

A Comparative Study of Select Choral Conductors' Approaches to Unification of Choral  
Sound, Rehearsal, Conducting, and Leadership: Frieder Bernius, Tõnu Kaljuste,  
Stephen Cleobury, John Eliot Gardiner, Weston Noble, and Robert Shaw

By

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## **Abstract**

The methods of six highly-successful conductors from around the world—Frieder Bernius (Germany), Tõnu Kaljuste (Estonia), Stephen Cleobury, John Eliot Gardiner (U.K.), Weston Noble, and Robert Shaw (U.S.)—are comparatively examined concerning 1) choral sound unification, 2) rehearsal strategies and techniques, 3) conducting gesture, and 4) practical leadership. Primary sources including personal interviews, published interviews, lectures and writings, rehearsal and concert videos, and online video interviews were the basis for observing the conductors' approaches to the four research areas. Their practical strategies, drawing on biographical details and interactions with the musicians of their ensembles, are explored to examine their overall approach to choral leadership.

Chapters include biographical details for each conductor, sound unification techniques, rehearsal strategies, thoughts on conducting, practical leadership, and synthesis and conclusions. The conductors' methods of choral sound unification vary greatly but are centered around a natural and free vocal technique that is focused on interpretation and articulation rather than vowel shape. In rehearsal strategies, there is even greater variance, but there is agreement on constant singer engagement, establishment of consistent priorities, and saving the voice for performance. Regarding conducting gesture, there is consensus that choral and orchestral conducting should not look dissimilar, since the musical ideas between ensembles are equivalent, and that gesture should clearly and concisely demonstrate the music. With respect to leadership, conductors should demonstrate extreme competence and confidence (from a high level of musical expertise), a priority-driven work ethic, creative enterprise, the humble heart of a

servant, the sharing of success, the acceptance of responsibility, positive energy, and an understanding of prevailing leadership principles exhibited in other disciplines.

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I also give my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Andrew Crane for teaching and demonstrating authentic practical leadership. During my study of choral conducting with him, he supplied the ideas that in time germinated into this study of leadership in choral conducting. I owe who I am as a leader to him. My extend my thanks also to the high school, collegiate, and church choristers who gave me their time and attention over many years, serving as an incubator for developing ideas on music and leadership.

I am indebted to my wife, Sarah, who relentlessly pushes me to improve in all aspects of life. To her and my daughters, Emmaline and Annabeth, who labored through this project with me, giving up their time with me so I could accomplish a dream, I give the highest praise and gratitude. Finally, I give thanks to God for his blessings of a probing intellect, the best mentors, my family, and music, all of which has shaped my life and character. Without him, I am nothing. *Soli Deo gloria.*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Choral conductors of the twenty-first century are continuously in search of strategies and techniques to employ in order to improve their ensembles. The body of resources involving such strategies and techniques is in no short supply in the United States due to several trade publications including *The Choral Journal* published by the American Choral Director's Association and six periodicals published by the National Association for Music Education. There are also many scholarly journals in music that devote space to choral music research. Choral conductors in academic positions typically present scholarly work on the improvement of the choral ensemble. While this work is laudable, it is generally focused on a narrow subject matter (e.g. intonation, selection of singers, or motivating the ensemble).

This study seeks to enlarge this conversation with a comparative analysis of several distinguished choral conductors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries serving in various types of positions. The focus is to analyze the conductors' approaches to unification of choral sound, rehearsal planning and technique, conducting gesture, and practical leadership in order to highlight common practices and/or major contrasts between them. The study will specifically explore the conductors' practical strategies, drawing on biographical details and interactions with the musicians of their ensembles, to examine their overall approach to choral leadership.

The general criteria for the selection of conductors included international recognition, prolific work with choral and orchestral forces, and demonstrated success of choral ensembles over a period of many years. In addition, criteria for choosing subjects

for analysis included diversity of nationality. Thus, the conductors selected for this study include: Frieder Bernius (b. 1947) of Germany, Tõnu Kaljuste (b. 1953) of Estonia, Stephen Cleobury (b. 1948) and John Eliot Gardiner (b. 1943) of the United Kingdom, and Weston Noble (b. 1922) and Robert Shaw (1916-1999) of the United States.

The selected conductors all are exceptional and prolific in their production of choral music at the highest level and represent different constituencies in Western choral art. For example, Frieder Bernius and Tõnu Kaljuste specialize in music from their respective countries. Stephen Cleobury conducts one of the world's more illustrious and historic choirs in the Anglican boy-choir tradition, and John Eliot Gardiner is considered an expert on historically-informed performance, conducting one of the most famous professional choirs in the world. Robert Shaw was one of the more widely regarded American professional conductors of both choirs and orchestras in the twentieth century, leading professional, amateur community, and collegiate choirs throughout his life. Stephen Cleobury and Weston Noble are academics, working in the collegiate setting primarily in Britain and the United States respectively. The various professional domains of these conductors have added diversity and, as a result, hopefully have enhanced the findings of this study.

The second chapter briefly outlines each conductor's biography, which focuses on details that have shaped their artistic vision. The third chapter discusses their approaches to ensemble unification of sound and interpretation. Many techniques of sound unification are explored including (but not limited to) tone, intonation, or blend, with a focus on techniques that make them unique in their approach to unifying an ensemble.



Chapter four deals with rehearsal planning and techniques, and reveals specific strategies in planning their rehearsal time to advance the ensemble's musical goals. The fifth chapter focuses on gestural communication, examining the conductors' thoughts on gesture and how they use gesture to influence the ensemble.

The sixth chapter will explore how the conductor interacts with the members of their ensembles to give insight into the essence of their leadership style. The most highly-skilled conductors possess an uncanny ability to inspire artistic vision and excellence in their musicians. How do they accomplish this? What is their approach to leading people? This chapter investigates the conductors' specific leadership strategies and approach to inspiring members of the ensemble.

The final chapter synthesizes the material, drawing conclusions on what the modern choral conductor can learn, and how they can improve, from these standard-bearers of choral artistry.

A large portion of the sources used for this paper includes primary sources such as interviews for periodicals, video interviews, rehearsal recordings, concert recordings, and personal interviews. Specifically, Frieder Bernius and Stephen Cleobury granted personal interviews with the author. The former was administered via email, while the latter was done by way of a Skype video conference. Other primary sources are included in monographs (i.e. *The Robert Shaw Reader*, and *Creating the Special World: A Collection of Lectures by Weston H. Noble*). Where a sufficient number of primary sources were not available, secondary sources such as biographies, periodicals, and dissertations became more important.

