THE BEAT STOPS HERE

Lessons on and off the Podium for Today's Conductor

MARK GIBSON

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To the concertmistress of my life,
Kirstin Luise Greenlaw;
she who to this day continues
to laugh at my jokes,
and at my bowing suggestions.

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PREFACE

Many books about conducting begin with a section devoted to the physical aspects of the craft. For years I have argued that score study was the most important element of learning how to conduct, not learning gestures or how to hold a baton, so *The Beat Stops Here* begins with a series of detailed analyses of several works—score study, if you will—written from the standpoint of a conductor. These lessons are preceded by a Glossary of Conducting Gesture, which describes basic concepts of my physical approach to the craft. Part 2, in three sections, deals with the conductor in his/her role as teacher, scholar, and leader. It includes chapters about conducting, how to do and teach it, and how the conductor relates to other musicians and members of the musical community, including a few "interactive" pieces. The composer as scholar includes articles about specific works of music and about art in general.

The word "beat," referring to the physical activity, as opposed to a time division within a measure, does find its way into the text occasionally. While I am "anti-beating," it is part of what we do on the podium, even as here within I have tried to employ other vocabulary and emphasize other concepts to describe those motions we call "conducting."

Finally, this effort is a hybrid, designed for the aspiring conductor as well as for those non-musicians who are interested in understanding conducting beyond the podium gesticulation they observe weekly at concerts. Conducting is as much about waving one's arms as golf is, which is to say, not as much as people think. Both are highly disciplined kinetic activities whose physical manifestations—a beat, a swing—conceal an abundance of subtle movement, both with the body and the mind. For the conductor, there are the added difficulties of knowing something about the entirety of Western cultural history, looking in the composer's soul, and grappling with the singer's psyche, but then again, we don't have to suffer the embarrassment of plowing our way out of a sand trap or fishing our ball out of the pond.

FOREWORD

On Conducting and Teaching

For about twenty years now, I have been teaching conducting to students from around the globe. Some of my students have been successful in music; some have left. Some now work with professional orchestras, some at universities. Some work in opera houses, some with choirs. Some have won competitions, some tour with Broadway shows. Some got on well with me, others had a difficult time; all of them studied conducting toward the end of making music, seeking a career in music, if not necessarily on the podium. They are, collectively, the bravest, the brightest and simply the best people, and it is to them I commit this book.

Those who came to study with me at the College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati didn't really know what they were getting into; few of them understood much about conducting beyond beating patterns, much less about the functioning of an orchestra or opera house, the design and trajectory of a career, or of a life on the podium. They came to study and earn degrees in a craft with a teacher who had limited formal training and whose only degrees are in piano. Not all my students grasped or processed the implicit irony of that equation. Yet they all left knowing more about conducting than when they entered; they left changed as musicians, as conductors, and mostly, as men and women.

Truth in Advertising

Recent marketing strategies at the University of Cincinnati have included phrases such as "The Power Behind Your Dreams," and "All Dreams Are Welcome." I often joke that, for those who come to my class, they actually should be, "Where Your Dreams Come to Die," or "Where Your Dreams Become Nightmares." Or maybe we should just quote Dante: "Abandon hope. . . ." Students come to study conducting with me much like the aspiring athlete who comes to the first practice, outfitted with shoulder pads, kneepads, and helmet, only to find that the sport they are actually learning is soccer. Or worse, badminton.

Just to make sure that a prospective student knows what "sport" s/he is trying out for, I always ask, before anything else, "Why do you want to conduct?" It has been shrewdly observed that there is no right or defensible response; no answer that will stave off, negate, or refute the questions that will follow, wherever the conversation leads. I pose those questions to challenge, not to discourage the student; to ensure that they know what sport we are going to be playing, and that they bring the right equipment. That equipment may not include, at least at first, either a baton or a metronome, any more than soccer requires a racket or badminton a helmet. The right equipment for the conducting student is, every day, a

score, any score, a pencil, preferably with a good eraser, and a mind that is willing, curious, and relentless.

