaping the music with motional sensations. “All of this is available to the conductor, but requires vast effort and....not always at all is achieved.” Musin concluded that one needs both special talent and a careful conducting education in order to attain the feeling of the “sound in hand.”

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 134.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXPRESSIVE GESTURES

In his book *Technique of Conducting*, Musin explained the expressive gestures used in conducting in greater detail. He believed that those expressive gestures come from our life experiences and are meaningful to the musicians only if they share similar experiences with the conductor. It is therefore essential that the conductor utilizes those gestures that are not only meaningful for the conductor, but also for the musicians of the orchestra.

Musin said that expressive gestures are common human behavior. We use expressive gestures, mimic and pantomimic, to manifest and further explain our emotions. They accompany our words and purposefully intensify and emphasize certain moments, making them more significant to the listeners. Musin noted that, “they [expressive gestures] accompany words, giving them emotional color, intensify those or other moments, making them more alive, impressive.”<sup>90</sup>

Even though normally expressive motions accompany words, they can be understood just as clearly when the words are not present. Expressive gestures are connected with a specific human activity, and their meaning stays clear by being associated with that activity. Musin concluded that, “expressive motions are one of the instruments of human communication.”

A number of musical emotions are present in one musical composition and very often they are hidden within the piece. Every musical form contains potential emotional context

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<sup>90</sup> Ilya Musin, *Technique of Conducting* (Leningrad: Muzika, 1967), 305. All information in this chapter are from this book. The quote will be changed when the page number is changed.

though not always clearly and obviously stated by the composer. Musin added that all of these various characters of expression could be described with a variety of terms. For example, the character of the music can be “muscular, demanding, commanding, affectionate, regrettable, mournful, etc.” One of the jobs of the conductor is to uncover the emotional context of a phrase and bring its inner structure to the surface.

The conductor uses expressive motions, as well as mimic and pantomimic gestures, when presenting his or her vision of the music’s emotional character. Musin believed that expressive gestures “represent those kind of tools, which are sometimes more efficient than wordy explanations.” In real life practice, expressive gestures accompany words. In conducting, however, they are combined with musical forms and actions. Musin wrote, “Manual means [gestures] and the objective context of the music somehow mutually interact with each other during the process of conducting. The music defines the expressiveness of the gesture; gesture specifies the essence of the music.”<sup>91</sup> Gestures help to clarify the meaning of the music and indicate the context of its emotional structure.

Musin pointed out that the gestures are the most important presentation of the music that conductor uses to influence the performance. The conductor may also use facial expressions as a means of expressiveness. Facial expressions appear in combination with gestures and need to be treated very carefully. “Sometimes, facial expression [mimic] of the conductor expresses not the essence of the music, but the conductor’s attitude towards the process of the performance.” The conductor may worry when performing a difficult section and that can show on his or her face. The conductor’s face may also show dissatisfaction with the performance. According to Musin,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 306.

this type of expressiveness should be avoided. “The conductor should strive for spontaneous manifestation of feelings, not to spoil them but to clear the way for them.”

Musin’s opinion was that there are many conductors who concentrate too much on the precision of the performance. When clarity becomes the main issue for the conductor, the focus of the conducting becomes correcting mistakes. In this kind of conducting, music’s emotional character is only given in a general way, not in a deeper, more emotive way. The expressiveness does not appear in such conducting; “the gesture is empty, lacking the unique context.”<sup>92</sup>

Musin added that, “with gestures, if they are specific and correspond to what we see in life, the conductor can communicate almost all human feelings.” He recommended that every phase of musical composition should be thoughtfully marked in the score for the conductor’s use. The conductor should use words that uncover the character of the emotion “locked” in the phrase as well as represent the conductor’s attitude towards that emotion. In addition, the conductor needs to track the change in musical sensations, “its strengthening or weakening, the change in a mood, etc.”

Musin believed that through observing human behavior and various life situations, the conductor could find the necessary inspiration for developing the language of expressive gestures. Like many other artists, actors and painters for example, the conductor needs to use life experiences and apply them to conducting. Strong ideas the conductor may gather from observing human “mimic, gestures, particular finger motions that play important role in expression of feelings, behavior of actors on the stage, etc.” Musin added that the conductor can find inspiration in artistic works, paintings, or sculptures, especially if they present heroism, tragedy, happiness, bitterness, etc. Paintings and sculptures are probably the best sources for the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 307.

enrichment of expressive gestures: “the manifestations of feelings in them are given in generalized form.”

Musin concluded this discussion by suggesting that the conductor become acquainted with works of the Russian actor Constantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski, the creator of the world famous Stanislavski Method. Musin believed that in Stanislavski’s work, the conductor can find great ideas and inspiration, directly or indirectly connected to the art of conducting.

### **Gestures That Explain Words and Are Taken From Life Practicum**

Musin pointed out that a great number of conducting gestures are prototypes of motions seen in everyday life. Musin believed that one of the most common gestures in conducting technique is “offering” (suggesting, proposing) motion. Musin explained that in real life, this gesture is “done with the light motion of a hand on the side of the body, while at the same time the palm opens and turns up.”<sup>93</sup> With this gesture, we invite, offer, or suggest to somebody to sit down or take something. Musin added that the gesture also means “please.” In conducting, it can be used to point out to the moment of the phrase’s culmination. “It tells the performers that they have to bring the melodic phrase to the given point and perform small intensifying of the sound towards the pointed moment,” he wrote.

The gesture of “invitation” is another gesture that is often used in real life. The gesture is performed by motioning with the whole arm, or by only the hand and fingers, palms facing upward. It is given with the left hand. Musin noted that in conducting, this gesture “addresses a specific performer” when necessary to bring out their melody line. With the arm motioning to the performer and with light finger motions (palm facing up), the conductor invites a particular voice

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 308.



to grow out from other sounds. This gesture has a “choosing character and is used in communicating with individual performers or smaller groups.” The whole arm is used in case that the conductor wants to address bigger group of people in which case the gesture is more exaggerated and more obvious.

Another gesture with this “choosing” character is the “pointing” gesture. Musin explained that this gesture is done a beat or two before showing with the right hand an important instrument entrance. The conductor uses the “pointing” gesture on the side of the specific performer and insists on making the entrance more obvious. This gesture, done ahead of the right hand, “intensifies the importance of the right hand.” While performing this gesture, it is necessary that the conductor looks directly at the performer. This is necessary when performing any of the “choosing” gestures. The same gesture, however, can have a different meaning. Musin gave the following example: while facing one group of performers, the conductor can point at a different performer with the left hand finger to make the group aware of the main voice. “Pointing” gestures can therefore emphasize a voice by making others aware of its importance. Musin added that this last gesture especially has an effect when done immediately after the “dismissal” (push aside) gesture.

Musin continued his explanation of the gestures used in everyday communication. He introduced the “dismissal” gesture. “With the help of this gesture in real life, we push aside something, turn down a proposition, etc.”<sup>94</sup> This gesture is done with the left hand with the thumb down and open, and on a flat plane. Musin noted that if the gesture is done in a sharp manner, it brings down the sound and suddenly stops any loud dynamics. When done smoothly,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 309.

it “postpones” other voices and puts them in the background to “make space” for a specific line to come out.