## Chapter 2: Biographies

Frieder Bernius

Bernius was born in 1947 in Ludwigshafen-Oppau, Germany to Helmut Bernius, a Protestant minister, and Inge Bernius, a church musician. Receiving his collegiate education at the Musikhochschule Stuttgart and the University of Tübingen, he has become a highly-successful conductor over a number of decades, beginning with the founding of the highly-regarded Kammerchor Stuttgart (Chamber Choir of Stuttgart), established in 1968 when he was 21 years old, also the year he began his studies at the Musikhochschule. The Kammerchor Stuttgart began with aspirations that the ensemble would elevate unaccompanied choral music to the level of the professional orchestra. The ensemble has toured internationally for decades, winning prizes at several important competitions.<sup>1</sup>

In 1977, Bernius began to collaborate with leading orchestras seeking to find an acoustical balance between voices and instruments in choral-symphonic literature. During the period between 1985 and 1987, he founded the Barockorchester Stuttgart (Baroque Orchestra of Stuttgart) and the Internationale Festtage Alter Musik Stuttgart (International Festival of Ancient Music Stuttgart), known as the Festival Stuttgart Barock since 2004, both intended to invigorate interest in the historically-informed performance of music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The founding of the Festival Stuttgart Barock “immediately made Stuttgart a center of historically-informed

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1. “Frieder Bernius (Conductor),” Bach Cantatas Website, accessed 3 January 2016, <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Bernius-Frieder.htm>.

performance practice and the location of widely noted rediscoveries of forgotten musical treasures.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1991 he founded the Klassische Philharmonie Stuttgart (Classical Philharmonic of Stuttgart), demonstrating his stylistic versatility. The ensemble performs works of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries on modern instruments. He also founded the Hofkapelle Stuttgart<sup>3</sup> in 2006, which specializes in the music of the early nineteenth century.

Although historically-informed performance is of great interest to him, he uses it to breathe new life into early compositions. “He is always aiming for a musical ideal orientated to original period sound, but also unmistakably personal. He devotes himself to the rediscovery of 18th-century operas on the one hand, and premieres of contemporary compositions on the other.”<sup>4</sup>

He has conducted in concerts worldwide at major international festivals, the World Youth Choir four times, and at four World Choral Symposia. He has also guest conducted with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Stuttgarter Kammerorchester.

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2. “Kammerchor Stuttgart: NCPA August Chorus Festival 2014,” Beijing International, accessed 4 January 2016, <http://www.ebeijing.gov.cn/Culture/FeelBJ/t1361935.htm>. This is an English translation of the short biography on his German-language website, Musik Podium Stuttgart, <http://www.musikpodium.de/index.php/frieder-bernius>.

3. A sixteenth-century instrumental chamber ensemble in Stuttgart existed by the same name. The ensemble founded by Bernius does not have any association with the sixteenth-century organization other than assuming the historic name.

4. “Kammerchor Stuttgart: NCPA August Chorus Festival 2014.”

In 2009, he recorded a complete anthology of the sacred vocal works of Mendelssohn in twelve volumes. He has produced over 100 recordings, of which 40 have received international awards including the *Choc du Monde de la musique*, ICMA-Award for best choral recording in 2013, Edison Prize (Netherlands) for recordings of Schütz (with Musica Fiata) and Bach, and the *Diapason d'Or* (France) for Mozart's Requiem<sup>5</sup> and Zelenka's *Missa Dei Filii* (with Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra of Toronto).<sup>6</sup>

### Tõnu Kaljuste

Tõnu Kaljuste was born in Tallinn, the son of Heino Kaljuste, an Estonian choral conductor and teacher. His father was the primary musical influence on Tõnu early in his life. Tõnu sang as a child in the Ellerhein children's choir, an ensemble formed in 1951 and conducted by his father. Heino Kaljuste later formed the Ellerhein Chamber Choir composed of amateur singers and former members of the children's choir who wished to continue choral singing. He graduated from Tallinna Muusikakeskkool (Tallinn Music High School) in 1971 studying piano and choral conducting, from the Tallinn Conservatory in 1976 with a graduate degree, and from Leningrad Conservatory with postgraduate work completed in 1978.<sup>7</sup>

Kaljuste assumed full conducting responsibilities of the Ellerhein Chamber Choir from his father in 1974, although he had been conducting the group since 1971. The choir

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5. Ibid.

6. "Frieder Bernius (Conductor)."

7. "Tõnu Kaljuste - A Biographical Portrait," Tõnu Kaljuste, accessed 4 January 2016, <http://www.tonukaljuste.com/biography/tonu-kaljuste-long-cv>.

began a transformation from that of a typical chamber choir, performing music of classical masters from all style periods, to a choir that championed music of Estonian composers, including Arvo Pärt's sacred minimalist pieces and Veljo Tormis's works inspired by ancient Finno-Ugric folk songs.

Later that decade, from 1978 to 1980, Kaljuste was a professor of choral conducting at his alma mater, the Tallinn Conservatory, and he and his Ellerhein Chamber Choir each won first prize as conductor and choir, respectively, at the ninth annual Béla Bartók International Choral Competition in Debrecen, Hungary. Following the success at the Bartók Competition, government funding became available for the choir, which became a full-time ensemble under the new name, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (EPCC) in 1981. (During the Soviet occupation, Estonian professional musicians were considered government employees paid by the Estonian Soviet State Republic Philharmonic Society. The "Philharmonic" label has remained, although many in Estonia refer to it as "Kaljuste's Choir."<sup>8</sup>)

Docurama Films' *The Singing Revolution* details the efforts of Estonians to keep their choral tradition alive through decades of Nazi German and Soviet occupation.<sup>9</sup> Choral music was one of the elements that united Estonians as a nation and ethnic group, and Kaljuste's EPCC played an active role late into the Soviet occupation in preserving

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8. Ibid.

9. James Tusty, Maureen Tusty, Mike Majoros, and Linda Hunt, *The Singing Revolution*, DVD (New York, NY: Docurama Films, 2008).

and promoting Estonian identity through music.<sup>10</sup> With Estonian independence being renewed in 1991, Kaljuste and the EPCC began a more international professional existence than what was formally permitted by the state. One of the key expansions of repertoire was the addition of the works of Arvo Pärt, whose works had previously been banned from public performance.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the establishment of the EPCC, Kaljuste also founded the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra (1993), and has served as conductor of the Swedish Radio Choir and Netherlands Chamber Choir. He has toured internationally for major concerts and festivals with the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, and was the winner of a Grammy Award in 2014 for the Arvo Pärt album *Adam's Lament* with the EPCC, Sinfonietta Riga, Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, and Latvian Radio Choir.<sup>12</sup>

The current repertoire of the EPCC is quite varied, including music from all style periods, but they focus particular attention on the work of Estonian composers, aiming to introduce it to the world, giving 60 to 70 concerts yearly in Estonia and abroad.<sup>13</sup>

Kaljuste collaborates often with Estonian composers Arvo Pärt, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Veljo

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10. "Top 12 most outstanding Estonians in the world 2014," *Estonian World*, accessed 5 January 2016, <http://estonianworld.com/people/top-12-outstanding-estonians-world-2014>.

11. "Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and Tallinn Chamber Orchestra with conductor Tonu Kaljuste," The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, accessed 3 January 2016, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/Artist/B112893>.

12. "Tõnu Kaljuste, Conductor," Konzertdirektion Hörtnagel Berlin GmbH, accessed 3 January 2016, <http://www.hoertnagel.com/en/artists/artist-portrait/detail/tonu-kaljuste.html>.

13. "Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir."