The Longest Distance Between Two Points

The mind is the most important. My former student, the brilliant Chinese *maestra* Xian Zhang, put it succinctly: "The most important thing is to be smart." The sheer quantity of scores to which we refer in our two-hour conducting seminar is often daunting; before long the discussion will veer into Buddhism, period attire, painting, food, wine, forms of transit, politics. A dizzying variety of languages will be spoken until our sessions devolve into the sound of laughter, or of music, during all of which a baton may or may not appear. We will kill flies, knock on doors, toss pasta, brush dogs, throw key chains, put on Buddha face, play air violin, perform mathematical equations, tap on tables, make up lyrics, and nosh on baked goods before we ever think of lifting a baton.

There are reasons for this. First of all, the study of conducting is circuitous; there is no straight line to mastery or success, however that is defined. The "Cruel Rule"—You must do something poorly before you do it well—is already played out every day with batons in my studio and in our rehearsal rooms. Failure is a given, but out of failure comes learning and, with time, mastery. It happens not on the student's time nor on my own; it occurs on its own time. The teacher plants seeds; they sprout if and when they sprout. That said, we do not idly sit about and play games; we do not wait for snow to fall off the bamboo leaf. Mastery also comes out of work, and we work, hard. My urgency for my students comes not from impatience for them to get to the top of the conducting mountain, but out of the necessity for them to learn a system, a way of working that may be foreign to them. It may be best described from the Buddhist tradition: chop wood, carry water. Do the work, independent of whether it leads to conducting or not. You will have a baton in your hand soon enough.

Second, it is too often the case that by picking up the baton, my students will want to conduct, and too often that will mean beating. The point of the study, the chopping of wood and the carrying of water, is not the conducting, nor, obviously, learning how to beat. Beating remains, for me, the "original sin" of conducting. It would seem to be the first act of conducting, and yet soon can become the death of music-making. Before long, the conducting becomes about the beating, and soon we find ourselves again on the pitch, throwing a ball that can only reach the goal by being kicked.

The Beat Stops Here

Thus, this investigation into the craft of conducting will be called *The Beat Stops Here*. We will discuss conducting, we will not ignore the basic vocabulary of 1-2-3-4, but we will try not to employ the usual conducting "words" to translate,

communicate, or understand a composer's thought and feeling. We will look for order in pulse and harmony, but we will not confuse *Gestalt* with meaning. Nor will we assume that the meaning or effect of harmony or motive can be understood in words. If composers could have expressed what they felt in anything other than the language of organized sound we call "music," they would have written prose or poetry instead.

Our tasks, therefore, are 1) to understand intellectually how the composer speaks, that is, to understand his or her language of sound; 2) to intuit and feel what the composer is trying to say through sound; and 3) to *know* in the richest sense of the word, any given work the composer has written; in short, our task is to *study score*. Only armed with that knowledge and understanding will we then be able to communicate what we know of that work to an ensemble and to an audience, employing our bodies from head to toe to speak a nonverbal language of gesture with style and taste.

All'lavoro!—To work!

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The nature of making lists is that, while it includes, it also excludes, often inadvertently. This brief accounting hardly begins to cover those who have contributed, knowingly or unknowingly, to this collection. Unnamed, they are also acknowledged and deeply thanked.

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PART 1

Repertoire Lessons

In memory of Gustav Meier (1929–2016):

> *"There are only three things you have to do to be a conductor:*
> *Study scores, study scores, and study scores."*

Introduction to Repertoire Lessons

The following "Lessons" are detailed analyses and instructions on how to study and how to conduct specific scores. The works were chosen in part for their didactic value, in part for the opportunities they present to better understand the composer, and in part because I like them and they are useful to program. All the works are in the public domain, the orchestral material is therefore accessible and affordable, and between them are at least a dozen different concert programs. I have avoided "top ten" scores, other orchestral works about which much has already been written, and what one might consider "major" works in favor of pieces that could inform the study of larger works; lessons learned from the Brahms Tragic Overture easily apply to his symphonies, knowledge of Mahler songs is *de rigueur* in terms of understanding his symphonies, and the opera excerpts herein will serve as a valuable introduction to Verdi, Puccini, and French style. The two large works discussed, Stravinsky's *Pétrouchka* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, have been written about to one degree or another, but rarely have they been dissected in comprehensive detail.

