

Initiating the student conductor into the basics of the conducting technique. (*Dynamics in music - importance and ways of expression*)

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Abstract: *This study aims at emphasizing the importance of musical dynamics in the performance and study of a choral score. Moreover, it tackles the ways of expression, those means and tools the conductor uses to communicate their intentions to the ensemble, such as pronation – to enhance the musical dynamics, and its reverse, supination – to fade out the sonority. In order to facilitate the assimilation of these tools, the study presents diagrams, photos and of course, practical exercises.*

Key-words: *Student conductor, conducting technique, dynamics, the ways of expression, practical solutions*

1. Introduction

In music, dynamics represents „the art of using – in composition and interpretation - the most adequate sound intensity elements, in order to give expression and meaning to the artistic message” (Giuleanu 1973, 496).

Dynamic markings express various degrees of sound intensity. As regards their effect, Nicolae Gâscă divides them into two categories:

a) “*Markings indicating a fixed volume*, or a constant, uniform intensity;

b) *Markings indicating a variable volume*, or a progressive change in the sound intensity” (Gâscă, 1982, 94).

Markings indicating a fixed volume: *pianissimo possibile (ppp), pianissimo (pp), piano (p), mezzo-piano (mp), mezzo-forte (mf), forte (f), fortissimo (ff), fortissimo possibile (fff).*

Markings indicating a variable volume: *crescendo (cresc.), decrescendo (decresc.), diminuendo (dim.), perdendosi (perd.), rinforzando (rfz., rinf.)* – a vigorous and rapid increase in sound intensity.

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2. Ways of expression

From a gestural standpoint, dynamic markings can be executed depending on the *amplitude of the beat gestures, the arms' position,* and on the use of the *pronation/supination* gestures.

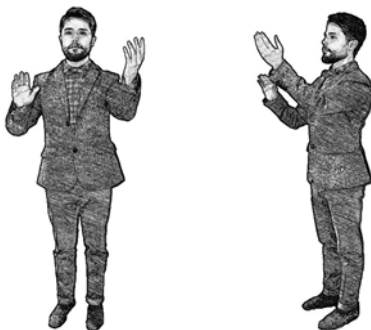
The conductor's right hand typically indicates the beat of the music, the metric pulsation. Moreover, it indicates the nature of the work; in certain cases, it can also deal with the vocal entries.

Initially, the left hand may perform the beat gesture “in mirror” (symmetrically); then it deals with vocal entries, expression, the expressive-artistic rendering of the work (phrasing, singing manner, tone color and other means of expression of the choral score).

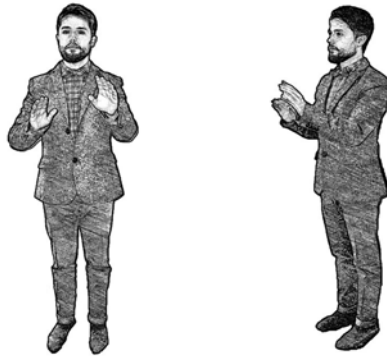
The high dynamic markings require higher beat gestures, the average ones – an average gestural plane and the low ones – a low gestural plane.

In the case of significant dynamic markings, the amplitude of the conductor's gestures shall be higher; similarly, low markings shall have a lower amplitude.

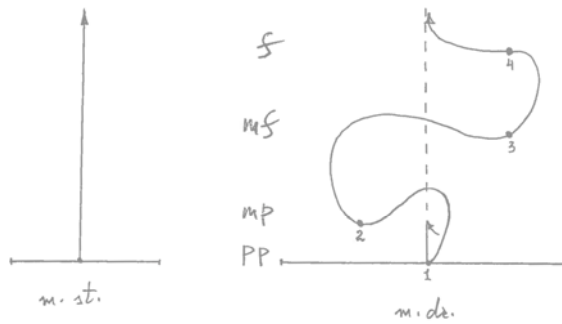
Pronation – is a sound-sustaining gesture by which the conductor increases the musical dynamics gradually. In terms of gestures, it must be executed with the left hand, by imitating a gesture of sustaining and enhancing the sound and, implicitly, the musical dynamics (the back of the hand is oriented downwards).



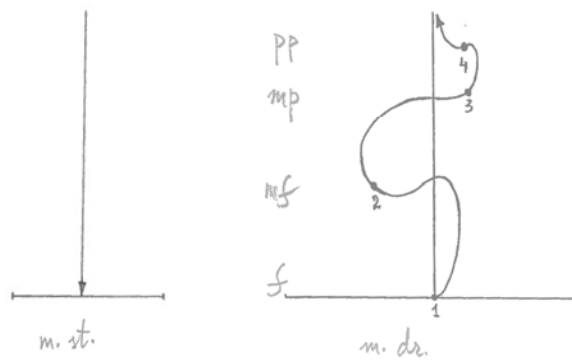
Supination – is a gesture of covering and fading out of the sound, used when needing low dynamic markings. It must be executed with the left hand; the fade-out gesture is made by gradually withdrawing the hand. The back of the hand is oriented upwards.



In both cases, the shift from one dynamic marking to the other shall be made gradually.



