

THE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
FOR
MUSICIANS, INC.

**Leading to the
Leadership Program for Musicians Certificate of Church Music**

A program of

The Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Presbyterian Association of Musicians

and

United Church of Christ Musicians Association

Principals of Choral Leadership

by

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(To see the full document you may purchase the course through

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Part 1: Basic Conducting for the Church Musician

Introduction to Choral Conducting for the Church Musician

This course is designed to introduce students to the basic skills of choral conducting. It is by no means comprehensive but will serve to give students the tools for further study and practice. It is recommended that, whenever possible, these skills be reinforced through use in other courses where practicable or desirable. Students whose primary track is vocal may wish to engage in private conducting study as a part of the requirements for this certificate.

Conducting in class is a major requirement of this course. A portion of each class is designed as a masterclass so that students receive individual conducting opportunity and constructive critique from the instructor. Students are expected to have assignments well prepared each week. In the event that there are more than 10 students in the class, more emphasis will need to be placed on conducting as a group, rather than individual conducting and critique. Because of the brevity of this course, there will be little or no work in score preparation; if the student is interested in this topic, it should be covered in private sessions.

Each session begins with technique review followed by a group session using the conducting drill. Daily practice of this drill by students is invaluable in becoming facile with not only the beat patterns themselves, as well as moving from one pattern to the other. It is important to allow time for students to demonstrate the assignment for each session. It is also vital that they have time to practice the new skills and ask questions. In all sessions, the assignment demonstration is encouraged first to reduce anxiety and allow for maximum attention to the new skills, however the teacher may determine the best way to present the material in this course with regard to the particular local circumstances. It is possible to devote five weeks solely to conducting and the remaining five weeks to vocal production; the teacher also has the option to combine both parts of this course, spending half the class session dealing with conducting and the other half with vocal techniques.

Required text

This course may be taught without a text, provided the examples in this syllabus are provided to the student.

Strategy:

A graphic organizer may be developed with the various diagrams incomplete to allow the participants to draw them as demonstrated by the instructor.

Required anthems

Billings, William. *The Lord Is Risen Indeed*. Concordia 98-3273

Buxtehude, Dietrich. *My Jesus Is My Lasting Joy*. H.W. Gray GCMR 02727

Roberts, William Bradley. *In All These You Welcomed Me*. Augsburg Fortress 11-10661

Recommended reading

Busch, Brian. *The Complete Choral Conductor, Gesture and Method*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1984.

- Jordan, James. *Evoking Sound, Fundamentals of Choral Conducting and Rehearsing*. Chicago: GIA, 1996.
- Warland, Dale. *Attention to Detail: A Choral Conductor's Guide*. Northfield, MN: American Choral Catalog, 1994. [videotape]
- Webb, Guy, ed. *Up Front!* Boston: E. C. Schirmer, 1993.

Outline for Session 1

Introduction to Basic Technique

- A. The primary responsibilities of a conductor
 - 1. Knowledge, understanding, musicianship
 - 2. Beginning and ending
 - 3. Developing an inner clock—keeping a steady beat
- B. How does a conductor communicate?
 - 1. Body language
 - 2. Facial expression
 - 3. Movement
- C. Preliminary considerations
 - 1. Posture
 - 2. Breath
- D. Basic Beat patterns
 - 1. Anatomy of a beat
 - a. ictus
 - b. preparation
 - c. rebound
 - 2. Patterns in 2, 3 and 4
- E. Assignment for Session 2

Standards and Benchmarks

Standard 1:1 Participant will know and be able to explain the responsibilities of a conductor.

Benchmark 1.1 Participant will list and explain the 3 primary conducting responsibilities either verbally or on paper.

Standard 1:2 Participant will understand and demonstrate correctly the beat patterns of 2, 3 and 4.

Benchmark 2.1 Participant will be able to draw all parts of each beat pattern.

Benchmark 2.2 Participant will accurately conduct each beat pattern.

Session 1

Introduction to Basic Technique

A. The primary responsibilities of a conductor

It is the task of the conductor to be the musical interpreter for the musicians he or she is conducting. In order to perform this responsibility, one must know all one can about the music to be performed, including such things as:

- Formal and harmonic analysis

- Phrase construction

- Text interpretation

- Portions that present a particular performance difficulty

- Stylistic interpretations, including dynamics, breathing

- Pertinent background material relating to the source or circumstances of the composition.