I am often asked what score study is, what it looks like. Well, this is what score study looks like, for me. If we can agree that the best rehearsing is great conducting, then I will suggest that the greatest conducting comes from the

most intimate knowledge of the score. It is recommended to have the scores at hand while learning these lessons; standard editions are used throughout, though please note that the standard edition of the Overture to *La Cenerentola* of Rossini is corrupt; this is explained in more detail in that chapter. The lesson on Mozart Symphony No. 29 is based on the critical edition, available through Bärenreiter, while for the *Don Giovanni* sextet, I use the scrupulous Soldan/Schünemann edition from the 1940s, originally published by C. F. Peters and now available through Dover. A complete list of editions used is found in the appendices.

As one does not learn any score in a cultural/musical vacuum, I recommend having scores of other works at hand for reference; many are mentioned as they come up in the lessons themselves. Also please have Italian, German, and French dictionaries nearby, either books or online. There are many foreign terms and expressions, and I'm not going to translate them all for you; that is part of your job.

Ready to go?

A Glossary of Conducting Gesture

In the absence of beat and beat-related terminology, we have had to devise an entirely new jargon to describe gesture and musical concepts. Below is a list of terms frequently used in our classes. The list not comprehensive and is frequently amended:

Advertising: Many young conductors exaggerate the size of the upbeat; this we call "advertising." It is never necessary to exaggerate, especially in music with a steady pulse and meter, and it is downright obtrusive in *piano* passages. Inexperienced conductors regularly employ an outsized upbeat when insecure, leaping from bar line to bar line. Doing so tends to break up the phrase or line and is to be discouraged—*it doesn't pay to advertise!*

Beats generate beats: One must know when and when not to beat, and toward what purpose one is beating. Young conductors often stop the beat, which can lead to the orchestra slowing down, or losing the pulse. Forward momentum is necessary to convey the line of the music, and the orchestra wants the conductor to show the direction of the phrase, while maintaining pulse. That said, overbeating is to be avoided, as in the saying, "**S/he who lives by the beat, dies by the beat**."

Bermuda triangle: The area, generally to the right of the body, shoulder-high, in which the conductor often finds his/her hand after rebounding on the diagonal off the 3rd beat in 4/4 meter, or off the 2nd beat in 3/4. Viewed from the side, the orchestra (especially the 1st violin section) has little or no idea what part of the bar they are in when the hand is up here. Even those in front of the conductor are often confused, as most conductors **set up** (see below) to the right of their bodies in the first place.

Biff-boff! Our rehearsals and classes often resemble comics or a graphic novel, as we frequently use mouth sounds to depict an effect or a quality of sound we seek from the orchestra. By using mouth sounds, we are better able to simulate or find a physical gesture that corresponds to that sound, rather than just beating and then telling the orchestra what we want it to sound like. Verbal imagery can be effective as well—I often describe the sound of a Verdi *forte* chord as a "bowling ball" sound, signifying the sound of a good, resonant hard strike. Many more sounds ("*Tsaahk!*", "*Whoosh . . .*"), I make first with my mouth, then try to find a hand position or move that describes them. *Biff*!

Bob-'n'-Weave: For the frequent swaying back and forth, side to side, or the generally unfocused, unintended meandering around the podium, we borrow a boxing term. Such motion is difficult for the orchestra to follow, as the baton itself becomes a moving target. To be avoided.

Brush the dog: A term to describe centripetal motion, a counterclockwise circular gesture with the right hand that promotes legato playing. Divorced from a beat pattern, it can be effective when the meter and tempo are steady. In fact, it reinforces the notion that the orchestra doesn't need or want your beat all the time anyway; they want to know what it should sound like through your hand. It is also useful in generating *accelerando*. Used in conjunction with **Toss the pasta** (see below).

Buddha face: Images of the Buddha reveal a calm, knowing visage, engaged but not emotional, open and receptive but not active. I encourage my students to channel that image when they are tempted to grimace, smile, or otherwise overtly express emotion on the podium that might better be communicated through hand/arm gesture. Consider the expression you make when you are reading a book; do you get so carried away that you start making faces at the book? Making faces in front of the orchestra distracts them and limits your ability to listen to what they are actually playing.

Buddha hand: Considering many statues of the Buddha, one sees the two hands in different positions; the left below the right, palm up and open, the right often in a vertical position, fingers slightly bent and separated, index finger often raised as if to emphasize a point. I equate this basic image with an effective position for the hands while conducting. It is crucial, in my experience, to deploy the hands in different, asymmetrical positions—left hand above or below the right, left hand in front of or behind the right, the palms facing opposite directions—in order to avoid parallel (mirror) conducting. The upward pointing posture of the left hand is especially useful; it is what we use to show the orchestra that a tempo change is imminent. Who knew that the Buddha was such an excellent conducting teacher?