Musin said that there is another gesture very similar to the previous one in terms of character. This is the gesture of “denial.” “With this gesture, we not only push aside something but also we categorically reject it,” he explained. The appearance of this gesture is similar to the “dismissal” gesture with the exception that the palm of the hand moves as though cutting something, not with the thumb turned downward. This gesture is used “to show a sudden change in dynamics, or a sharp diminution of the sound.”

The conductor can also perform the gesture of “push away.” This gesture, according to Musin, is the exact opposite of the “invitation” gesture. An elevated left hand with an open palm turned to the side of the performers puts the addressed performers into the “second plan.” The gesture is also used to decrease dynamics.

Musin called an additional gesture with similar connotation the “rejection” gesture. This gesture is executed with the same hand motion as when refusing something by shaking our head with a negative connotation. The palm of the left hand is open and does “waving motions” directed to a group of performers. “Like the previous gesture, this gesture serves as the tool for decreasing the sound by moving voice groups to the background,” he said.

Another gesture that is in use is the “arising” gesture. The “arising” gesture is a call to the performer to emerge from other voices. It is executed with energy. The whole arm is used to “stimulate big dynamics, most often while addressing the brass section.” Musin referred to yet another gesture as the gesture of “attention.” This gesture is performed with the “raised left hand and pointer finger facing upward.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 310.

According to Musin, the “request” gesture reminds on the “invitation” gesture. The position of the hand is similar, with the palm open and turned up. The hand itself, however, is more relaxed than in the “invitation” gesture, and the actual duration of the gesture “can be prolonged until it produces the needed effect on the orchestra.” It may be used for various purposes, mainly to increase the expression of the performed part. Musin noted that, “the gesture emphasizes the action taken in the right hand.”

Musin pointed to yet another commonly used gesture: the gesture of “power.” Musin explained that this gesture is performed with the fingers kept together in a cupped hand, and is rather tense in character. It is used if there is a need “to express better focus of the sound and to intensify the action in the right hand” for an increase in dynamics. The left hand, with the palm up and fingers slightly curved, is raised slowly, Musin noted. “The conductor, as if he is gathering the sound in the hand, raises it to the reinforcement,” he explained. If the sound must be escalated quickly the conductor “seizes” the sound with the fisted hand directed towards performers. “In life, this type of gesture we utilize to show power and strength.” Musin added that, in general, the left hand with closed fingers, gradually or quickly raised, is a very good way to acquire a louder, stronger, or more focused sound.

### **Expressive Gestures with a Previously Defined Meaning**

Musin recognized that there is a group of expressive gestures that, historically, were associated with “certain life situations.” According to Musin, those gestures stayed in general use in the form of symbols; previously agreed upon signs with a “preserved prior practical meaning.” Conductors often use gestures that have a generally accepted meaning and are based on life

experiences. Musin concluded that in order to better understand the essence of these gestures, it is important to understand their original purposes.

Some expressive motions that we use in everyday life are biological in nature, according to Musin. In their foundation lies the “instinctive need”<sup>96</sup> for the body to protect itself and adjust to its surroundings. Musin gave an example of the gesture commonly used to show *subito pp* dynamics. The gesture is the exact opposite of the *pp*, done with an open palm and a sharp, rising movement meaning “stop.” In the past, this gesture was the natural “reaction of the body against approaching danger.” The hand is held in front to protect the body and hold the enemy at bay.

This gesture, in its basic nature, does not have a corresponding meaning to the musical situations for which it is used commonly. The gesture is learned as part of the general conducting practice, and even though it is expressive and beautiful, it is often used without the understanding of its true meaning. Stanislavski, Musin said, was strongly against the usage of these kinds of gestures. He considered them to be illogical and overused.

If the conductor instead would use the gesture of quickly pulling back the arm closer to the body, the gesture would then correspond exactly to the meaning of the *subito p* dynamics, Musin thought. This gesture is obviously the exact opposite of the gesture commonly used, but it more adequately represents the essence of required musical expression. Musin added that the nature of this gesture is defensive when facing a dangerous situation, corresponding to the sudden decrease in dynamics. The body naturally moves back and tries to get away rather than taking on an attack stance. In other words, the *subito p* dynamics can be done with a defensive gesture with the motion in the left hand done at the very last moment, sharp and sudden. Musin claimed that the sharpness of the gesture would ensure that *f* stays to the last beat necessary, and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 311.

that the piano does not start too soon. If the beat before the *subito p* is very strong and accentuated, this gesture is even more effective.<sup>97</sup>

Musin remarked that the above example is a reminder of how important it is to understand the source and meaning of a gesture before utilizing it. It also shows how learned gestures might not be used at the right time for the simple reason that the conductor may not understand their real meanings.

Musin continued by saying that it is possible to find expressive gestures that “have no obvious connection with life gestures.” He gave an example of the gesture used for expressing the heroic, triumphant character of the music. This gesture is performed with the arm raised high. Musin commented that the size of the motion is not as important as the implied majestic and grandiose character of the motion.<sup>98</sup> Musin inquired as to why this gesture causes such a reaction in performers and why do brass players always react to this gesture with such a big sound. He believed that the reason for this is found in an ancient connection between natural overtone series and heroic feelings. Since brass instruments play in natural scales, we make logical associations with triumph and victory. For the same reason, Musin thought, composers give brass instruments triumphant melodies. Musin added that in many paintings and sculptures, holding one arm up high symbolizes victory. Also, leading an army into attack is represented with the arms raised high in the air to make it visible. Therefore, it is not unusual that we associate raised arms with victory and triumph.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 312.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 313.

### **Motions That Originate in Actions of Labor**

Gestures formed from “various types of actions of labor”<sup>99</sup> are related closely to the group of gestures previously described. Musin pointed out that the foundation of conducting technique, the beat, is in fact one form of human labor. To be more precise, this motion originates in the action of “beating with a stick on the stand” to lead the performance. The reason for using the beat in modern conducting is no longer strictly technical in nature but also expressive.

Another type of motion used in conducting language originates in striking and throwing human actions, Musin believed. Various forms of sound can be shown with these motions. Musin added that striking and throwing motions in general shorten the sound, make it abrupt, show accents, etc. In this category, we find many gestures associated with throwing and striking, such as “force out,” “toss up,” “throw in,” “scatter,” “throw of,” “throw over,” etc.

Another category of gestures is derived from actions of pressure. Musin said that these gestures are used when the conductor wants to show “the extent of the sound, its intensity... the point of culmination, the expressive melodic accent, or the short intensifying of the dynamics, etc.”

Gestures such as “pull” or “draw out,” “stretch,” “extend,” or “stroke,” Musin explained, represent “not so much the elongation of the sound but also its dynamic change to smaller or louder.” Musin concluded that, “all of these motions could be done with either the left or the right hand.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 314.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 314.

