

# **Initiating the student conductor into the basics of the conducting technique**

## ***(The Conflict between rhythm and metrics and how to resolve it)***

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**Abstract:** *This study highlights some metro-rhythmic elements a conductor uses when expressing the upbeat, contretemps and anacrusis. Also, it shows the firstly analytical (technical) and then practical approaches of the essential issues. The entire study is provided with musical examples, as well as with practical exercises meant to resolve these issues. The object of study is focused on the technical segment.*

Key-words: *Conducting, technique, the up beat, the contratempo, anacrusis*

### **1. Introduction**

As we know: “The conducting training courses aim at shaping the artistic personality of the students, by developing their own abilities for the knowledge, understanding and interpretation of music, thus setting the bases for the complex experience required by the artistic and teaching activities”(Guțanu 2014, 317).

The conductor must be able to communicate with the choir by means of their conducting apparatus. The artistic act must be expressed both technically and, of course, artistically. In order to reach the artistic stage, one must first resolve the technical one. The conducting technique is a tool to be used for the purpose of displaying the performing mental approach and for leading the musical instrument (the choir).

The conflict between rhythm and metrics has always been and still is an issue to the beginner-conductor, as the great conductors and teachers have always stated, in their conducting treatises. I would like to cite the grand Russian conductor Ilya

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Musin, who used to say: "the syncopation, in itself, but also the shift from syncopation to the strong accent is one of conductors' concerns, the issue being the inexactness in interpretation"(Musin1967, 99).

When dealing with the upbeat, *contretemps* and *anacrusis*, the necessity to diversify the conductor's gestures is influenced by rhythm, by the metrics of the musical piece, by the conflict between rhythm and metrics.

## 2. The upbeat

**The upbeat** represents a special rhythmic formula. "It consists of the cumulation (connection) of an accented rhythmic value (*ictus*) with the preceding, unaccented rhythmic value (*preictus*). This process of inverting the rhythmic accents (the *preictus* becomes *ictus*) has been suggestively called *syncopation* (in Greek, *syncopi* = shock, collision, tearing up) and it represents the relationship between the way to organize durations and a new system of distributing the morphological accents". (Giuleanu, 1973, pages 436-437).

It is common knowledge that, in terms of structure, the upbeats can be *regular* and *irregular*. In their turn, the *irregular* ones can be of *anticipation* and of *delay*. From a conductor's standpoint, all types of upbeats can be resolved based on the same principle: the displacement of the accent within the measure shall be indicated by means of the *aufтакт*.

The gesture will be much sharper and the angular contour will be used.

### 2.1. Practical exercises:

#### Exercise no. 1

The left hand shall indicate a rhythmic formula comprising four even (regular) beats and, simultaneously, the right hand shall execute the upbeat gestures. This exercise facilitates the correct division of the beats and accents on half-beats, thanks to the use of eighths formulas (1A). After practicing the upbeat with the right hand correctly, we can move on to exercise 1B.

The image shows two musical exercises, 1A and 1B, in 4/4 time. Exercise 1A consists of two staves: the top staff is labeled 'm.st' and the bottom 'm.dr'. Both staves contain a sequence of quarter notes. The first measure of the top staff has an accent (>) over the first note. Exercise 1B also consists of two staves: 'm.st' on top and 'm.dr' on the bottom. The top staff has quarter notes with slurs over groups of two and three notes. The bottom staff has quarter notes with an accent (>) over the first note.

### Exercise no. 2

The left hand shall indicate a rhythmic formula comprising four even beats and, simultaneously, the right hand shall execute the upbeat gestures. In this exercise, formulas of quarter notes are used (2A). After practicing the upbeat with the right hand correctly, we can move on to exercise 2B.

The image shows two musical exercises, 2A and 2B, in 4/4 time. Exercise 2A consists of two staves: 'm.st' on top and 'm.dr' on the bottom. The top staff has quarter notes. The bottom staff has quarter notes with slurs over groups of two and three notes. Exercise 2B also consists of two staves: 'm.st' on top and 'm.dr' on the bottom. The top staff has quarter notes with slurs over groups of two and three notes. The bottom staff has quarter notes.