Car ignition: Related to the **doorknob** (see below), this describes the rapid turn of the right wrist, without vertical inflection, that can generate an immediate, crisp *subito* attack or impulse. Like the **doorknob** or **diving board** (see below),

it requires that the arm be *loose*, one of the prime difficulties for many young conductors. It could also be described as a modified finger snap.

Clapping: We do a lot of clapping in my classes. Related to **Kill the fly** (see below). Clapping promotes a loose wrist and hand, assures that the hands are in different positions, and can generate a sound that signifies solidity and resonance. It is also so affirming, clapping for oneself!

Click-free zone: I have come to believe that flicking from the wrist, while at times effective (see **Tinker Bell** below), is not really necessary in most cases. It often disrupts the pulse, especially when done in a spastic manner, and doesn't really relate to how any instrument is actually played. Often the click imposes an unintended accent on the music; in my view, it is part—but only a small part—of the toolbox at our disposal.

Cross on 2: In a four pattern, one is advised to define space on or toward the left of the body, either with the hand or with the tip of the stick. We call this "crossing on 2" and it isn't done enough. While crossing on 2, however, care must be taken to keep the baton in a constructive position (not turned sideways, for example), and one must account for the time and space needed to get back to 3. Cross on 2 applies to any meter that requires the conductor to travel left with his/her hands, including 12/8, 6/8, and passages in 8.

Cruel Rule: "You have to do something poorly before you do it well." Too often we deny this basic fact of the human learning curve. For the conductor, the cruel rule is unfortunately often in effect precisely when one is in front of the orchestra, the most inopportune time to do something poorly. Accept that it is part of one's progress on the podium, and in life, and aim, to the best of your ability, for a rapid learning curve.

Cueing: A term you will find rarely, if at all, in my teaching. I much prefer the idea of **signaling** or **picking up** (see below). Somehow, "cueing" has accrued connotations of pointing in a manner often not in the character of the music, with the sole intent of showing an entrance. It becomes personal, in the sense of communicating, "You play *now*." I encourage a different approach to welcoming and inviting members or sections of the orchestra into the community and texture of the sonority and continuum.

Dew drop: This clever name to describe a particular cutoff gesture comes from one of our fine trumpet players at CCM. We were trying to find a term for the left-hand motion (right hand usually is holding a baton) that cuts off a delicate, *piano*, chord in the winds, for instance. Holding the sound, palm up, simply draw the hand down as though one were picking a plum off of a tree, closing the thumb against the index and third finger in the process. I suppose we could have called it the "plum," but it seemed to resemble a drop of dew, as well. A very effective conducting term.

Diving board: An image used to describe an initial downward impulse (pushing away) preceding an upbeat. When diving into a pool, one doesn't just jump straight up; one flexes one's knees and presses down slightly into the board,

which generates upward momentum and elevation. In conducting, we don't just lift our hands into an upbeat; we flex our wrist slightly and press into an imaginary board (or into the palm of your upturned left hand, for practice) before springing up (in the desired tempo).

Doorknob: Turning a doorknob—either clockwise or counterclockwise—is a good way to practice forearm rotation, a useful and rarely mentioned tool in the vocabulary of conducting gesture. While turning a doorknob, there is no vertical motion in the forearm; replacing the knob with a baton, one can define horizontal space easily, generate a legato gesture, save vertical space, or simply **Fold out**. Similar to the **Key ignition**, defined below.

Door knock: Young conductors seem to have difficulty engaging their wrists while conducting; a lot of the motion seems to come straight and solely from the elbow, limiting options of expression and gesture. In order to loosen the wrist, go knock on a door (a gesture we don't normally execute from the elbow); then try to incorporate that motion into your physical gesture.

Drift: One of a handful of absolutely fundamental concepts in our vocabulary. Drifting usually describes a horizontal, nonrhythmic, noninflected motion of the hand/s, toward the center; one that gathers and focuses the orchestra and prepares an attack. Think of it relating to the gentle drifting forward of a car with automatic transmission and how helpful that is to starting a car stopped at a red light in the snow. It promotes a loose, easy attack with the bow, and the easy, organic flow of air in a wind attack. Used vertically going downward, especially in recitatives, when attacking a chord on beat two.