## Expressiveness in Gestures of Dynamics

Under this heading, Musin compared and differentiated various levels of dynamics that need to be reflected in the conductor's use of gestures. The conductor needs to understand and show nuances when using gestures that show dynamics. To illustrate that, Musin gave the examples of *ff* from *Scheherazade* by Rimski-Korsakov and the *ff* in Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* which completely differ in character. Musin concluded that, since identical dynamics can be of different intensity, there could not be a universal gesture for their expression. "Same as the *f* and *p* are not universal, the gestures are not universal," Musin said.<sup>101</sup>

Musin recognized that there are conductors who generally use bigger gestures, as well as conductors who use smaller gestures. He believed that there is no other reasonable explanation for using smaller or larger gestures besides what the music requires. Some young conductors are led to believe that large gestures are not necessary since there are conductors who do not use them. Young conductors therefore tend to use smaller gestures at the beginning of their conducting education. Musin thought that this can be equally "not effective" if there is no understanding of the music and no meaning behind the conductor's choice. "The conductor needs to clearly understand the meaning of the musical form and express it with the adequate motions," he wrote.

Musin believed that even more important is the understanding of the dynamic progressions within a musical form. The conductor must find the formula of the motion of dynamics and show it with an almost "arithmetically precise increase or decrease of the size of the gesture." For Musin, the understanding of the process of dynamic development is an essential step when learning the score.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 315.

Musin further explained his idea through comparison of the *crescendo* from the beginning of Beethoven's *Leonore*, and the *crescendo* in the Scherzo movement of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6*. In *Leonore*, Musin said, the *crescendo* "expresses the inner increase in determination.... therefore, the gesture doesn't have to noticeable increase at the beginning, rather it can be more focused, insistent, concentrated (which can be done with only the fingers of the left hand.)" Later on towards the end of the *crescendo*, Musin said the gesture should grow, but even there it doesn't have to be too big or too sharp.<sup>102</sup>

The *crescendo* from the Scherzo movement of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* is different in character, Musin pointed out. Here, the gestures do not have to be focused and small. From the very beginning, they can be bigger, trying to "beat off the dark power" that grows rapidly from all sides of the orchestra.

Musin concluded that "in the essence of every dynamic change is either a growth or a weakening of its formal context, enlargement or weakening of some emotion, intensifying of its brilliance, concentration." It is of the great importance that the conductor shows "what is lying behind the notes" to transmit the meaning of the music to the performers and make the dynamics fit this vision. Or as Musin said, "not only the shade but its reason, not only notes but their connections, not only phrase but live musical form in all its precision and expression."

### **Gestures Representing "Space" and "Weight"**

Musin pointed out the expressive character of conducting gestures that are used to represent the ideas of "space" and "weight." He believed that the character of the music is closely related to the register in which it is done. Musin thought that lower registers often bring

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 316.



dark character to the music. He gave the example of the mysterious main theme from Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* and how it sounds much darker when performed by bassoon than when later performed with other instruments. Musin also provided the example of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, pointing out the change in the atmosphere of the music from dark to light. This corresponds to the change in register as the movement unfolds.

Musin recognized that our minds connect lightness and darkness in relation to the space. He said that, "nobody paints a ceiling with dark colors and a floor with light colors."<sup>103</sup> This aesthetic feeling, according to Musin, is the foundation of our understanding of light and dark. "What is high is light, and what is low is dark." Also, everything that is up high is light and happy, and everything that is low must be heavy and sad.

In accordance with these principles, Musin recommended conducting the beginning of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* lower since it starts with the dark color of double basses. In the same manner, the beginning of *Loengrin* should be conducted higher since it starts with the high registers of strings. The conductor, however, can change the character of a phrase by changing the level of conducting. Musin once again gave the example of the beginning of *Ode to Joy*. Conducting it higher will give music a "lighter, elevated, rejoiced"<sup>104</sup> character from the very start of the piece.

Musin concluded that all of the above mentioned rules are general, and that following these strictly is not enough to create a meaningful interpretation. "Mechanically moving hands in high or low plane of the time beating still does not solve the deal. What is important is the form

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 317.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 318.

of the gesture,”<sup>105</sup> he wrote. For Musin, it is always the most essential task to find individual gestures that communicate conductor’s unique artistic understanding of the music.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 319.

## CHAPTER 5

### HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT METHODS

Musin divided the process of performance preparation into three steps: score preparation, (or what Musin calls “homework,”<sup>106</sup>) rehearsal with the orchestra, and the performance of the prepared music for an audience. Musin considered the first step of this process to be the most challenging and important part of the performance preparation. He added that “homework” defines and gives character to the remainder of the process. Musin thus underscored the importance of this initial step in completing the process successfully.

Young and inexperienced conductors often do not see the connection between the homework that the conductor needs to do before the first rehearsal and the actual process of rehearsing the orchestra. One of the common mistakes is thinking that it is possible to learn a score without practicing manual technique. Young conductors sometimes feel that they can start using their gestures once they are in front of the orchestra by simply learning their score well. This attitude, in Musin’s opinion, has a negative impact on the conductor’s overall education and professional development. He also believed that the development of one’s expressive motions would not be sufficient if the expressive gestures are not practiced during the homework portion.

By the time of the first rehearsal, given all that is on the conductor’s mind, discovering expressive gestures at this point is simply impossible. Musin said that the conductor should

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<sup>106</sup> Ilya Musin, *Education of a Conductor* (Leningrad: Muzika, 1987), 55. All information in this chapter are taken from this book. The quote will be changed when the page number is changed.

invest time and energy into the process of developing manual expressive gestures in order for them to be done properly at the rehearsal. Musin added that the homework time is a real opportunity for the conductor to practice their manual skills before stepping in front of the orchestra. Since conductors have no musicians to respond to their manual gestures while in the homework atmosphere they must use their imagination to practice effectively and develop sufficient technique.<sup>107</sup>

Musin drew a line between a conductor and a pianist to illustrate his beliefs on the importance of homework. He recommended watching and getting acquainted with the homework that a pianist has to do in order to learn a piece of music. Musin thought that while watching pianists conductors may experience insights into their own practice methods. Musin saw many similarities between a pianist and a conductor. In his opinion, both a pianist and a conductor work with music that contains many independent voices. The pianist, in his or her homework analysis of the piece, defines musical ideas that need to be presented and spends sufficient time searching for the performance means that embody those musical ideas. During this process, the pianist “deepens their understanding of the piece,” as well as discovers its formal and expressive structure. In accordance with these new musical discoveries, the pianist improves the technical aspects of the performance in order to truthfully represent them to the audience. The learning process of the pianist is one without end. While becoming more involved with the music the quality of the pianist’s technical skills also progresses. This progress results in more possibilities for an even deeper understanding of the musical form and its expressiveness. The pianist’s search for an adequate interpretation of a phrase is constant and inexhaustible.

According to Musin, the pianist’s work methods consist of the following:

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 56.