This means that a conductor must spend as much time (or more) in score study and preparation as she or he would in preparing a piece for public performance as an organist or singer. One cannot know enough about the score one will conduct. To be most effective, one should memorize as much of the music as is possible.

Secondly, it is the primary responsibility of the conductor to start and stop the music. While these two things may seem to be self-evident and simplistic, they are of utmost importance. Enabling a group of musicians to begin a piece of music together and *in the proper tempo* is a skill that the conductor must rehearse often.

Thirdly, it is imperative that every conductor develop an “inner clock.” The ability to maintain a steady tempo is paramount to the successful of interpretation and performance of any piece of music. Frequent score study using a metronome should be a part of every conductor’s daily practice time.

Strategy:

Have participants turn to a partner (TTYD) and in 1 minute tell each other the 3 responsibilities of a conductor. (30 seconds each).

During this course, we will spend time working on the second and third responsibilities. While score preparation is of utmost importance to the success of any performance, there will not be time in this course to pursue this topic.

B. How does a conductor communicate?

Communication of information happens in a variety of ways. Most of us consider language, whether spoken or written, as our primary means of transmitting information. As musicians, we know that music is a powerful communicator of spiritual and emotional truth. For the conductor, the language of the body becomes primary. Whether it is facial expression or the way in which we move and use gesture, the language that the carriage and motion of the body speaks is a

mirror which reflects to the choir the nuance, style, and interpretation of the music they are singing.

C. Preliminary considerations

Just as proper **posture** is the basic first step for healthy use of the voice, so proper posture is a primary issue in enabling the conductor to use the language of the body effectively. To achieve the correct posture, think of yourself as a puppet on a string.

The string is attached to the crown of the head. As you are suspended by that string:

The crown of the head is high.

The chin is slightly off the chest.

The spine is elongated, making you feel tall.

The chest is raised; feel your shoulders expand outward from the center of your back.

Your arms are relaxed at your sides while your legs should feel released away from your pelvis and should firmly support your weight without tension.

Once you have assumed this relaxed position, your body is prepared to breathe and move freely.

Strategy:

Participants do a round robin stick drawing where each in order contributes the next aspect of correct posture. Allow 1 minute for the activity.

It is imperative to learn to use the breath properly, both as a means to feed and relax your own body and as a primary form of communication with your choir. Practice letting the air flow into your body by releasing the abdominal muscles and pelvic floor and letting your body expand as though it were a balloon. Exhale freely, emptying the lungs completely and inhaling again. Using this free, deep breathing is important both to keep the body relaxed while conducting and as a model of breathing for your choir.

D. Basic Beat Patterns

Conducting involves putting together a succession of movements in a manner that communicates accurately meter, tempo, and style. Each beat consists of three parts which, when used consecutively in a pattern, provides clear direction to the performers.

The most important part of a beat is the **ictus**, the point at which the beat begins; the point at which the breath is released and sound begins. Another way of describing the ictus is the point at which the energy of the sound is released. A clear ictus which consistently falls on the same imaginary line or plane provides a reliable indication of the tempo. The ictus is often referred to as the point of the beat. If it is not regular and clear, the beat pattern will not elicit clean attacks or truly metrical singing from the group.

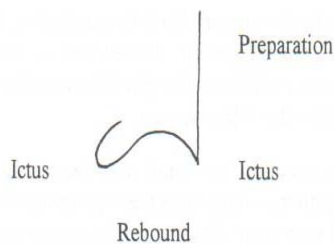
The **preparation** (not to be confused with preparatory beat) is that portion of the beat that precedes the ictus. The preparation must give a clear indication of tempo; therefore, it must have a definite duration. The preparation begins with the ictus of the previous beat and ends at the

ictus of the beat it prepares. For example, in 4/4 time, the preparation of beat three begins at the point of beat two and ends with the ictus of beat three.

The **rebound** is that portion of the beat immediately following the ictus. It is important to have a full rebound or there will be little or no release of energy. This is analogous to many sports. If one stopped swinging a bat or golf club at the point of contact with the ball, the ball would not travel nearly as far as when one follows through the swing. The rebound of the beat functions in the same way as the follow through of the swing—only then is there an optimum release of energy and a continuity of movement to the next beat.

Strategy:

Have each participant complete the drawing as demonstrated by the instructor using white board or easel paper.