Easy hand: Great virtuosity somehow looks easy, and I often encourage a hand that doesn't look very busy, but which nonetheless contains all the information needed by the orchestra. Great pianists and vioinists make it look easy; so should conductors.

Flat stick: The angle of the baton is rarely discussed. Without a flexible, easy wrist, the baton will often point straight up when the arm is raised from the elbow; this offers the ensemble too many targets to look at—the tip of the elbow, the point where the hand grips the stick, the tip of the stick. Increasing the odds of accurate ensemble means reducing the margin of error in the gesture; using the elbow to keep the stick close to parallel with the ground gives the orchestra a single, uniform target to follow.

Fold out: A frequently employed term. "Fold out" refers to the clockwise rotation of the right forearm that facilitates travel to the right side of the body. It helps define physical space and can also be used to generate subtle *pizzicati* and chord changes in recitative. Often accompanied in my mind with a gentle "Boof" or "Boff."

Gestalt: I use this as a verb to describe the activity of organizing phrases and defining patterns in score study. There is, apart from John Cage, little or no randomness in composition. Every composer has a way of organizing a score; the conductor is charged with identifying that structure. For example,

listening to a random sequence of steady pulses, the mind will automatically organize those pulses into groups of 2, 3, or 4. Using this same concept, we organize phrases into group of 2, 3, or 4 bars by referencing harmonic motion, orchestration details, and texture changes.

Go to: Although we often study "in a box," seated at a desk or elsewhere, looking down at a score, on the podium we must **travel** (see below) and physically "go to" whatever section or individual needs or wants attention at any given moment in the score. All too often, the inexperienced conductor waves his/her arms in the general space right in front of them, so I urge them to "go to" the 1st violins, or to the horns, or violas. Rarely do we go to the brass, following Richard Strauss's famous dictum.

Graphing: I'm certainly not the first to recommend graphing out scores. I like to use graph paper in little spiral-bound notebooks I find in Europe. Everyone has his/her own method. I usually start with basics at the top of the page, name of composition, date, key, opus, instrumentation. Number of bars in the piece or movement. Then I start writing in phrase lengths, period lengths, harmonic activity, then fill out instrumental detail, using abbreviations of instruments, arrows, whatever I can use graphically to help me remember and understand. Ultimately, I try to create a document that is a complete shorthand version of the score. The act of writing itself reinforces one's knowledge of the score.

Harmony means something: An axiom in our class. While one cannot quantitatively define what harmony means (though many have tried to assign color to pitch and emotional meaning to motive), we do know that we experience an emotional effect when Puccini harmonizes a tune in a particular way, when Richard Strauss moves from major I to minor vi, or when Beethoven uses 3rd relationships, as in the 4th Piano Concerto, when he turns the 3rd of the G-major triad—B—into the tonic to begin the first orchestral *tutti* section. The listener is affected by harmonization in context, and it influences our conducting.

Helium hand: A gesture and an expression that literally is popping up more and more in our work. It describes an easy, slow, vertical, noninflected rising of the left arm and hand in preparation for a signal (often simply the opening of the hand or raising of a finger) for an entrance in horns or other winds. Too often we assume that a wind player isn't listening to the surrounding sound environment preceding an entrance and needs a pointed **cue** at the precise moment of attack. I have found that most horn players, for example, prefer a more general gesture; they usually know when to come in and welcome a less aggressive invitation to play.

Hinge bar: In score study while analyzing phrase length structure, often one encounters a bar that seems to function as a vamp bar or an extra bar between two discrete phrases; this I call a "hinge," like the hinge on a door that connects it to the frame. One of the descriptive tools we use to define bars that connect one idea with another.

Horizontal rebound: Conductors all too frequently fail to control or define the direction of the rebound, which generally goes straight up before the arm is committed either to the left or right, depending on the meter. Both in accompanied recitative and in mixed-meter works, this is often confusing for the orchestra. I recommend only a slight vertical rebound before moving to either side, thus sending necessary information to the orchestra more quickly, reducing the size of the beat and managing better the speed of the gesture (a larger vertical rebound demands that more distance is used to go to either side, requiring a faster arm; this by definition will distort tempo).