Pronation



Supination

To obtain a certain level of dynamics in the case of slow musical works, in addition to using the amplitude and position of the beat gesture, as well as the pronation/supination gesture (depending on the musical work), the conductor can also use the connecting upbeats, which will delineate much more clearly the dynamic plane of the work, but also the nature of articulation. The fast-tempo works shall require precision and the correct intensity of the impulses (visually, the hands almost stand still; the movement is produced from the wrist (the energy of the sound remains focused in the index and middle fingers).

The markings of *sforzando* (*sf*) and *subito piano* (*sp*) must be executed abruptly. They are to be made according to the following steps: first, drawing the choir's attention by means of the upbeat; then, there is the actual execution by means of a blow (impulse) - for *sforzando* and a quasi-blow (impulse) - for *subito piano*, followed by the sudden withdrawal of the hand (during recoil).

upbeat \longrightarrow *blow* \longrightarrow *withdrawal*

The reason for such markings is usually an emotional one (depending on the context). They are used in special cases (to emphasize a word, a mood, etc.), being a tool for expressivity, with a surprise effect.

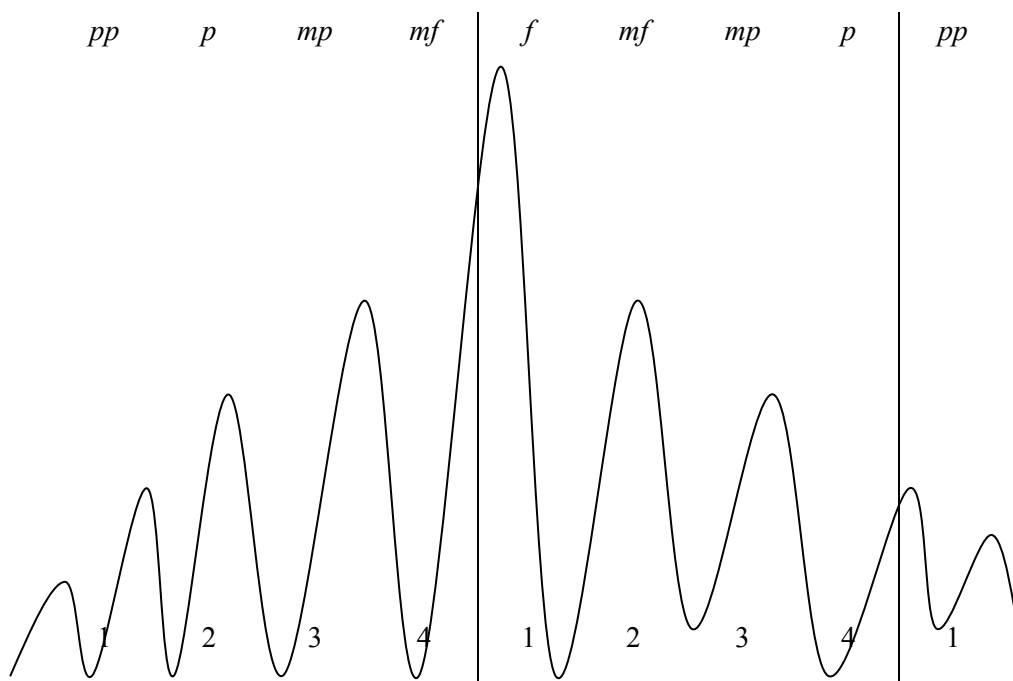
2.1. Practical exercises

Exercise no. 1

Exercise for balancing the metric pulsation and the dynamics.

Keeping both hands parallel, the student conductor shall execute a chain of 4-beat conducting measures (more precisely, 3 measures: 2 complete + the 3rd one – incomplete, with closing on the first beat). The exercise starts in *ppp*, with each beat gradually amplifying the dynamics, until a *forte* marking is reached, on the first beat of the second measure; then, gradually, the conductor returns to *ppp* on the first beat of the 3rd measure, where he/she completes the exercise with a closing gesture. During the exercise, the student conductor must also count the beats in the desired dynamic marking.

Graphical representation:



Exercise no. 2

Practicing the pronation/supination gesture.

This exercise consists of the same steps as in exercise 1, the only change being made in the gestures of the left hand. Namely, on the *crescendo* (*ppp-mp-mf-f*), the student shall use the pronation gesture; on the *decrescendo* marking (*f-mf-mp-p-pp-ppp*), the supination gesture shall be used, in turn, while maintaining a unitary metric pulsation. The counting of the beats remains valid for this exercise, as well.

After the execution of this exercise, the pronation and supination gestures can be applied in the works of the current academic year. Hence, the student conductor shall gradually become able to conduct artistically and to perform the work properly. "Artistic conducting is a matter of creativity and imagination on the conductor's part, during the performing process" (Guțanu 2014, 78).

3. Conclusion

As I also mentioned in other studies: "It is extremely important to become aware of and cultivate the creative instinct"(Guțanu 2014, 76). " Of course, there are several

factors that contribute to the formation and education of a student as a conductor and future music teacher, such as: the traits of the conductor's personality (their personality, education, experience, ideals, character), their habit of individual practice (the hereditary inheritance and experience – which also includes creativity) and, of course, the interaction of the conductor's inner self with the environment, namely with the members of the choir. The education and formation of the student – conductor will depend on both internal and external factors and it will be accomplished gradually, in a spiral manner” (Guțanu 2012, 23).

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