1. The pianist learns in *smaller sections* with constant work on a few measures at a time.
2. To focus attention on appropriate performance skills, the pianist practices every hand separately by voices and layers of structure, using the *method of divided learning*.
3. In selecting the most adequate performing choices, the pianist uses the *method of comparison*.
4. In order to master technically difficult sections, the pianist *simplifies the speed of performance*. The pianist then analyzes complex passages in slower tempos.
5. For developing better manual skills, the pianist practices exercises and etudes.

Musin pointed out that the most rewarding aspect of the above system is that the performer not only learns the specific piece, but he or she also works on developing skills that improve the overall performance technique. Musin realized that all of the above methods are supported by the significant “aural attention” that the pianist uses to control the practicing process. He emphasized the fact that the pianist spends time practicing scales, etudes, and exercises in order to improve manual technique.<sup>108</sup>

Musin believed that pianist’s methods could be applied equally and effectively to the conductor’s homework. With these comparisons of preparation, Musin pointed out that the difference between the two is the lack of sound in the conductor’s practice. He raised the important question of how the conductor can accommodate for this lack of sound. Musin recognized that the time spent in rehearsal with an actual orchestra is an irreplaceable experience. However, he believed that the purpose of homework practice is to give the starting point and broaden “necessary conducting qualities, such as attention, activity of the musical ideas, self-control, etc.” In addition, the conductor develops ideas of interpretation, expands range of “motional sensations [gestures], and accordingly the feeling of the sound in hand.” The conductor works on deepening musical understanding of the piece and the “conductor’s vision of the score,” along with many other crucial conducting qualities.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 57.

Musin suggested the following methods for the conductor's homework, similar to the pianist's practicing method:

1. Method of divided learning of the score through separating individual voices and structural layers of music (paying attention to the interpretation as well as manual skills)
2. Method of comparison
3. Method of comparison in addition to the method of the divided conducting
4. Method of divided learning of the expressive elements of the interpretation
5. Slowing down the practice of demanding technical elements
6. Practicing exercises for developing "feeling of the sound in hand"

### **Method of Divided Learning of the Score**

Musin remarked that the nature of the conducting profession (similar to that of piano), is to deal with more than one voice one time.<sup>109</sup> This fact determines the need for learning the score by understanding the voices and structural layers of the music separately. The conductor needs to develop the skill of "hearing all voices of the orchestra" just as the performer/instrumentalist must be able to hear all of the voices in a difficult section. This method of divided learning of the score is done in homework practice and is, in Musin's opinion, the most efficient way for developing this quality.

Musin underlined the necessity of using this method of divided manual score learning. The conductor acquires a deeper understanding of each separate structural layer and is able to execute the search for expressive gestures much more efficiently when thoroughly acquainted with all the voices. The quest for the most applicable expressive gestures for each voice and structural layer also becomes more efficient. Another advantage of this method is that, by implementing it during the conductor's homework, one is "able to overcome the antagonism between expressiveness and rhythmic precision of the interpretation."

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 58.

Musin noticed that one of the common mistakes the inexperienced conductor makes is to conduct only the melody or the voice that the conductor hears in his or her head. Proper attention is not given to the other voices, most often to the accompaniment. Consequently, when this happens the performance is done with insufficient leadership, and therefore can cause a number of mistakes in execution. Since the preparation of the score was not done correctly by using adequate methods, the performance is not done with the precision needed. The result is not satisfactory.

Musin said, “the method of divided learning of the score makes it possible to listen to all the voices of the score and find conducting means for their synchronized leadership.”<sup>110</sup> In his understanding, the method of divided learning of the score:

I. Develops following habits and qualities necessary for the conductor:

1. Attention and observation
2. Analytical thinking
3. *Polyphonic hearing*: the skill of listening to many voices at the same time
4. Control over the flow of the performance

II. Helps more deepened and detailed analysis of the score while working on interpretation solutions. It also helps in understanding:

1. Function of every voice in the score
2. Functional connections between voices
3. The role of rhythmical accompaniment

III. Helps in finding tools of *polyphonic* leading during the manual learning of the score:

1. Finding the voice that provides the support for leading
2. Transition of the leading from one voice to another
3. Using *general gestures* that address all voices

IV. Can be used as the system of the conductor’s self control:

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 59.

1. Control of the precision of the gestures
2. Revealing imperfections in conducting
3. Revealing mistakes in interpretation.<sup>111</sup>

### **Method of Comparison**

Musin explained that the method of comparison is something that we use in everyday life. “We compare unknown things and appearances to objects that are known to our experience.” In order to learn about the new element, we use the method of comparison to compare it to the familiar object. Through this comparison, we learn about characteristics and qualities of the new element, and its similarities and differences to and from the related object. As a result, we deepen our knowledge and vision of the new element.

This method “develops attention, observation, analysis and synthesis skills of the conductor.” The conductor is using this method constantly while studying the score, as well as in his or her work with the orchestra. During the performance, the conductor compares what they hear with the ideal musical vision that needs to be achieved. During the rehearsal, the conductor analyzes a section played, makes decisions based on the findings, rehearses the same section to correct the inadequacies, all while making new comparisons and choices.<sup>112</sup>

Musin believed that young conductors have an obligation to learn how to differentiate sensations in their hands and make their manual skills sensitive to different characteristics of a musical phrase as early in their education as possible. The young conductor is satisfied easily with the first gesture they acquire. By using the method of comparison, the conductor is soon aware of the various expressive motions available. The conductor also becomes aware of the various characteristics of the musical structure that may be affected by the expressive gestures.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 61.



These, according to Musin, can include character, dynamics, rhythm, color, as well as any other aspect of the musical structure.

### **The Role of Motional Sensations in Mastering Manual Technique**

Musin thought that instrumentalists have an advantage over conductors because they can rely on their aural senses while doing their homework. However, the conductors can feel motional sensations, as well as the muscle response, to their musical ideas and visions.<sup>113</sup> Musin noted that the number of motions that conductors can do is very limited. A hand can make motions down and up, left and right, close and away, and circular. Yet, “the numbers of actions that can be done [with these motions] are numerous. Each one of these actions is made of and controlled by corresponding motional sensations.”

According to Musin, the method of comparison uncovers the possibilities of the conducting art. This method does the following for the young conductor:

#### I. Develops necessary conducting skills and habits:

1. Interpretative vision and fantasia
2. Hearing attention
3. Motional sensations
4. Feeling of the “sound in hand”
  - a) Feeling of the rhythmical pulse within the beat
  - b) Feeling of musical connections between beats and sounds
  - c) Feeling of the direction of the phrase
5. Feeling of direct connection between musical images and gestures
6. The ability to experience and convey motions of the musical structure with gestures
7. Precise and active conducting
8. The skill of the *conductor's vision* of the score
9. The skill of enriching the score
10. The ability to understand the context of the piece

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 63.

## II. Helps better interpretation of the piece:

1. More detailed analysis of the score
2. Search for the interpretative answers
3. Deeper comprehension of the piece (understanding of the meaning of the dynamics, articulation signs, phrasing, etc.)