Information: I have found that this seemingly vague term is useful—as is **signaling**—for replacing the concept of **cueing** (see above). Rather than think in terms of telling someone when to come in, if we think rather of the information an orchestra needs to execute a passage or an entrance, we can once again get out of the box of just beating and cueing. In fact, one might look on a lot of conducting as signaling any change in the texture of the score, be it an individual line or a change in musical/textural contour.

Kill the fly: Put out your left hand, put your right hand on it, picture a fly in your left hand, raise your right hand, then bring it down and kill that fly. That is a downbeat, in my training. Conducting is about killing flies, one fly in the center, another off to either side. The downstroke is the important factor here; you can't kill a fly while pulling upward away from your hand.

L-shape: A gesture I have found very useful to **make space** (see below) for a *subito piano* effect or tempo change. Rather than immediately rebounding off the last beat of a bar, one approaches the beat laterally, stops momentarily, and rises slightly to execute the downbeat in a new tempo or dynamic level.

Make space: An expression I use in two senses: first, to describe making time as opposed to "slowing down," or making a *ritardando/rallentando*; second, to describe the act of making physical space either to inform the sound or to manipulate time.

Page turn two-step: Many young conductors step away from the music stand after turning a page or beginning a piece, requiring them to step forward again to turn the page, over and over again. In fast tempos, it is particularly distracting. This constant and awkward dance is to be avoided.

Pick up: Referring to acknowledging an entrance, an important change in instrumentation, or going to an important line in the ensemble, I urge a conductor to "pick up" that player or section as s/he travels through the orchestra and score.

Pivot bar: Similar to a **hinge bar** (see above), this term describes a bar that seems to function both as the last bar of a phrase and the first bar of the next phrase. Great composers often write in irregular or ambiguous phrase lengths; that ambiguity is central to maintaining interest and flow in the score.

Plug into: My teacher used this expression when getting us to connect to the pulse in the bass line, or to wherever the motor was present in the orchestra.

The idea is to set up the tempo and really *listen* to the section playing the pulse. Often the motor is in the bass line, or is a steady 16th-note pulse (Egmont Overture) in the middle strings. In Tchaikovsky, we plug into the triplet 8ths of *Romeo and Juliet,* or the 2nd movement of his 5th Symphony.

Pulse train: A term used to get conductors to listen to pulse in their heads and feel it in their bodies *before* starting a piece. Picture an action movie in which someone is trying to get on a moving train; s/he doesn't and can't just jump on the train while standing still. The protagonist runs in the direction of the train, gets as much speed going as s/he can, and then goes for it. In conducting, I define pulse units with my mouth by articulating subdivisions and when I feel comfortable with the pulse, I conclude my process of setting up and give a preparatory beat.

Ride the basses! We often say that the bass line isn't the sexy part of conducting, but it is often the motor, often the defining factor of pitch (establishing harmony) and frequently establishes the dynamic level of the ensemble. Note lengths in the bass line affect the timbre and articulation of the whole group. Bass and cello *pizzicati* often articulate major structural events in a work, and the bass line is crucial for maintaining tempo in fast passages, either keeping the orchestra from rushing or serving as the engine of an accelerando. Ride the basses!

Rotation: A word we use in reference to arms, particularly forearms. Many conductors deploy the right arm pointed straight out, hand gripping the stick, palm down, and move only laterally. This is a very limited approach to conducting, posited on the belief that the hand position should never change, but it tends to make crossing the body difficult, limits the flexibility of the wrist, and doesn't really inform sound. Rotation describes the motion one would use when opening a door (see **Doorknob** above); in conducting, care must be taken when rotating the forearm with the position of the baton in relation to the hand and arm, use a **flat stick** (see above).

Save vertical space: I often refer to conducting as Newtonian, in the sense that what goes up, must come down. What we don't discuss or acknowledge is that there are many ways to go up, with the hand, the wrist, the forearm, the shoulder, even with the knees. That said, once the hand, the arm, the stick, or the tip of the stick is elevated, there really is only one place for it to go; it must descend. I encourage a much more nuanced idea of what rebounding looks like, as once the stick and arm go up, the conductor loses influence over both sound and tempo (see **Trampoline** below).

Set up: Refers to what one does before starting the actions of conducting. Specifically, how does one stand, how does one raise one's hand/s and in what hand position does one begin, what is one's foot position, at whom does one look, and how does one visually address the ensemble? What are the appropriate motions involved in starting an orchestra? Regarding one's human interaction in leading the ensemble, what does one say, if anything, to

the group before conducting, how does one address the concertmaster, how does the initial tuning occur? Rehearsals and conducting are defined by the set up, just like a runner preparing to start a race.