Tormis, Heino Eller, and Tõnu Korvits. His interpretations of the music of György Kurtág (Hungary), Krzysztof Penderecki (Poland), Giya Kancheli (Georgia), and Alfred Schnittke (Russia) have also garnered acclaim.<sup>14</sup> Other composers with whom he has collaborated include: Erik Bergman (Finland), Sven-David Sandström (Sweden), Knut Nystedt (Norway), Einojuhani Rautavaara (Finland), Brett Dean (Australia), and R. Murray Schafer (Canada).<sup>15</sup>

Kaljuste has served as guest conductor of major European orchestras including the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, and Swedish Radio Symphony, and regularly works with the RIAS Kammerchor and the Latvian Radio Choir. He was conductor of the Estonian National Opera from 1978 to 1985, performing works of Benjamin Britten, W. A. Mozart, and a ballet of Veljo Tormis, *Estonian Ballads*. Since 2004, he has served as Artistic Director for the Nargen Opera Festival in Estonia, presenting stage works including those of Beethoven and Haydn.<sup>16</sup>

Kaljuste has an extensive recording discography, many albums receiving prizes including the *Diapason d'Or*, Cannes Classical Award, Edison Prize, Classic BRIT Award, and the Grammy Award.<sup>17</sup> Aside from his recordings of notable Estonian composers for the ECM record label, he has also recorded the complete Vespers and Litanies of W. A. Mozart and much of the sacred music of Antonio Vivaldi for Carus-

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14. "Tõnu Kaljuste, Conductor."

15. "Tõnu Kaljuste - A Biographical Portrait."

16. "Tõnu Kaljuste, Conductor."

17. Ibid.

Verlag.<sup>18</sup> He is an appointed member of the Royal Music Academy of Sweden and was awarded the Japanese ABC Music Award and the International Robert Edler Prize for Choral Music.<sup>19</sup>

During the last several years, Kaljuste has worked as a professor at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and as the head of its conducting department, working with university ensembles and teaching conductors.<sup>20</sup>

### Stephen Cleobury

Born in Bromley, England on 31 December 1948, Cleobury became a boy chorister in his youth at Worcester Cathedral, and went on to serve as organ scholar at St. John's College in Cambridge, where he received his university education. One of his teachers was David Willcocks, whom he later succeeded as music director at King's College, Cambridge. In 1974, he served as sub-organist at Westminster Abbey, and in 1979, was the first Anglican to be appointed master of music at Westminster Cathedral, a Catholic church in London. He was appointed director of music at King's College and conductor of The Choir of King's College in 1982, a university ensemble known, along with other English chapel choirs, for the use of boy sopranos and countertenors exclusively for treble voices.<sup>21</sup>

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18. "Tõnu Kaljuste - A Biographical Portrait."

19. "Tõnu Kaljuste, Conductor."

20. "Tõnu Kaljuste - A Biographical Portrait."

21. Ian Carson, "Cleobury, Stephen," *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed 11 September 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42799>.



Cleobury has enhanced the stature of the world-famous choir during his tenure at King's, expanding the daily service repertoire and further developing its broadcasting, recording, and touring activities. This includes the commissioning a new Christmas carol every year for the annual and internationally-broadcast "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" service, and a first-ever live transmission of *Messiah* simultaneously to theaters in Europe and North America. Although the King's College Choir's main focus is to sing at the daily chapel services at King's College, they enjoy an extensive international touring and recording schedule, and sing at several high-profile concerts throughout the year in the UK.<sup>22</sup>

Cleobury has also served as conductor of the Cambridge University Musical Society (1983-2009) and BBC Singers (1995-2007), and as visiting professor at the Royal College of Music. Interestingly, his brother Nicholas (b. 1950) is a prolific conductor of orchestras, working with the major orchestras of the UK in addition the Welsh National Opera and English National Opera.<sup>23</sup>

As Chief Conductor of the BBC Singers, Cleobury was acclaimed for creating a unified choral sound with singers who were professional soloists. He performed a number of premieres and recorded works of Michael Tippett, Richard Strauss, and J.S. Bach with the group. As director of the Cambridge University Musical Society, one of the UK's oldest of such groups, he conducted many orchestral works and a vast number of the

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22. "Biography," Stephen Cleobury, accessed 2 January 2016, <http://www.stephencleobury.com/biography.php>.

23. Carson, "Cleobury, Stephen."

major works for chorus and orchestra, including Britten's *War Requiem* in Coventry Cathedral on the 50th anniversary of its bombing.<sup>24</sup>

His talents on the organ have led him to perform recitals throughout the world, from the LDS Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah to the Performing Arts Centre in Hong Kong. He has recorded many organ works of Bach and other composers including Herbert Howells and Edward Elgar.<sup>25</sup>

Cleobury is also known as a servant of his profession, assisting in many administrative positions, including President and Vice-President of the Royal College of Organists throughout much of his life, Warden of the Solo Performers' section of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, President of the Incorporated Association of Organists, and current Chairman of The Incorporated Association of Organists Benevolent Fund, established to support church musicians and organists in need. In 2009, the Queen appointed him Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).<sup>26</sup>

### John Eliot Gardiner

Born in Fontmell Magna, Dorset, United Kingdom, Gardiner gained early experience in music from his artistically motivated family. He sang in the church choir, played the violin and other instruments (largely self-taught), and studied conducting at fifteen years old.<sup>27</sup> Gardiner attended the University of Cambridge to study history and

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24. "Biography," Stephen Cleobury.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. "John Eliot Gardiner," *Contemporary Musicians* (Detroit: Gale, 1999).

Arabic, but his interests and passion in music became even more acute. He took a year off from his studies to explore his conducting interests, setting out to perform Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610 "as it was meant to [sound]"—that is, with period instruments and interpretation. He prepared his "own edition of the music, found the players, booked the venue, [and] raised the money."<sup>28</sup> This was the early days of historically-informed performance, and Monteverdi's Vespers were not well known. The choir, singing together for the first time, performed Monteverdi's Vespers in King's College Chapel in London, 5 March 1964, to enthusiastic reviews. The ensemble, which became known as the Monteverdi Choir, returned to King's College Chapel for a 50th anniversary performance in 2014.<sup>29</sup>

In 1978, Gardiner founded the English Baroque Soloists, a leading period instrument orchestra, performing chamber, symphonic, and operatic works from Monteverdi to Mozart, frequently in collaboration with the Monteverdi Choir, which has gone on to become internationally renowned for their virtuosic ensemble singing, historically-informed performances, and ambitious artistic projects.

The Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, founded in 1989, performs major works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the same intended faithfulness to historic practice. Berlioz appears to be a favored composer of the group and Gardiner

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28. Ivan Hewett, "The Full Monteverdi," *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 August 2010, accessed 19 October 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/744193101?accountid=14556>.

29. "The Monteverdi Choir at 50," Monteverdi Choir and Orchestras, accessed 5 January 2016, <http://www.monteverdi.co.uk/50>.

himself, who in 1993 performed and recorded the French composer's newly-discovered *Messe Solennelle* for the first time in history.<sup>30</sup>

Gardiner often recalls a portrait of Bach, by Elias Gottlob Haussmann, whose original once hung in the home of Gardiner's parents while he was growing up. The portrait was lent to the family for safekeeping after the owner, Walter Jenke, a German-Jewish refugee fled Germany in 1936.<sup>31</sup> "As a little boy I didn't particularly like it. I loved his music but I couldn't reconcile it with that portrait, which is stern and rather forbidding."<sup>32</sup> The world of historically-informed performance (HIP) may appear similarly austere, but Gardiner has spent his life attempting to breathe life and musical energy into performances of early music through the music of the nineteenth century. However, the conductor's period performance interests go well beyond Bach, extending to works of Schütz, Purcell, Rameau, Charpentier, Bach, Handel, and Gluck.