## III. Can be used as the tool for:

1. Choosing expressive gestures of conducting
2. Control of the correctness of conducting
3. Control of whether the specific gesture is appropriate for the musical form
4. Overcoming opposites between technical and expressive aspects of conducting<sup>114</sup>

### **Application of the Method of Comparison in Score Preparation**

Musin stated that the method of comparison during homework practice is the best way of “finding the expressive gestures necessary to transmit musical images.” While analyzing the music, it is essential that the conductor attentively searches for the uniqueness of the phrase and the gesture that can depict it. At the same time, Musin added, the conductor must continue to check the effectiveness of his or her gestures. There are many aspects of the gesture that need to be controlled by the conductor. Examples include the rhythmic continuity of the beats in the measure, clarity and precision of the elements of the phrase, accuracy of the character of the gesture, among others.<sup>115</sup> Musin said that by searching for the appropriate gesture, the conductor is training actively his or her attention. Simultaneously, the conductor is developing “analytical thinking, conducting fantasia, and, most importantly, the feeling of the sound in hand.”

While profoundly working on a phrase (paying attention to its expressive qualities, style, dynamics, articulation), “the conductor may discover in it [the phrase] expressive characteristics, that earlier remained unnoticed.” The conductor better understands and learns more about the

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 68.

piece. The new aspects of the music are opening, and the conductor is able to hear the nuances of each line. The conductor not only analyzes the score; he or she also works on further developing motional sensations (gestures). Musin added that conductor “feels the inner pulse of the phrase, the direction of its musical motion.” Furthermore Musin commented, “this analysis allows the conductor to more clearly senses the formal structure of the piece.” This method elongates the process of studying the score, but it is the most effective way for developing a meaningful conducting technique. If pursued at the beginning of the conductor’s training, it also prevents the formation of bad habits and mistakes in conducting.

Musin suggested that the first step in the conductor’s analysis should be the comparison of the rhythmic elements of the phrase. This allows an establishment of precision and evenness of the beats. Following that, the conductor should add articulation and dynamics. Finally, he or she should seek out the expressive gestures, character of the music, orchestral colors, etc.<sup>116</sup>

Musin explained how the method of comparison should be done in the following examples. The first example is Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No.5*. Musin recognized that the third and fourth measure of the melody in the first movement often sounds like this<sup>117</sup>:

**Example 5.1**

*Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 5 Movement I (inaccurate presentation)*



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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 71.

The example should sound like this:

**Example 5.2**

*Tchaikovsky, Symphony No.5 Movement I (accurate presentation)*



As another example, Musin explained that the first theme of the second movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No.5* should be conducted as one of these variations:

**Example 5.3**

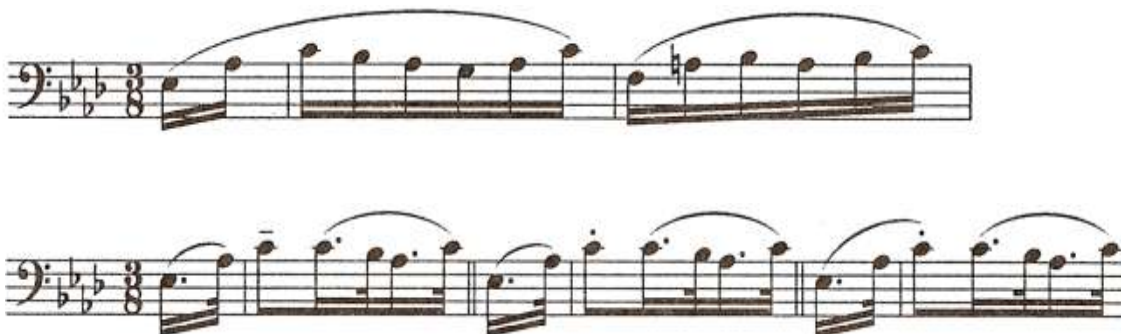
*Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 Movement II (theme)*



Musin then suggested conducting the same melody in different ways, with constant attention paid to the sensations in the right hand:

**Example 5.4**

*Beethoven, Symphony No.5 Movement II (variations)*



After all of these comparisons, the conductor should try to conduct this spot with the bass accompaniment, trying to give the bass a gentle gesture for the pizzicato. This will allow it to refrain from interfering with the singing melody and give it support.<sup>118</sup>

Musin thought that by using the method of comparison, the conductor first and foremost practices attention and ability to control the manual motions.<sup>119</sup> This method “makes the conductor more self- critical” and allows them to search for more options in the score. A more direct connection is created between the gestures and musical imagination. Musin concluded that young students should use the method even when the music looks simple and should experiment with variations of the gestures, such as trying different positions of the stick, placement of hand, and direction of motion.

### **Comparison of Accompaniment**

Musin believed that too often inexperienced conductors neglect the accompaniment of the melody.<sup>120</sup> Using the method of comparison, the conductor can get acquainted with not only the melody, but also the accompaniment. Musin suggested working on the rhythm of the accompaniment first by using the method of the comparison.<sup>121</sup> The conductor should try feeling the pulse of the accompaniment. Following this practice, the conductor should examine the melody by using the same method and find expressiveness within it. The next step is to join the melody with the accompaniment so that the rhythm of the accompaniment enriches the expression of the melody. Accompaniment often gives melody the rhythmic support and this should not be neglected.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 81.

The following example shows Musin's thoughts for a section from Beethoven's *Symphony No.8*, where the accompaniment almost provokes the unevenness of the melody. The support that the accompaniment can provide for the melody is very important:

**Example 5.5**

*Beethoven, Symphony No. 8 Movement I*

**Allegro vivace**

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a section from Beethoven's Symphony No. 8, Movement I. The first system is marked 'Allegro vivace' and consists of two staves: a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system is marked 'rit.' and also consists of two staves, continuing the melodic and accompanimental lines. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4.

Muscular sensations learned during the work done by comparing the rhythmic elements of the accompaniment will preserve the rhythmic base of the section. This will hold true even when the complexity of other voices is added.<sup>122</sup>

### Comparison of Instruments

The conductor should use expressive gestures that differ in character for addressing orchestral instruments of different types. The sounds of specific instruments are often associated with a specific emotion and character. Musin gave the example of the second movement of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No.4*. The oboe performs the melody from the very beginning.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 81.

### Example 5.6

*Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 4 Movement II*



The character of the melody is pastoral and melancholic. It would change if the melody were played with a different instrument- a clarinet, for example. The same theme is later presented by cellos and in the recapitulation with violins, and finally with bassoon. Musin insisted that every time a different instrument plays that same melody, the conductor should use a gesture that depicts the new, changed character.<sup>123</sup>

Examples similar to this are very common in the orchestral repertoire. Another example Musin used is the theme of the second movement of the *Scheherazade* by Rimsky- Korsakov.

### Example 5.7

*Rimsky- Korsakov, Scheherazade Movement II*



This theme is presented by the bassoon first, followed immediately by the oboe, then first violins, and finally with the group of wind instruments. Musin thought that for every appearance of the theme, the conductor should find the adequate gesture needed to convey the individual character of each different sound quality of these instruments.