S/he who lives by the beat, dies by the beat: A proverb that describes the dangers of beating for the sake of beating. One of the most difficult things to grasp is precisely when we are beating for ourselves—be it to reinforce our knowledge of the score or merely to look interesting—and when we are beating because the orchestra actually needs our beat. Often the momentum of continuous beating makes it more difficult to change tempo or texture, and after a while the orchestra simply stops looking. The flip side of the coin is "**Beats generate beats**."

Signaling: Rather than talk about **cues**, I refer to signals. A signal can be a glance, a turn of the head, a **fold out** (see above), a raised finger, or any other physical gesture, subtle or overt, that gets the orchestra's attention, influences sound, or encourages an entrance.

Small hand: Describing the subtle, disciplined use of the hands, close to the body, facilitating active listening. We say, the bigger the beat, the smaller the listening.

Stir the soup: Related to **tossing the pasta** (below) and **brushing the dog** (above). It also describes a circular motion, but is flat (not vertical) and uses space in front of the body, simulating the motion of stirring soup with a spoon. The hand is often pointed down; if "stirring" with the right, be sure the stick is in a useful position. Again, this gesture promotes legato, connecting phrases and sounds.

Surfing the orchestra: Once pulse is established, the piece begun, and the music is going, I encourage the conductor to ride on the sound, by which I mean that the conductor is free to move from section to section, listening to the sound, letting go of the beat as one can. In full flow, the conductor doesn't necessarily lead the orchestra, nor follow it, but goes *with* it, as the surfer goes *with* the waves and the wind.

Teaching from the podium: I use this expression to discourage the kind of conducting that aims to be "clear" through beating. Similar to **advertising** (see above), this kind of beating is often accompanied by a facial expression that says, "Come on, let's get this together: *Look at me*!" There is a time to conduct in a fashion that promotes good mechanics in the orchestra, and there are rehearsal techniques that can be used to promote better ensemble. But overtly telegraphing beats is often at odds with communicating the intent of the score.

Tinker Bell: A recent addition to the glossary, it describes a particular signal that looks very much like a fairy—Tinker Bell, in this case—pointing her wand at something or someone and casting a spell with the flick of her wrist. Just a gesture, but a useful one. Related to the **click**, which as mentioned above can be a useful part of one's vocabulary, as long as one's entire vocabulary of gesture is not built around it.

Toss the pasta: Like **brush the dog** (see above), but centrifugal, going in a clockwise direction. Round gestures promote connected playing and generate flow. Pasta tossing is a vertically inflected gesture, as opposed to **stirring the soup** (see above), which is executed horizontally.

Trampoline: What goes up must come down, as we have noted. The conductor who simply rebounds vertically has very few options. Once the hand is up in the air, it can no longer influence sound, nor can it shape line or adjust tempo. All it can do, as one does on a trampoline, is come down again, and like bouncing on the trampoline, all one can do after coming down is bounce up again. To be avoided.

Traveling: A major concept in our approach to craft. The conductor travels with eyes, hands, or body, around and through the orchestra to where the sound is or needs to go, where the pulse is, where an important entrance needs to be shared, and where other information is desired or needed. The music never stays in one place; it will move, circularly, throughout the ensemble. As we say, you go where the sound takes you.

Two (three) adjectives: Another fundamental aspect of our approach to craft. A clear upbeat is not enough; the orchestra wants to know the spirit (*Geist*) of the work, not merely how loud, soft, fast, or slow it is. I encourage students to think of adjectives that accurately describe the spirit of any given passage; their physical gesture or countenance should accurately communicate that spirit without necessarily having to say the word to the ensemble.

Yee-arr-sanh-suh: 1-2-3-4 in Mandarin. It describes the relatively empty act of just "clear" beating in 4; what we try to avoid.

Your mouth conducts your hands: This adage, appearing near the very end of our glossary, is at the very forefront of our philosophy. Through singing a phrase, our mouths can make our hands more legato. By double or triple tonguing, we improve our inner pulse, discipline both the size of our gesture and the rhythmic accuracy thereof. It is the single most important concept in our approach to the craft.