During the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage in 2000, the choir, along with the English Baroque Soloists, performed the complete church cantatas of J. S. Bach in over 60

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30. "Sir John Eliot Gardiner," Monteverdi Choir and Orchestras, accessed 5 January 2016, <http://www.monteverdi.co.uk/about/gardiner>.

31. Kate Connolly, "Painting of Johann Sebastian Bach returns home to Leipzig," *The Guardian*, 12 June 2015, accessed 23 February 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jun/12/painting-johann-sebastian-bach-returns-home-leipzig>. Elias Gottlob Haussmann in 1748 painted the work that was displayed in Gardiner's boyhood home. It was restored only once during the ownership of Bill Scheide, a US philanthropist and Bach enthusiast, after his son accidentally punctured it with a dart at his birthday party. Haussmann painted a similar work in 1746, but has been poorly restored and lacks the "vivacity" of the 1748 work. The 1748 work was presented, as instructed in Scheide's will, to the city of Leipzig, where it currently resides.

32. Alexandra Coghlan and John Eliot Gardiner, "Bach on the farm," *New Statesman* 142 (9 April 2013), accessed 23 February 2016, <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/04/bach-farm>.

churches across Europe. *Gramophone* magazine called it “one of the most ambitious musical projects of all times.”<sup>33</sup> The live recordings produced by *Soli Deo Gloria* (the group’s label), earned him the Gramophone Special Achievement Award. He has 250 recording projects to his name, produced for the world’s major labels, including Deutsche Grammophon and Universal International. He has been given special recognition of his artistic achievements by several European countries: appointed Knight Bachelor by the Queen of the United Kingdom in 1998, nominated *Commandeur dans l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 1996 and made *Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur* in 2010 by the French Republic, and received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2005. He also holds honorary doctorates and academic awards from many universities in Great Britain. Gardiner was recently named President of the Bach Archive in Leipzig, and in 2013, he completed a highly-regarded biography on J. S. Bach, *Music in the Castle of Heaven*, published by Penguin in the UK and by Knopf in the USA.<sup>34</sup>

He regularly conducts leading symphony orchestras around the world such as the London Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Royal Concertgebouw, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Orchestre National de France, and at the Royal Opera House. Gardiner has also conducted opera extensively throughout his career especially in France, serving as artistic director and *chef fondateur* of the Opéra de Lyon and from 1983 to 1988, and conducting at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and the Opéra Comique.<sup>35</sup>

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33. “Monteverdi Choir,” Monteverdi Choir and Orchestras, accessed 5 January 2016, <http://www.monteverdi.co.uk>.

34. “Sir John Eliot Gardiner.”

35. *Ibid.*

Gardiner owns and resides on an organic farm in Dorset, England, on the same land once farmed by his father. This farm, which boasts newly-constructed cattle barns “The Merry Widow” and “Benvenuto Cellini” (paid for by the profits from opera productions) and two French Aubrac cows given by the Prince of Wales, one of his patrons, reveal a dual passion which “seems to both counterbalance and fuel his music.”<sup>36</sup>

### Weston Noble

Born on a small 160-acre farm near Riceville, Iowa, on 30 November 1922, Weston Noble tended the farm with his entire family. Weston rose early to milk the cows and practice the piano for an hour before leaving for school. His parents valued his education and encouraged him to continue going to school through high school, even though many farmer’s children prior to World War II ended their education early to become farmers. His parents and relatives also encouraged his study of music as he clearly showed an early aptitude for musical skill: playing the piano and clarinet, and singing in school choirs.<sup>37</sup>

Noble decided on his own to attend the University of Iowa to study music until a Luther College recruiter visited his parents home. Weston recalls that after the recruiter left, his father told him, “I guess you’ll go to Luther.” So he changed his mind and decided to attend that school, majoring in music education.<sup>38</sup> Noble’s college career was

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36. Coghlan and Gardiner, “Bach on the farm.”

37. Perry Dean White, “The Whole Conductor: Weston Noble's Philosophies on the Psychology of Conducting and Musicianship” (D.M.A. document, The University of Oklahoma, 1998), 8.

38. Ibid, 12.

cut short because of his enlistment in the Army Enlisted Reserve Corps and subsequent summons in 1943, although Luther College made arrangements for him to graduate early.

He served in the Army for three years from March 1943 to March 1946, assigned to the 750th Tank Battalion doing combat (assistant tank driver or assistant gunner) and clerical work (casualty records), but he also found time for music during his training in the States, leading worship services. He saw combat in the Battle of the Bulge, and his battalion was among the first Americans to enter Berlin. Noble wrote home often of the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, to which he was an eyewitness, and of his hope in beginning a conducting career upon his return home.<sup>39</sup>

I know the Army has done me lots of good in many, many ways. There is no question of doubt that I will come home a different person than the one that came into the Army on March 1943.... I plan to take advantage of the GI Bill of Rights after the war... it will give me only one year of graduate work, and right now I would like to take that at Juilliard School of Music in N.Y., N.Y.... I enjoy directing more than playing, and I do believe that is my field in my music. I can never forget as long as I live the concert we gave at the Religious Emphasis Banquet in November of 1942. We sang only two numbers. One was by Dr. Hofland and the other was "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." When we had finished "When I Survey," there was at least one solid minute that no one even stirred. Finally Rev. Field got up, put his arms around me and with tears in his eyes thanked the Schola [Cantorum]. There is no question but what I would be very, very happy with a good job in conducting, especially if they were good. I can't begin to explain how seeing things I am and experiencing events I do help a musician especially in conducting when it comes to interpreting music. But it does regardless.<sup>40</sup> (Letter to relatives Ruby & Aldis Dunston, postmarked 22 November 1944, Belgium, before the final Allied offensive)

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39. Ibid, 15-22.

40. Ibid, 18.

In the fall of 1946 after his return home, he had been accepted and was planning to attend the Juilliard School of Music, but after last minute reservations, decided to stay in Iowa to teach high school. He began graduate work at the University of Michigan in 1947 while teaching at a small high school in Luverne, Iowa. He planned to continue at Michigan to pursue a doctorate, but was offered a temporary teaching job at his alma mater (whose faculty had encouraged him in music during and after the war) conducting the Concert Band (1948-1973) and the Nordic Cathedral Choir (1948-2005). He was instantly successful, quickly gaining the respect of his students, and was offered the permanent position, one in which he would remain his entire career.<sup>41</sup>

During his leadership as conductor, and later as music department head, the department maintained exceptional growth, as Noble proved to be an effective marketer, promoter, and recruiter. Luther College ensembles were on tour for a minimum of two or three weeks each year. The music department also began to host annual festivals concentrating on talented high school students, a practice which has been adopted by universities around the country.<sup>42</sup>

Weston Noble has become an exceptionally accomplished educator and conductor through the course of his long tenure as a musician. He is currently professor emeritus of music at Luther College, serving 57 years as conductor and teacher. He has served as

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41. Ibid, 22-25.