The conductor should, Musin said, not only address an instrument or a group of instruments by conducting in their direction but also use a type of gesture that reflects the

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 82.

character of the sound needed. Therefore, the conductor needs to understand the variety of forms in the orchestral colors and develop the feeling for the orchestral sounds. Here, the method of comparison is again useful. In this case, however, the conductor compares the instrumental colors of the piece. The conductor explores how the phrase would be conducted to a different instrument or group of instruments, and he may therefore find a gesture that would be appropriate for the particular instrument used.

Musin suggested that at the beginning the conductor represents in gesture the color of the instrument only, paying attention to the density and weight of the sound.<sup>124</sup> Musin added that, depending on the orchestration of the piece, the conductor should decide the overall emotional character of the melody played by the specific instrument and embody in the gesture the specific character needed for the piece. The melody can become “airy and light or heavy and dense.” It can have thoughtful character or character that is passionate, sorrowful, etc. Musin stressed that the conductor eventually needs to “incorporate the melodic line with other voices of the score.”

The method of comparison is used not only to find the appropriate gestures, but also to increase the development of the “conductor’s vision” of the score and “interpretative fantasia.” Musin believed that all of these factors contribute to the building of a strong conducting language along with the ability of finding a gesture that best embodies the musical idea.

### **Method of Comparison and Divided Conducting to Analyze the Score**

Musin remarked that the method of divided score analysis by voices and structural layers helps the conductor to observe and hear all the voices of the score separately. This ensures a better understanding and a more detailed analysis of every individual voice. Musin added that the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 83.



conductor, by using this method, may note the instrument doublings, decide on the importance of the voices in the melody by finding the “under-voice,”<sup>125</sup> recognize various layers of the accompaniment, and find many other interesting details of the musical structure. The conductor gains a better insight into the structure of the piece, as well as into the inner logic of its development. Such attentive analysis helps the conductor to discover the meaning of every single symbol within every individual voice.

The conducting student develops motional sensations and becomes capable of applying them to the process of learning the music. Musin said that at this level, the conductor is capable of deciding which element of the structure should be juxtaposed and compared.<sup>126</sup> It is necessary to compare the elements on a case by case basis. The conductor should not miss any of the elements that have the capability of being compared. There will be instances when, for specific elements, the comparison will not be needed. This is because the elements appear in a very simple form.

In the conclusion of this chapter, Musin gave us a more direct idea of what the process of learning the new piece should look like. He suggested that the conductor should first conduct the new piece through without dynamics, phrasing, and articulation.<sup>127</sup> This is the starting point to ensure rhythmic accuracy. Musin warned that conductors who immediately conduct with expressiveness fail to notice mistakes in their conducting. At the next stage, the conductor “compares the elements of rhythm, dynamics, and phrasing; the conductor needs to analyze how the character of the phrase changes, and why this changes appear.”<sup>128</sup> This allows the conductor

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 86.

to discover individual characteristics of the phrase. The conductor attentively searches for appropriate gestures to portray the character of the new, changed phrase.

Eventually, Musin added, the conductor starts feeling and “understanding the role of the elements of the musical structure which he is comparing.”<sup>129</sup> The conductor makes meaningful connections between beats within the measure and “begins to sense the characteristics of the musical phrase in his gesture, which actively stimulates the development of the feeling of the sound in hand.” The final step is to add the meaning and emotional substance to the overall unfolding of the musical structure. The elements of the musical structure are accepted gradually according to their complexity so that the meaning of the whole piece is constantly developed.<sup>130</sup>

Musin concluded that after all active sensing of the musical material, comparisons, muscle training, and attentive thinking, “the music stands in front of the conductor fulfilled with new meaning and significance.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 87.

## CHAPTER 6

### MUSIN AND THE CONDUCTING LANGUAGE

#### External as Opposed to Contextual Conducting

Musin believed that it is essential that the conductor develops the language that not only looks appropriate, but also has deep meaning. This language is the product of a thorough study of the music and particularly its expressiveness. Musin suggested while there are many conductors who look active while conducting, give many directions to performers, and show every dynamic, entrance, detail, yet one can feel that the musicians do not respond to such conducting, and the audience is not moved either.<sup>132</sup> Musin compared this type of conductor to the traffic controller who shows direction on where the traffic should move, but does it without emotion or expression.

Musin thought that the conductor does not have to feel anything in order to conduct music properly. “The conductor enlarges the amplitude of a gesture to show enlargement of the dynamics. However, he can feel nothing, wish nothing.”<sup>133</sup> Musin compared such a conductor to the actor who gives intonation to the words without genuinely experiencing them. The words are said properly but have no deeper effect on the audience. Musin stated that, “if the conductor’s gesture has no meaning, no context, the orchestra will receive it as a formal sign, signaling only that it is needed to play with more or less power of sound.” For Musin, it is essential that the

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<sup>132</sup> Ilya Musin, *Language of Conducting Gestures* (Moskva: Muzika, 2006), 180. All information in this chapter are taken from this book. The quote will be changed when the page number is changed.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

conductor possesses a personal opinion about the music; the conductor must live the music, not simply transmit what is written in the score.

Another case in which musicians do not respond to the conductor occurs when the conductor is overusing gestures to impress the audience. Musin pointed out how easy it is to stop showing the music and start showing one's self while conducting. He said, "instead of striving to express the deepness of the musical context, conductor starts showing his feelings. He allows exaggerated mimic, artificial pose, etc., which produces non- artistic impression."<sup>134</sup> Neither orchestra nor the audience finds this type of conducting expressive or impressive. The conductor's motions can be elegant and beautiful but fail to have purpose and meaning.

### **Detailed and General Conducting**

Musin cited another categorization of conducting technique. He believed that the technique could either be detailed or general. There are conductors who need more gestures to express their understanding of music, as well as conductors who use lesser gestures to communicate understanding. Where one conductor needs gestures of greater amplitude, another may need small and concentrated gestures. "More perfect the technique of a conductor, in bigger degree it utilizes *general* gesture."<sup>135</sup>

Musin strongly felt that the conductor needs to know every note and every nuance of the piece of music conducted. However, he recognized that it is an open question of how much of that really needs to be shown during a performance. The opinions are different. Given that there was enough rehearsal time, some think that in the performance, the conductor needs to show all the nuances. Others think exactly the opposite.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 184.

Musin was aware that both types of conducting the performance have their disadvantages. Musicians can do a lot on their own. Sometimes a performance where every detail is shown is overwhelming- the elements of the score are simply doubled, and yet the conductor does not get the needed sound. Another type of conducting limits gestures to showing tempo and dynamics and can be unproductive. Musin believed that there is no orchestral musician who plays all the nuances by themselves without the support of the conductor.