Zig-zag: Both a score study tool and a manner of moving through the orchestra while conducting, this concept, promoted by my teacher, Gustav Meier, describes the traveling one does while going through the score, identifying potential conducting/ensemble concerns, instruments that enter after long rests, important musical lines, etc.

1

Overture

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*, Op. 43 (1801)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

Prometheus—he who stole fire from the gods—is brilliantly depicted in sound by Beethoven at the outset of this fabulous overture; specifically, the act of generating fire. One of the most striking openings in the repertoire, the work begins with a series of *ff* chords, marked *staccato*. A descending chromatic bass line underlies the harmonic progression C4-2, F6, A♭ +6, G5-3. The opening chord reminds us of bar 1 of the 1st Symphony, which also begins with a C dominant chord, but while the symphony opens tentatively (or perhaps impishly), the overture starts with a shout. Or not a shout; in my view, the opening bars depict Prometheus himself, or even Beethoven, attempting to create fire by striking two rocks against each other. I want these chords to sound just like that: two rocks being struck together with force, shocking, violent. The first chord doesn't succeed in generating fire; the 4-2 inversion might even suggest that Prometheus has been trying for a while, before we actually hear the first strike.

Almost as momentous as the chord itself is the silence that follows. Audiences were not unaccustomed to loud, even startling, introductory chords or sound events; composers wrote them (if for no other reason) to get the public's attention. But the lengthy silence that follows—two full beats in *Adagio* tempo—is certainly unusual, if not unique.

The 4-2 inversion leaves little option for the next sound event; the magnetic pull of the outer voices insists on a 1st inversion chord. The listener does not yet know whether it will be a major or minor tonality. As in the first symphony, C acts as a dominant function, resolving to F major, but once again, the F6 chord itself demands resolution, or extension. Following our metaphor, the second chord seems to result in a spark. The composer waits, observes, looks for smoke during the second long pause before bar 3. As there is not yet smoke, he will try again.

There is nothing, neither precedent nor reason, to suggest that the next sound event would be an augmented 6 chord. What might Beethoven have written instead; what might his "Plan B" have been? Sit down at the piano and try out some alternatives. The next chord could just as well have been G major 5-3; it would have led the listener in another, perfectly legitimate, musical/narrative direction. Or F major 6 could have gone to F minor 6, the bass descending. This would be effective; the juxtaposition of major and minor chords would have deep resonance. Or even iterating the F chord, in root position, could have led to something of import.

But Beethoven's choice, the thrice-repeated A♭ +6 chord, is uniquely compelling, especially when the 1st violins leap upward from F♯ to C on beat 2. Not only is the top C the highest string pitch we have heard so far, the tritone leap up adds an unmistakable emotional *frisson;* again, Beethoven did not *need* to go up to C. No voice-leading rules would have been violated had he chosen to stay on the F♯ and resolve upward to G. But the harmonic/dramatic effect is enhanced by the leap; furthermore, the C–B resolution will have implications as the work progresses. By the time we arrive at G dominant in bar 4, a *sforzato fermata* on beat 2, we aurally "see" smoke, and where there is smoke. . . .

The point of my *Plan B* game is this: Harmony means *something,* as does melodic design. Any of the alternatives I proposed could have gone on in effective, even Beethovenian, directions. All were characteristic of his language and style. But only his choices had the meaning he intended, a meaning that cannot be described in words. The magnetic pull of the outer voices—particularly that of the descending chromatic bass line, suggests his insistent narrative, which I have chosen to interpret as a metaphor for the generation of fire. In bar 5, we hear the smoke rising, in the form of a tune emerging, *pp,* in the oboes, horns, 2nd violins, and violas. On a tangent: I draw a connection between this melody and a phrase from Mephistofeles's serenade in Gounod's *Faust,* "*N'ouvre ta porte, ma belle*. . . ." (see Example 1.1). Surely Gounod didn't deliberately borrow the tune—so many little ideas resemble each other in music—but one takes one's points of reference where one finds them. Similarly, the conclusion of the phrase—E–A–G–F–E–D–C–B—recalls the end of a phrase from Mozart's aria "*Un'aura amorosa*" (from *Così fan tutte*, K. 588, 1790) on the words ". . . *cor porgerà*" (see Example 1.2). No direct connection need be drawn, just a reminder that these 12 pitches in a scale coincide with some frequency, even over centuries, sometimes intentionally, more often by chance.