42. Ibid, 26-30.



guest conductor for over 900 all-state bands, orchestras, and choirs on four continents, and for international music festivals all over the world.<sup>43</sup>

In 1994 the North Central Division of the American Choral Directors Association established the Weston H. Noble Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Choral Art. Noble himself was the first recipient to be honored. He was awarded the Midwest Clinic Medal of Honor by the International Convention of Band and Orchestra Directors, the Outstanding Music Educator Award from the National Federation of State High School Associations, and the Lowell Mason Fellow Award from the National Association for Music Education. He holds honorary doctorate degrees from five U.S. colleges, and was awarded the St. Olav's Medal from King Harald V of Norway for his contributions to Norwegian-American relations.<sup>44</sup>

#### Robert Shaw

Robert Shaw (30 April 1916 – 25 January, 1999), born in Red Bluff, CA, was the son of an evangelical minister, and during his early days, planned to become a minister himself. His experience working with the glee club at Pomona College, Claremont, CA encouraged him to pursue a musical career. In 1938, he began a ten-year period of choral conducting in New York after connecting with Fred Waring and his orchestra and chorus. It did not take long for Shaw to reach a high level of success, conducting the choir at Marble Collegiate Church on Fifth Avenue at Carnegie Hall. He was awarded America's

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43. "Weston Noble," Luther College, accessed 4 January 2016, <http://www.luther.edu/music/faculty/noble>.

44. Ibid.

Conductor of the Year in 1943, and Toscanini (after a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony) later announced that Shaw was the choral maestro for whom he had been searching.<sup>45</sup>

He subsequently prepared choruses for Toscanini's choral-orchestral projects for NBC and directed the choral programs at Juilliard and Tanglewood. He commissioned a requiem from Paul Hindemith for the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, *When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed*.<sup>46</sup> In 1948, he founded the 40-voice Robert Shaw Chorale, a group that for 18 years brought him international acclaim. Shaw commissioned several works for his ensembles from composers including Béla Bartók, Benjamin Britten, Charles Ives, and Darius Milhaud. The group also won Grammy awards for recordings of Bach's Mass in B minor (1961), Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* (1964), Poulenc's *Gloria* (1965), Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* (1965), Handel's *Messiah* (1966), Berlioz's *Requiem* (1986), and Verdi's *Requiem* (1989).<sup>47</sup>

The U.S. State Department sponsored tours of the Robert Shaw Chorale to locations in Europe, the Soviet Union, the Middle East, and Latin America.<sup>48</sup> The Chorale toured the Soviet Union in October 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis, performing Bach's Mass in B minor in Moscow. Shaw also proved to be an effective orchestral conductor, believing that understanding a composer's symphonic language

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45. "In Memoriam: Robert Shaw," *Musical Times* 140, no.1866 (Spring 1999): 9.

46. The text of this work was written by Walt Whitman commemorating the death of Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

47. Ibid.

48. Jeffrey Baxter and Robert Shaw, "An Interview with Robert Shaw: Reflections at Eighty," *The Choral Journal* 36, no. 9 (April 1996): 9.

would influence the interpretation of that composer's choral works. This aspiration led to a series of orchestral appointments including conductor of the San Diego Symphony Orchestra (1953-1957), associate orchestral conductor with George Szell of the Cleveland Orchestra (1956-1967), and music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (1967-1988).<sup>49</sup>

Shaw collaborated for many years with Alice Parker on arrangements of spirituals, hymns, folksongs, and Christmas carols that continue to be popular repertoire selections for American choirs to this day. He was colloquially known as the “dean of American choral conductors,” influencing many in the field in residencies across the country and inspiring thousands of amateur singers and educators. He produced a video project with the Carnegie Hall Corporation, *Preparing a Masterpiece*, where he rehearsed a volunteer choir of music educators and conductors auditioned throughout the country on major works of Brahms, Beethoven, Berlioz, Britten, Hindemith, Verdi, Mendelssohn, and Haydn. The video recordings were produced in eight volumes from 1991 to 1998.

He held honorary degrees and citations from 40 U.S. colleges and universities, 14 Grammy Awards, England's Gramophone Award, four ASCAP awards and the Alice M. Ditson award for service to contemporary music, the Guggenheim Fellowship (the first ever awarded to a conductor), the George Peabody Medal for outstanding musical contributions in the United States, and the Gold Baton Award of the American Symphony Orchestra League for distinguished service to music and the arts. He was awarded the *Officier des Arts et des Lettres* from France, Kennedy Center Honors in 1991, and in 1992 he was awarded the National Medal of the Arts by President George H. W. Bush.

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49. “In Memoriam: Robert Shaw.”

### Chapter 3: Unification of Choral Sound

Most choral conductors have a particular approach to unifying a choir's sound. Many different elements of choral sound unification may be observed: e.g. tone or timbre, intonation, volume, vowels, vibrato, etc. Describing these elements with respect to each conductor, this chapter focuses on the techniques they employ, to construct an impression of their individual approaches to unifying an ensemble.

#### Frieder Bernius

It is said that Bernius has an ear for subtle tone colors in ensemble singing.<sup>50</sup> One of the ways he cultivates a unified sound is to reduce the contrast between bright and dark vowels. In other words, darker vowels (e.g. [a], [o], and [u]) can be in conflict with brighter vowels (e.g. [ε] and [i]) within a musical phrase, which results in the timbral interruption of the line. That can manifest itself as a lack of intonation within the group. An additional problem is the difficulty of performing wide vowel contrasts in a short period of time (similar to the problem of a pianist playing successive long leaps of tall chords very quickly). It is challenging for a choir to unify their vowels since every voice is structured in its own unique way, and what is more, to *unify* vowels placed at the opposite end of the timbral spectrum. Bernius's technique is meant to bring the ideal

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50. Fred Stoltzfus, "A Fantasia on Teaching--Frieder Bernius at Work in a Choral Conducting Master Class," *Choral Journal*, 40.1 (August 1999): 37.

vowels closer together on the continuum, in order to make it easier to unify, and to make a more seamless musical phrase.<sup>51</sup>

According to Bernius, it is up to the conductor to choose how to do this, whether, in the case of an [a] and [i], the [a] should be made brighter to match with the [i] vowel, or the [i] being influenced by the darker [a] vowel.<sup>52</sup> Either way, the vowels within a phrase should influence one another. Bernius adds in an online video interview: “[The conductor] should know how to build a sound... If people know the common vowel of the musics they’re singing, they are able to bring a common sound. You should know exactly the color of the vowels.”<sup>53</sup> According to Bernius, this is what drives good intonation in unaccompanied singing, and what separates vocal music from instrumental music. Orchestral instruments have a visual reference point, while the voice must be “built by itself.” The tuning of voices is not only based on pitch, but also on timbre and color, which is strongly affected by vowels.