Musin concluded that, “the orchestra plays what is in parts, and the conductor shows what is not in the score but needs to be understood.” In Musin’s opinion the conductor needs to show many elements in order to convey deep understanding of the music. Most important for the conductor, in Musin’s opinion, is to show meaningful connections between notes, phrases, motives, and to show understanding of the musical form, as well as the logical unfolding of its musical structure. The goal of the conducting student should not be detailed or general conducting rather meaningful, expressive understanding and communication of musical ideas.<sup>136</sup>

### **The Communication between the Conductor and Orchestra**

Musin remarked that the language of conducting is defined essentially by the communication between the conductor and the orchestra. This communication needs to be mutual; “it is not a *monologue* it is a *dialogue*.”<sup>137</sup> Musin thought that young conductors sometimes forget this fact, conducting “for themselves” and not to the orchestra. Their gestures “illustrate” the music rather than suggest the musical context. The conductor needs to fulfill two basic requirements for their language to be understood by the orchestra. First, the gestures need to be passionate and active. Secondly, they need to address players. From the first preparation to

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 187.

the last note of the piece, the conductor needs to convey musical ideas with gesture, mimic, and body language.<sup>138</sup>

### **The Perception of the Musicians in the Orchestra**

Musin established his ideas of conducting language based on his theories about the nature of gestures and laws under which they work. In this section of the book, Musin asked why it is that musicians understand the conductor's language of gestures, and how much of the language that they actually understand.<sup>139</sup> He believed that the answer to this question rests in the formula of conducting gestures. "Every musician reacts to the conductor's gestures differently based on their performance culture." Musicians learn about the conductor's gestures during rehearsals and performances. Musicians begin to understand further the language when the gesture is followed with an explanation of what is needed in the specific section.

Some elements of the conducting language such as tempo, dynamics, power, and sharpness of a gesture are understood by any musician. Other elements such as direction of the musical phrase and emotional content of the music can only be understood if the level of musicianship is satisfying.<sup>140</sup>

The conductor needs to have imagination and vision to be able to discover those associative gestures that can be used and prove meaningful for the musicians. The conductor's entire education should be devoted to finding these gestures and associations. This is what makes conducting difficult and complex.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 193.

## **The “Intonation” of the Conducting Gesture**

Musin compared the intonation of gestures to the intonation of words. Most of the time, we do not intend to give intonation to the words that we speak. “We simply want to express our emotional attitude towards what we talk about, and our voice responds to that wish.”<sup>142</sup> Similarly, the conductor- while mastering his language of gestures- does not concentrate on the intonation of gestures but on how to express the emotional context of the music. Musin said that very often, expressive gestures are added to our words to enforce the meaning of the words spoken.

Gestures lacking intonation are also lacking expressiveness. The conductor needs to sense the emotional meaning of the music in order to be able to give his or her gesture the proper “intonation.”<sup>143</sup> Additionally, the conductor needs to embody and live the music, just as an actor does. The actor compares the intonation of the words in order to select the ones with the most meaning. The conductor needs to use the method of comparison and find the right intonation of the gesture.<sup>144</sup>

## **Imaginative Conducting**

Musin once again used the comparison between our words and music in regard to our imagination’s role in conducting. When we begin to speak a sentence, we already have in our minds the meaning of that sentence. All of the words in the sentence express that meaning and support the upfront, decided “intonation.”<sup>145</sup> In the same way, the conductor must have a decisive meaning of the music in order to be able to transmit it to the musicians. When beginning

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 200.

the transmission of this meaning with expressive gestures, the conductor needs to already completely embrace it and “from the beginning feel the point of arrival to which he or she will lead the phrase.”

Musin believed that, from the first measure, the conductor has to portray the character of the piece. Likewise, both the performers and the audience need to be drawn into the music’s energy. “The conductor already, at the first measure, shows that he ‘picks’ the sound, starts the motion of the phrase, supports it in a state of transition through the culmination point, and finally ends it with the end of the phrase.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 199.



## CONCLUSION

Ilya Aleksandrovich Musin was an integral force in the advancement of conducting techniques in Russia, and, more recently, throughout the entire world. Musin wrote four books, three of them about conducting technique. His books contain priceless advice and information for conductors in every stage of their development. They are extremely detailed, yet comprehensible and easy to follow. This document has focused on Musin's theories and methods directly related to the variety of gestures that are possible in the conducting language.

Much is said about basic conducting rules in numerous conducting books. However, rarely has there been writing that focuses on conducting gestures as thoroughly as Musin's books. What makes Musin's method different than many other method books is his emphasis on expressive gestures and finding one's own conducting language: a language of gestures.

Musin's somewhat philosophical approach is based on intensive analysis of conducting gestures and their specific qualities. He believed that conductors could not convey musical imagery to the orchestra without possessing a satisfying "language of gestures."<sup>147</sup> This "language" includes sophisticated manual skills and suitable body language. Meaningful manual skills are necessary for developing the "feeling of the sound in hand"<sup>148</sup> important concept of Musin's method.

Musin emphasized that the conductor has no instrument. As a result, the conductor needs to draw sound from an orchestra and not only visualize ideas about a piece of music, but also he

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<sup>147</sup> Ilya Musin, *Education of a Conductor* (Leningrad: Muzika, 1987), 203.

<sup>148</sup> Ilya Musin, *Language of Conducting Gestures* (Moskva: Muzika, 2006), 132.

needs to communicate those ideas to the players. The conductor actually gives the sound to the orchestra by way of expressive gestures. Simply illustrating the music with gestures that are learned or copied from other conductors (common for young conductors who practice at home without the orchestra) is not enough. The conductor's duty is to communicate the unique definitions of a musical work to the orchestra rather than using empty gestures that lack a true feeling and comprehension of the music itself.<sup>149</sup>

The conductor's gestures should freely deliver musical ideas with all of their expressive qualities and characteristics. A variety of "expressive gestures"<sup>150</sup> are available to the conductor, and they can be used for the very purpose of communicating musical ideas to the orchestra. Musin stressed that a rich imagination and sense of fantasy are important skills that the conductor needs in order to be able to find a correlation between the "shape of the music"<sup>151</sup> and the "shape of the gesture."<sup>152</sup> In addition, the conductor needs to achieve a deeper understanding of a piece by means of comparison. The conductor constantly compares different ways of performing a single phrase of music, as well as what modification is made in terms of expression. In Musin's opinion, this process of studying the score, which helps one to learn differences, similarities, and characteristics of musical phrases, is proven to be essential when trying to find the most effective expressive gestures.<sup>153</sup>

Musin believed that the conductor should have many different gestures available for expressing a single phrase of music. According to Musin, the palette of a conductor's gestures is drawn from life experiences. It can range from expressing the texture of music (ways of beating

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

the time, articulation, and phrasing) to conveying ideas about the movement of music (pushing, applying pressure, stretching, and other types of movements that demonstrate sensations of lightness, heaviness, intensity, etc). Every action that helps the conductor better communicate musical emotions, such as pathos, joy, drama, or triumph, can also bring forth the deeper meaning of the music. Conductors should strive to embody all of these considerations into their gestures. The conductor needs to feel which gesture is making the phrase unique so that in the future, he/she can recognize and promptly utilize it again. Searching for the best hand expression, that unique and personal expressive gesture is probably the most difficult task in the education of a conductor.<sup>154</sup>