After practicing the upbeat with the right hand correctly, exercises no. 1 and 2 can be repeated, this time reversing the formulas.

### Exercise no. 3

In this exercise, one must conduct the musical formulas provided below (in the first bar, the left hand conducts a natural rhythmic formula of four quarter notes, whilst the right hand indicates the upbeats; in the second bar, the rhythmic formulas are reversed).

### Exercise no. 4

This exercise consists of practicing two types of upbeats, in parallel:  
*Regular upbeats – irregular upbeats of anticipation.*

**Exercise no. 5**

This exercise consists of practicing two types of upbeats, in parallel:  
*Regular upbeats – irregular upbeats of delay.*

The image shows two systems of musical notation, labeled 5A and 5B. Each system consists of two staves: the top staff is marked 'm.st.' and the bottom staff is marked 'm.dr.'. Both systems are in 2/4 time. The notation includes rhythmic patterns of eighth and quarter notes, with some notes grouped by slurs and others marked with accents. The patterns are designed to practice different types of upbeats.

**3. The Contratempo (Contretemps)**

The *contretemps* have a rhythmic formula that resembles the upbeat, in terms of structure. “*Contretemps* are obtained by eliminating from the rhythmic pattern the periodically accentuated values (the ictus-es) and replacing them with rests” (Giuleanu, 1973, page 439). Hence, notes appearing in weak beats, or followed or preceded by rests, will be called “*contretemps*”.

Example: The folk dance “*Lino-Leano*”.

The image shows a musical score for the folk dance "Lino-Leano". It features four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The score is in 2/4 time and includes lyrics consisting of "la la la la" repeated throughout. The notation includes various rhythmic values and rests, illustrating the concept of *contretemps*.

(Fragment from the musical piece “*Lino-leano - De doi*” by N. Ursu)

From a conductor's standpoint, contretemps shall follow the same principle as the upbeat.

### 3.1. Practical exercises:

#### Exercise no. 1

m.st  $\frac{4}{4}$

1A

m.dr  $\frac{4}{4}$

m.st  $\frac{4}{4}$

1B

m.dr  $\frac{4}{4}$

#### Exercise no. 2

m.st  $\frac{9}{8}$

2A

m.dr  $\frac{9}{8}$

m.st  $\frac{9}{8}$

2B

m.dr  $\frac{9}{8}$

#### 4. Anacrusis (pickup note)

*Anacrusis* (from the Greek “*anacrusis*”) means before the stroke, before attack. The anacrusis can be *on beat*, *on parts of the beat* or it can be an *anacrusis formula*.

From a conductor’s standpoint, in the case of anacrusis, the impulse of the beat’s *crusis* (downbeat) shall be stronger than the one of the initial upbeat (auftakt).

The phrasing shall always be oriented towards the downbeat (crusic beat) (the tendency of the gesture shall be towards the downbeat).

Example of anacrusis: a fragment from Georges Bizet's choral piece “*L'Arlesienne*”.



The image displays a musical score for a choral piece, likely from Georges Bizet's "L'Arlesienne". It consists of four staves, each with a vocal line. The music is written in a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first two staves feature a melodic line with a pickup note (anacrusis) on the first staff, followed by a series of notes. The second and third staves have a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The fourth staff has a bass line of eighth notes. The score is divided into two measures by a vertical bar line. The first measure shows the pickup note and the beginning of the phrase, while the second measure continues the phrase. The notes are labeled with 'la' to indicate the pitch.

#### 5. Conclusion

“The role of the conductor is to create the choral instrument and to take it to the highest level, while using the arsenal of means of expression acquired through technique.”(Guțanu Stoian 2016, 10). The exercises presented above are aimed at resolving the rhythmic formulas and the rhythmic-metric conflict, but also at enhancing the interdependence of the conductor's arms. One starts from simple rhythmic formulas and moves on towards more complex ones, in order to attain gestural confidence and clarity. This combination of rhythms will facilitate the student's understanding of the syncopation, contretemps and anacrusis. It is only through practice that the student can realise the difference between the conducting interpretation of all the rhythmic formulas presented in this study.

All the problems about some metro-rhythmic elements which a conductor uses when expressing the upbeat, conretemps and anacrusis he can solve it exercising and understanding their.

## 6. References

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