A full metrical beat is the length of time from one ictus to the next. Note that the rebound of a beat is also the preparation of the next beat. It will become increasingly important to understand this dual function as we continue our study of conducting technique.

A beat pattern is derived when one combines beats together consecutively in a sequence of movements that represents a particular meter. The most common meters are 2, 3, and 4. The following diagrams show the basic conducting patterns used for these meters; note that they may be altered slightly depending on tempo, phrasing, articulation, or style. It is important that a conductor master these patterns so that they become an automatic response to a meter. Only when this happens is a conductor freed to concentrate on conducting the music itself and not the beat.

Strategy:

Have each participant draw each pattern following the example of the instructor. Allow 30 seconds for them to TYP and analyze each others replication of the patterns.

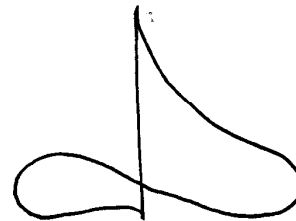
2-beat pattern



3-beat pattern



4-beat pattern



Note that the ictus of all beats in a pattern with the exception of the final one comes on the same horizontal plane. This plane is an imaginary line, usually at or just below the waist. To find it, stand straight with your arms straight down at your sides. Bend your right arm at the elbow until your hand points upward. Now let your hand drop naturally until your arm forms a 90-degree

angle at the elbow; your hand should be at or near your elbow. This is the plane on which the ictus of your beat should fall. Any lower, and your choir will not see it and the ictus will lose energy; any higher and your choir will not fully release their energy and their singing will become tight.

Keeping the center of conducting low is often difficult for people who are short in stature. This problem is easily rectified by the use of a podium. Organists who are used to conducting from the console with their hand high also tend to have difficulty keeping the ictus low; for them this is a matter of practice.

The right hand should be the primary hand for conducting; it is the hand that is always keeping the tempo within the beat pattern. The left hand will be used to mirror the right hand on occasion; at other times it will be used to give additional directions. We will discuss more about the role of the left hand in a later session.

Practice these patterns over and over until they become automatic. If you are having difficulty, enlarge the patterns onto a large piece of newsprint or brown paper and practice tracing the pattern with your hand. As you practice, use the arm in a large free motion. It is helpful for conductors to warm-up in much the same way any musician or athlete does. Neck and arm rolls, shoulder lifts, and general stretching exercises, especially those for the arms and upper torso, are most helpful in freeing the body for relaxed but energetic conducting. When practicing your conducting, use a free, moderate-size motion that involves the whole arm moving from the shoulder. Keep the pattern of the beat between the horizontal plane of ictus and your chin. Keeping your shoulder at a normal position will help keep your conducting pattern from becoming too high and ensure that the ictus of the beat remains on your horizontal plane. For learning purposes, place the thumb and index finger of your right hand together at the finger tips. Keep the rest of the fingers relaxed and gently curved.

Strategy:

1. Practice each pattern as a group standing in rows all facing the same direction. Be prepared to correct inaccurate patterns immediately. It can be helpful to have music with each beat pattern in the background, or to audibly count off the beats.

2. Have them TTYP and practice for each other the three beat patterns. Do NOT have them conduct at the same time facing each other. Allow as much time as necessary to correct any problems and empower success.

E. Assignment for Session 2

Always practice in front of a mirror—it is a conductor's best friend.

1. Practice each of the primary beat patterns until you feel comfortable executing each one.

2. Practice the following conducting drills. Each uses the primary beat patterns consecutively; there should be no break between patterns. Be careful to keep the beat absolutely steady. Count aloud while conducting as follows: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &. M.M. quarter = 60 is a good learning tempo. (Note: this is an important part of the exercise; it is designed to connect motion with a steady beat; subdividing the beat helps to keep from rushing.) It would be helpful to practice using a metronome.

Pattern:	1	2	3	4	3	2	1
No. of repetitions	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
	4	3	2	1	4	3	2

Pattern:	1	3	4	2	1
No. of repetitions	4	4	4	4	4
	4	3	2	1	4

Note: When conducting this drill as a group, it is helpful if one person is assigned to count aloud so that the group maintains a steady tempo. It might also be helpful if another person is assigned to call the meter changes one or two beats before they occur.

3. Choose one hymn in each of the following meters: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4. Be prepared to conduct each for the next class. Select hymns that begin on a downbeat.