



THE CONFIDENT CONDUCTOR

Conducting Tips and Techniques

STATE OPERA
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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2020

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● **CONDUCTOR**

In 2020 State Opera South Australia is excited to invite teachers to develop their conducting skills. Designed specifically for primary and high school teachers who are relatively new to music ensemble leadership, this booklet, in conjunction with workshops will deliver basic conducting skills and techniques that can be used across choral, band, instrumental ensemble and classroom music groups.

Whether you have been asked to conduct the choir at assembly, or lead the weekly recorder ensemble, this booklet will give you some golden rules and conducting tips and techniques to help you along the way.

CONDUCTING TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

Golden Rule: Your BREATH is the music. Your BREATH affects your body, which is your tool, and your conduit for information. Your BREATH is the clearest indicator of tempo, and emotion.



Things to remember when conducting a group

- Posture**
- Stand tall – be confident!
 - Legs at shoulder width apart – feel stable
 - Don't move the upper body too much – hands and arms should do the work
 - Don't bend the knees!

- Eye contact**
- Look up from your score
 - You need to look encouraging – if you frown, they frown!
 - Include the whole ensemble, not just those at the front. Conduct the back rows.

- Planning**
- Decide in advance what to rehearse
- What are the tricky sections?
 - What needs improving? Dynamics? Ensemble? Colour? Simply getting the right notes? Be specific
 - Guess number of minutes you need on each section: you'll have to be flexible of course, but having at least an idea before you start is efficient

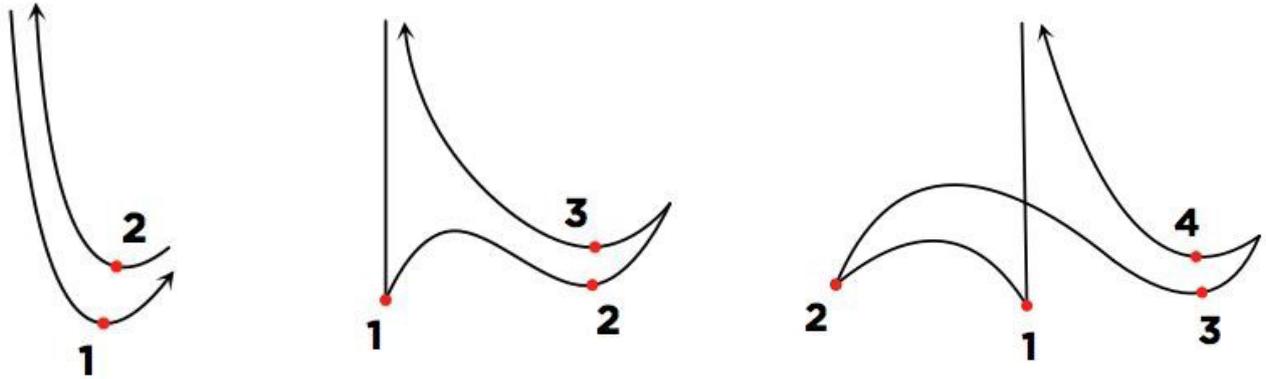
When is the best time to run a piece, and when the best to stop and start with detail? You need to do both, and sense when is the best time to switch it up.

Try finish the rehearsal on an “up” – with something they do well.

Try and answer every question before you start: look through the music from a performer's perspective: language pronunciation, “what does that word mean”, vocal splits, contradictory articulation. Appearing prepared gives confidence to musicians.



The Basic Conducting Patterns



Touch the bottom of the beat like a hot stove – don't hang around!

Try and have all the beats on the same horizontal line.

Most of the time – one hand is FINE. You are not learning to fly!

Remember the beat is always DOWN, and the journey should be predictable – like the laws of physics.



Musical Gestures

Your body language shows everything – it is the only thing you have!

Tempo

- Smaller beats are easier for faster music. Elbow only, or even wrist.
- When you want to get faster – don't get BIGGER as you'll probably get SLOWER!
- The slower the music, the more your beat needs to keep moving: it should never STOP.