Many American choirs accomplish this kind of vowel compression by adjusting the brighter vowels toward the dark end of the spectrum, at times, forcing the dark vowels even darker. Some make the argument that darker vowels are easier to unify since their overtones are muted, and they can make a younger choir sound a bit more mature. Some even suggest a choir may sound more cultured in this fashion. However, this manner of modification at times glosses over the beauty of language, rendering a sort of

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51. Ibid.

52. Stoltzfus, “A Fantasia on Teaching--Frieder Bernius,” 40.

53. “Frieder Bernius interview in Vicenza,” YouTube video, 8:38, posted by “QuartettoVicenza,” 5 March 2011, <https://youtu.be/dqE3dTUdRjc>.

monochromatic sound, perhaps makes the text difficult to understand, and moreover, could negatively affect intonation. Bernius's technique of matching vowels within a phrase frees the singer from a slavish insistence on limited vowel colors, and unlocks an ensemble's tonal possibilities, limited only by the composer's imagination. Thus, there can be phrases within a work that are much brighter, or darker, than others so long as neighboring vowels are timbrally related.

### Tõnu Kaljuste

Many great choral conductors share an affinity for orchestral music, and it is interesting that they look to the orchestra to influence the perception of choral sound and interpretation. This can take shape in different ways, from a conductor asking a choir singing Bach to model the orchestra's interpretation of a certain passage, to comparing particular vocal timbres to orchestral instruments, and more. Kaljuste believes that with the rebirth of period instrument ensembles, there is a window through which to perceive the kind of choral sound an ensemble should model.<sup>54</sup>

Modern choirs have the difficult task of performing widely varied repertoire with audiences listening intently for how they change their interpretation, and consequently, their singing technique as they perform music from different musical periods. Kaljuste suggests that a conductor can understand the type of technique necessary by listening to the instruments of the relevant period, reasoning that the singers of the day produced a certain sound and technique based on the capacity of their instrumental counterparts.

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54. Vance Wolverton, "Interview with Tõnu Kaljuste," *Choral Journal* 53, no. 7 (February 2013): 34-41.

Using the term “cultural history” to describe the understanding a choir should have of the associated singing techniques, Kaljuste encourages conductors to educate their choirs in the appropriate styles and offer a variety of repertoire so their singers can develop their own understanding of cultural history in sound.

The study and performance of common articulation demonstrated by instrumentalists can serve to unify an ensemble in much the same way as vowel unification.

It wasn't very long ago that all conductors performed Bach and Vivaldi with the same technique that they used for Brahms and Shostakovich. There was this change in the world, starting in the 1970's or a bit before when all these old music gurus such as [Alfred] Deller started to bring to people's minds the idea that cultural history was connected with the instruments. One must bring the same thing to the education of our students so they can understand that they must change their technique for the music of different style periods.<sup>55</sup>

In effect, today's singers can learn how to interpret various styles of art music, and apply the appropriate vocal technique, by listening to period instruments of the relevant style. It is curious, however, that many conductors, Kaljuste included, ask their instrumentalists to play as though they were singing—imitating the human voice. “All music starts with the human voice and all of the instruments want to copy beautiful singing. All the different instrumentalists bring to the world very nice and specific qualities, but the basic thinking is vocal.”<sup>56</sup> It is conceivable that instruments are an important link—a time capsule, perhaps—between the singers of today and the singing styles of earlier music. Just as instrumentalists of early music derived their interpretation

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55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

from singers, singers of today can understand early music interpretation by emulating instrumental style.

One of the most obvious examples of this concept is in the detached playing style of instrumentalists who play the music of the Baroque period. It is well-known to many instrumentalists that Baroque music, in terms of historically-informed articulation, must be played with detachment, resisting the urge to make long legato phrase shapes, as one might do in the more recent periods of music. This style can easily be visualized on string instruments with the change of the bow. (String players performing music of the Baroque allow time and space between certain bowstrokes in particular phrasing points to produce the sound of this style.) Much has changed in stylistic development of the Baroque in singing and playing styles, but the instrumental style reference here has remained. Singers can learn much about authentic Baroque interpretation and articulation by listening to and observing instrumental style, as it establishes a link to the singing style of the same period.

Stephen Cleobury

The Choir of King's College is one of the best-known choral ensembles in the world. Millions tune in to the choir's annual international broadcast of *A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols*, every year in December. It may be surprising, given their global reputation, that Cleobury's approach to unifying the ensemble is not groundbreaking, especially since King's has such a recognizable sound. Of course, the use of children's voices does contribute to their distinctive sound, but even among other chapel choirs employing boys in the treble voices, the sound of the Choir of King's College is still



quite distinguishable. Cleobury explains his philosophy of unifying an ensemble straightforwardly:

We're talking about blend of voices, which means trying to get everybody, first and foremost, to listen to each other, and to be sympathetic to the people around them. For the personality in front listening, trying to blend this group, it's about achieving similar vowel sounds and similar vowel colors. It's about making sure everyone is singing at roughly equal volume. Otherwise you have a voice obtruding, and not agreeing on intonation.<sup>57</sup>

Although this simple statement about blend of voices may sound very familiar to students in choral conducting, it illustrates a few time-honored principles one may explore. Cleobury's first priority is to train his singers to listen to one another with the understanding that they must be "sympathetic" to their colleagues, or in this case, willing to change what they are doing vocally. He goes on to explain how he listens as a conductor to help the singers understand how they can listen and adjust. There are three reference points in listening for unification for Cleobury: vowels sound or colors, volume, and vibrato.<sup>58</sup>

There are many ways to approach vowel unification. For Cleobury, one of the keys to unifying a choral ensemble is the integrity of the language. Anyone listening to the King's College Choir may be instantly struck by the intelligibility of their singing. Their words are clearly understood. This is likely due to Cleobury's commitment to the language. Many conductors, attempting to unify a choir, resort to using common vowels that can be easily matched by everyone in the choir. The result may be homogenous but lacking in connection with the text, and in relation with the surrounding vowels in a

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57. Stephen Cleobury, Skype interview with the author, 28 January 2016.

58. Ibid.

phrase. A simple example is substituting the vowel [a] in the word “the.” Although this is very common in the United States, British choirs including King’s College tend to use the vowel [ə]. Touching on this idea in an interview relating to the 1999 recording of the Rachmaninov *Vespers*, Cleobury says “one thing that happens is that as soon as the language comes right, you start to get a change in color in the voices, particularly because of the vowels in the Church Slavonic. I very strongly believe that if you get the language right, then the color follows in its wake...”<sup>59</sup>

Cleobury suggests that singers practice modes of speech, even in one’s own language, because “the difference in how people speak to one another, colloquially, and how one should be pronouncing the language in, as it were, an art song is greater as each year goes by.”<sup>60</sup> The goal for the conductor is to very clearly understand what vowel is used for a particular syllable, making sure to keep the integrity of the language.

The second element in listening and unification is volume: “...making sure everyone is singing at roughly equal volume. Otherwise you have a voice obtruding, and not agreeing on intonation.” Cleobury makes an interesting observation, that a lack of balance can create intonation problems. Sometimes intonation can suffer because a particular voice is too bright or using a slightly incorrect vowel. However, balance can play a huge role as well. When a certain voice is “obtruding,” they likely are not listening or being “sympathetic” to the voices around them. Furthermore, balance problems can prevent the choir from hearing pitches of reference, usually the root of a chord.