One of the most important concepts of Musin's method is the "feeling of the sound in hand."<sup>155</sup> In its simplest explanation it is the ability of the conductor to control every aspect of the beat. The conductor must also be able to sense the material substance of the sound, its intensity, and its texture. If the conductor shows only the beginning of the beat without controlling the sound within the single beat (the sensation of the pulse of the beat), he or she will not be able to conduct with precision and expression. Every musical phrase has its beginning, climax, and ending. A conductor supports the passing of each single beat, through the climax, and through the ending of the phrase. By carefully listening to the progression of the sound within a phrase, Musin believed that the conductor is developing not only expressive conducting tools, but he or she is also activating and shaping his own musical thinking and ideas. During this process, active musical thinking contributes to the formation of new expressive gestures. Musin

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 132.

explained that the transition of the sound through the beats within a musical phrase is similar to the real-life experience of carrying something from one point to another.<sup>156</sup>

The ability of a conductor to control the transitioning of the beats while transmitting the character, rhythm, and direction through a musical phrase defines that particular conductor's unique understanding of a work. The conductor is not just "cutting the air with his hands"<sup>157</sup> or drawing conducting diagrams. Instead, the conductor is developing the feeling of their hands as though moving through a thick material, "like the feeling of drawing your hands through water,"<sup>158</sup> which the conductor can mold according to their own musical ideas. A conductor begins to feel the music "materializing"<sup>159</sup> in their hands. This gives the conductor the possibility of transmitting through gestures the character and emotional sub-text of the music, a quality that is necessary for any performer on any instrument.

Musin strongly believed that the only gestures possessive of great meaning are those that are a direct result of one's deep understanding of the music. He discouraged students from copying their teachers. Even if the learned gesture is beautiful, in Musin's opinion, it cannot have the expressiveness of the gesture that comes from a conductor's deep and thorough search for the right gesture. Musin was not vague in his instruction regarding the discovery of one's own language. He gave very clear rules for home practicing, detailed explanations of what the musicians want to see in conductors, the types of gestures to be found, and where to search for them. Musin explained gestures that are in use, and their meaning. He made us understand that every gesture performed by a conductor means something.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

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## APPENDIX

### GUIDELINES FOR THE BEGINNING CONDUCTOR

In his last book, *Language of Conducting Gesture*, Musin summarized his thoughts about conducting technique, often in a very philosophical manner. The book speaks in general about various concepts and believes presented from the point of view of a renowned conducting pedagogue with years of experience behind him. Some elements in this book are new to his method, such as “levels of conducting technique,” which are explained thoroughly in the second chapter of this document.

This appendix looks at the last pages of *Language of Conducting Gesture*, subtitled *Guidelines for the Beginning Conductor*. In very simple words, Musin gave the beginning conductor straightforward rules for the first steps in conducting. The list of rules is very short and could be a useful tool for the young conductor who is concerned with the basic elements of conducting and building a good foundation for the expressive conducting language that needs to be developed.

The following are Musin’s guidelines:

- Initial positions of hands is opposite of the shoulders
- Conducting in the middle of the body causes the beat to smudge
- Hands should not be positioned higher than the diaphragm
- Show beats with one hand; left hand is used as an expressive tool
- Show preparatory beat with one hand; left hand shows the expression

- Breath with the preparatory beat
- Preparation for the triplet beat has circled, elliptic character
- Beginning of the fermata is directed upwards
- Tempo is confirmed and established with the preparation to the second beat of the measure
- Character of the preparatory beat should show the character of the beginning
- Time beating: transferring hands from one ictus of the measure to another
- Avoid smudged beats on the sides of the body
- Keep the same type of sensations in all stressed motions
- Last beat of the measure is inside the beating box
- Use circular motions to connect beats in legato style
- Feel the subdivisions at the rebounds of the beats (two, three, four)
- Apply duple or triple preparatory beat accordingly
- Show direction of the melodic motion to the climax of the phrase
- Feel whether the beat has steady or transitional character
- When conducting melody, “pick” the sound and “carry it over” to the end
- Support the melody in its transition from one beat to another
- Use the gesture “here” when showing the climax of the phrase
- Prolong the gesture that shows “here”
- Change time beating pattern to repetitive downward motion to show steady character of the music
- Change time beating pattern to show the transitional character of the music by beating repetitively upward; use the whole left hand gesture “here”

- Feel the weight of the sound (solo as opposed to tutti, winds, strings, etc.)
- Use gesture to show fanfare with hands up
- Use gesture for showing forte dynamics (rejoice, majestic, etc.)
- When using expressive gestures, control the precision of the time beating
- Control the rhythm by conducting separately the accompaniment and the melody
- When using expressive gestures, always listen to the rhythmic pulse in the accompaniment
- Search for the expressive conducting gestures by using the method of comparison
- Start conducting by showing the beats first and gradually adding the expressive elements
- Use expressive conducting gestures and try to convey different characters of music
- Utilize left hand as the mean of expressiveness
- Utilize various heights of beats and various parts of the arms
- Show the beginning of the beat in the higher position
- Lead the hand to the beat
- Connect beats in the measure by using circular motion
- Show the direction of the melodic motion
- “Pick” the sound and carry/support it during its transitions
- Feel the amount of sounds within one beat of the measure (duple, triple)
- Feel the “weight” of the sound by using various parts of the arm (wrist, forearm)
- Treat incomplete beats of the measure with attention (eighth notes, etc.)
- Use different gestures when addressing winds, strings, or the whole orchestra
- Use expressive gestures for dynamics (example: conduct *f* higher in the air)



- Learn the score in phases (do not forget to pay attention to the rhythm of the accompaniment)
- Support the motion of the melody with the rising hand motion
- Show the “lightness” of the sound with the upward motion
- Change the direction of the beats when showing succession of supported (heavy) sounds
- Change the direction of the beats when showing lightness of the sound
- Do not use upward preparation motion for *subito p*
- Prepare *subito p* with preparation in lowered position
- Use left hand when showing *sfz*, *subito p*
- Show the direction of the melody with gesture “here”
- Do not rush the return to tempo by accelerating tempo within one beat
- Make sure to feel evenness of the motion of the sounds within the beat
- Always use the method of comparison to learn the score and find right gestures (for rhythm, phrasing, and others)
- Always be aware of the beat
- Listen to the rhythm of the accompaniment and conduct on its foundation
- Stand tall; don’t stoop
- Mark beats of rests and long notes
- Do not scatter on sides to show entrances
- Do not “mirror” conduct
- Search for the right expressive language by using alternate conducting gestures
- Actively, persistently strive to transmit your ideas to the orchestra

- Convey to the orchestra the imaginative aspect of music: your passion
- Attention, attention, attention!!!<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ilya Musin, *Language of Conducting Gestures* (Moskva: Muzika, 2006), 226-228.