Dynamics

- When musicians see bigger gestures they play louder!
- When musicians see smaller gestures they play softer!
- Your left hand has a role to play, particularly for changing dynamics.

Character

- *Accents*: karate chop; fists; big, sharp gestures.
- *Staccato*: liptons tea, small, twitchy movements – maybe hand only?
- *Lyrical*: open palm, stroking a cat: hands only for soft, full arms for loud.

Don't forget your face and the rest of your body can communicate all this if needed. What is the mood of the piece, and does your body and face reflect this?

Warm-ups

For any choir rehearsal – don't skip the warm-up!

- *Gently engaging the voice*: move from hums / sirens (ng) to gentle singing.
- *Exploring all the vowels*: – ih – eh – ah – oh – oo.
- Begin comfortably and gradually get higher.
- Legato scales and arpeggios
- *Bouncy arpeggios*: – eg “yoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo” to engage more breath.
- *To energise the face and lips, tongue twisters are a good warm-up*: “red leather, yellow leather” / “The tip of the tongue and the teeth and the lips”
- *Don't be afraid to be physical*: waggling fingers, rubbing cheeks, touching toes, jumping and stretching: singing is a physical activity and sometimes the body needs engaging.
- *For children – finding head voice*: Whoops, woohs and sirens.



Vocal Blend

- Vowel-matching
- Vertical space in vowels – not wide “spoken” vowels
- Every vowel has a little bit of “ah” in it.
- Use humming as a basis for focussing the sound.

General rehearsal tips

- Humming is a great way to fix problems of tuning
 - Take time to organise breathing if necessary, don't leave a long phrase to chance!
 - Exaggeration makes for a good example – overdo something to get the effect you want.
 - Engage singers with the rhythm – eg moving feet, tapping body, clapping, ½ choir singing ½ choir counting
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CONDUCTOR

Anthony Hunt

Conductor, Pianist and Organist Anthony Hunt was the Chorus Master at Opera Australia from 2013-2019. In 2020 returned to Adelaide with his family, commencing as Head of Music & Chorus Master at State Opera South Australia, and as Director of Music at St Peter's Cathedral.

After completing an Honours degree in both Piano and Organ performance at the Elder Conservatorium, Anthony moved to London to study as a répétiteur on the Royal Academy of Music specialist opera course.

Moving to Sydney in 2009 as Assistant Chorus Master for Opera Australia, and then as Chorus Master in 2013, Anthony has prepared the Opera Australia Chorus for over 60 productions, including *Aida*, *Anna Bolena*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Carmen*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Die Tote Stadt*, *Don Carlos*, *Don Pasquale*, *Don Quichotte*, *The Eighth Wonder*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Falstaff*, *Faust*, *Götterdämmerung*, *King Roger*, *La Boheme*, *La Traviata*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *The Love for Three Oranges*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Luisa Miller*, *Macbeth*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Mikado*, *The Nose*, *Otello*, *Pagliacci*, *Parsifal*, *The Pearlfishers*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Rigoletto*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Thaïs*, *Tosca*, *Turandot*, *Il Turco in Italia*, *Verdi Requiem*, *Il Viaggio à Reims*, *Whiteley*, *Wozzeck*.

As Chorus Master at Opera Australia, his work has been frequently broadcast on ABC Classic FM, and the many DVD releases and international cinema broadcasts include *La Traviata*, *Manama Butterfly*, *Aida*, *Turandot*, *Carmen* and *La Boheme* for Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour.

Anthony has been a participant in the Symphony Australia Conductor Development Program, a guest chorus master for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.





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Conducting 101

Saturday 14 March, 2pm-5pm

Conducting Progressive 1

Tuesday 9 June, 5pm-7.30pm

Conducting Progressive 2

Tuesday 16 June, 5pm-7.30pm

Conducting Progressive 3

Tuesday 23 June, 5pm-7.30pm

How to conduct a musical

Saturday 12 September, 2pm-5pm

Places for each session are limited.
To book, visit our website.

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