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59. Brian Robins, “From Rutter to Rachmaninov: An Interview with Stephen Cleobury of King’s College, Cambridge,” *Fanfare - the Magazine for Serious Record Collectors* 22, no. 2 (November 1998): 138.

60. Cleobury, Skype interview.

A third fundamental of unification referenced by Cleobury is vibrato. Of course, every conductor has an opinion on vibrato, and some are indeed controversial. Regarding whether there should or should not be vibrato, and how much there should be, in a passage of music, Cleobury says: “It depends on what groups you are working with. Obviously with young children, the question of vibrato doesn’t arise so often, whereas it can arise in quite difficult ways in amateur adult groups...I don’t have a doctrinaire approach to vibrato.”<sup>61</sup> Since many of Cleobury’s choristers sing without vibrato, one may wonder about the effect of other sections (countertenors, tenors, and basses) singing with resonant vibrato. This may not prove to be a major problem at King’s as compared to mixed choirs, as developed men’s voices tend to possess a slower rate of vibrato than their female counterparts. Mixed choirs must take vibrato more into account since there is a wider range of vibrato variance between men’s and women’s voices, than between men’s and boy’s voices. In addition, it may be observed that unification of vibrato within a section is more important, especially in keeping with good intonation, than unification of vibrato between sections.

The *Carols from King’s* DVD featuring the King’s College Choir is a good representation of their unified choral sound.<sup>62</sup> In listening to the choir, phrases are interpreted with attention to textual stress with punctuation delineating the phrasing, all of which points to the priority of the text. Vowels are superbly unified across the choir, although they appear to avoid major modifications, the result of which renders the

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61. Cleobury, Skype interview.

62. Stephen Cleobury, Boris Ord, David Kremer, James Whitbourn, Philip Ledger, and David Willcocks, *Carols from King’s*, DVD ([S.I.]: Opus Arte, 2001).

performance intelligible. The brighter or frontal vowels [i] [eh] [a] are allowed to remain forward. The men sing with a full and natural resonance, achieving unification while emphasizing brighter timbres, a task that is difficult to accomplish. There also does not appear to be an effort to sing without vibrato or in straight-tone. Although wide-ranging operatic vibrato is not present, the choristers are singing with a supported, resonant, and vibrant tone. Some semblance of vibrato may indeed be, and likely is, present, but is not overtly apparent.

### John Eliot Gardiner

In unifying an ensemble, John Eliot Gardiner, a conductor of solely professional choirs, has a unique approach. With some of the best choristers in the world at his disposal, he looks to musical interpretation, almost entirely, to unify an ensemble. Gardiner is known for his pioneering of the historically-informed performance (HIP) movement. Recently, he has become uncomfortable with the label as it has taken on new definitions in his view. In an interview with Ivan Hewett of *The Daily Telegraph*, he says: “you have to remember what you find can always be interpreted in different ways. The danger is when different groups of people each think they’ve discovered the truth about something, which is why HIP gets very cliquy and intolerant.” To Gardiner, historically-informed interpretation is not a rigid adherence to an academically accepted stylistic norm, but a fresh hearing of the music based on an historically-informed point of view.<sup>63</sup>

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63. Hewett, “The Full Monteverdi.”

He is highly praised for his unique interpretation of classic works in the choral repertory. According to a *Billboard* article, Gardiner possesses what record companies are looking for, “a truly distinctive and often shattering approach to repertoire.”<sup>64</sup> His understanding of the need for period instruments and his insight into the articulation of instrumental and vocal forces of different style periods contributes to this unique approach to interpretation: “My enthusiasm for period instruments is not antiquarian or in pursuit of a spurious and unattainable authenticity, but just simply as a refreshing alternative to the standard, monochrome qualities of the symphony orchestra.”<sup>65</sup> Gardiner’s use of period instruments is not solely for music of the Baroque. On playing Beethoven with period instruments, Gardiner explains that one is brought back to “the white-hot crucible of creation.”<sup>66</sup> Here, he reveals that in paying attention to accompanying forces, one can discern what he considers to be the proper articulation, interpretation, balance, and intonation.

Like many other early music specialists, Gardiner looks to instrumental articulation to provide a blueprint for the kind of articulation required in the voice parts. Since Baroque and Classical period instrumentalists were trained to play like the singers, one can determine that there was coordination of articulation between singers and players: “When you look at the instrumental treatises of [Bach’s] day, they’re all based on imitation of the human voice... The singing voice is something, of course, that we can

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64. Heidi Waleson, “Super-Conductor: John Eliot Gardiner,” *Billboard* 108, no. 36 (7 September 1996): 46.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*

reproduce naturally—we have it. But are we reproducing it in the same way that Bach did it. That is the question.”<sup>67</sup>

Since Gardiner often works on projects that deal with orchestral and vocal forces, articulation becomes an important concept. Proper articulation practiced in rehearsal can actually be a powerful point of unification, and this appears to be one of Gardiner’s secrets. His singers are so well trained—they understand how to unify their volume, timbres, vowel colors, and to limit their vibrato—so he is able to avoid spending time on those elements of unification. Hence, interpretation is the frontier that the conductor exploits, not only to present the music in a creative and expressive way, but also to unify the minds and voices of the singers. It is a powerful thing when all the singers of an ensemble are not only singing in a unified way, but singing the musical phrase and communicating the text with precisely the same articulation and emphasis. In a rehearsal conducted by John Eliot Gardiner, articulation is used particularly to bring the ensemble together into greater unity.

Weston Noble

Weston Noble employs voice placement techniques and rhythmic cohesion to that end. Each academic year after singers were chosen for Noble’s Nordic Choir at Luther College, he meticulously labored to find the best standing position for the choristers within each section of the choir. Noble freely admits that the determination of voice

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67. John Eliot Gardiner, *John Eliot Gardiner In Rehearsal - BACH, J.S.: Christen, atzet diesen Tag, BWV 63*, Naxos Video Library, 58:41, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://naxosvideolibrary.com/title/100292>.

placement is highly subjective and depends on the preference of the conductor.<sup>68</sup> The factors affecting voice placement in his ensembles may include elements as varied as tone color, level of vibrato, pitch acuity, physical height, size of voice, and internal rhythm (e.g. rushing vs slowing). The primary criteria are vocal timbre, intonation, vibrato, and size of the voice.<sup>69</sup> A complex procedure of rotating singers is used to evaluate the best seating position of voices within a section based on these factors.<sup>70</sup>

With each section, Noble begins with finding two voices that blend well together, the pair of which serves as a model. A third singer is introduced and sings with each singer in the original pair both on their left and right, respectively. After the optimum unification is found, a fourth singer is introduced, and so on. Sometimes he reverses the final order in a mirror image to see if the unification is better. In determining the placement of each singer, Noble prefers to match opposites: dark voices with bright voices, voice with vibrato matched with a voice with no vibrato, singer tending to rush matched with a singer tending to slow the tempo.<sup>71</sup>

Noble has observed that one of the benefits of voicing a choir with this technique is that the singers are forced to listen attentively to the voices around them from the beginning and that they become conscious of the need to do so, a skill which will reap great benefits in later rehearsals. One also observes that the tendency for a singer to

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68. Weston Noble, and Steven M. Demorest, *Creating the Special World: A Collection of Lectures by Weston H. Noble*, (Chicago: GIA, 2005), 44-46.

69. White, "The Whole Conductor: Weston Noble's Philosophies."

70. Noble and Demorest, *Creating the Special World*, 44-46.

71. Ibid.

drastically alter their vocal mechanism to achieve unification is reduced when singers are placed in a formation in which they are neighbors to voices that naturally blend well with their own.<sup>72</sup> Although this placement technique is often credited to Noble, Robert Shaw, Roger Wagner, and others have utilized it as well.<sup>73</sup>

Weston Noble is also meticulous in placing sections of the choir in formation for rehearsals and performances. At the beginning of the academic year, and after the choir is voiced for unification, Noble places his choir in this formation from left to right: row one, soprano II and alto I; row two, soprano I and alto II; row three, bass II and tenor II; and row 4, bass I and tenor I. Sometime after Christmas, the singers often move into quartet or mixed formation.<sup>74</sup>

Weston Noble gives much credit to Robert Shaw for his approach of unifying the choir through rhythmic precision. The rhythmic unity of the choral ensemble is based on the timing and approach to consonants. This is what separated these two conductors from the rest in their day. Conductors tended (then and now) to focus on vowel unification, and with less time being spent on when the vowel was reached. He notes three fundamental rules (with credit given to Robert Shaw and his contemporary, Fred Waring). Rule 1: The initial consonant must precede the beat so that the vowel sound occurs on the beat. Rule 2: The consonant should be short and crisp. Rule 3: The consonant must be approached

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72. Otto E. Mielenz, "The Individual Placement and Baroque Phrasing of Weston Noble," *Choral Journal* 7, no. 1 (September – October 1966), pp. 13-14.

73. *Ibid.*

74. Dennis Shrock, and Weston Noble, "An Interview with Weston Noble," *Choral Journal* 32, no. 5 (December 1991), 10.



with the correct pitch in mind (singers should voice the consonant with the pitch that follows if possible, or imagine that pitch in unvoiced consonants).<sup>75</sup>

Noble often uses Shaw's count-singing<sup>76</sup> technique to meld the ensemble in rhythmic unity. He prefers to use the technique after there is reasonable comfort with the pitches and rhythms. The constant subdivision, he notes, helps the choristers internalize the rhythmic drive, which is in the subdivision, causing the choir to sing not only with more unification, but more expressively. In rehearsal, Noble is also known to use a drumstick (played by a drummer in the chorus) to mark the beat or the subdivisions as the choir sings. This technique reverses the process of count-singing with the subdivision being heard rather than sung.<sup>77</sup>

#### Robert Shaw

Weston Noble and Robert Shaw shared a penchant for rhythmic drive and cohesion and used it to great effectiveness to unify their respective ensembles. Shaw was once asked in a seminar how to achieve blend. His answer: "I achieve blend through rhythm... You directors spend so much time trying to achieve vowel uniformity, and then you never arrive at the vowel together!"<sup>78</sup> Although this is one of the elements for which

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75. Noble and Demorest, *Creating the Special World*, 53.

76. The method of singing the numbers corresponding to each beat of the measure along with the word "and" in between the beats corresponding to the eighth notes on the written pitches.

77. Ibid. 49-51.

78. Ibid. 53.

Shaw is most remembered, there are a host of techniques he employed and about which he wrote which may give a more complete account of his ideas on unification.

Shaw came to be known as an innovator, arranging singers in mixed formation to promote a more homogenous sound. A *Times* critic in 1953 wrote that one of Shaw's performances was "one of the most highly trained and carefully blended chorus-orchestra combinations in the world, capable of far more clarity than a booming mass chorus, and far more power than the usual small ensemble."<sup>79</sup>

According to Shaw, the task of singing uniformly—or as he would put it, with "unanimity"—is an extremely difficult, arduous, and complex endeavor requiring a level of constant self-evaluation unrealized by many singers. This unanimity requires a common approach to pitch, rhythm, tone, tempo, articulation, phrasing, and dynamics. "I have always felt that it was useless to command choral singers to 'Blend!'" Instead, he implies that singers must be trained to "appraise their own contributions" as it relates to those factors to achieve what he called "singing in [sync]."<sup>80</sup>

On 20 September 1984, Shaw composed a letter addressed to "Dear Friends" in which he enumerated four principles of "choral technique" which are foundations in his rehearsals. First, "*intonation* is the *sine qua non* (without which nothing) of choral singing."<sup>81</sup> He argues that modern generations suffered from a lack of pitch integrity and that it was every chorister's job to constantly monitor his/her own pitch acuity.

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79. "In Memoriam: Robert Shaw."

80. Robert Blocker, ed., *The Robert Shaw Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 38.

81. Blocker, *The Robert Shaw Reader*, 52.

Second, “*time is divisible.*” Every ensemble member must be sensitive to the tempo, not allowing anything to alter it unless it is “conscious and proportioned.” In order to maintain the integrity of the rhythm, the ensemble must sense not only the pulse of the tempo, but its internal divisions.<sup>82</sup>

Third, “vocal tone...is capable of *variety of dynamics and colors.*” Here, Shaw advocates for a use of dark and bright timbres, different rates of vibrato, and use of disparate dynamics from “yelly” to “mumbly.” His point is to approach the voice “as a means of musical-expression rather than self-exhibition,” and that these palatal variances may be used to communicate a wide array of affects in the music and text.<sup>83</sup>

Fourth, “vocal (choral) music has words...and that it is possible *most of the time* to project them through and over instrumental collaboration. We do this by concentrating not upon the words themselves, but upon the distinct and successive sounds which form those words; and by allotting to each of these sounds their precise moments and amount of musical time.”<sup>84</sup> These four principles of choral technique provide insight into Shaw’s priorities as a conductor. They also reveal the reasoning behind his distinctive warm-ups and rehearsal techniques, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

One could say Shaw believed in a natural vowel production. “It is perfectly possible to have vowel definition without grotesque facial contortion and the fracture of vocal line. The vowels are formed at the ‘voice box’ (or whatever you want to call it), not by the teeth, nose or position of the tongue in the mouth. ... Drop your jaw slightly and

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82. Ibid, 53-54.

83. Ibid, 54-55.

84. Ibid, 55.

naturally.”<sup>85</sup> There is much conversation over the proper formation of vowels and the best way to unify that formation throughout a choir. The variations of the teaching methods conductors use to instruct their singers on the right way to form a certain vowel are too many to count. Shaw advocates for a natural approach to vowel formation, which in his view is most efficient for both singer and conductor.

Regarding diphthongs and triphthongs, syllables which possess multiple vowel sounds, Shaw had an approach which some of today’s conductors may consider unconventional. In order to maintain the integrity of the text, he preferred to “exaggerate the intensity and the duration of the distinct vowel sounds in diphthongs and triphthongs.” According to today’s convention, choirs typically sing the first vowel sound for as long as possible, producing the second or third vowel sound in the syllable at the last conceivable moment. However, Shaw implored his choirs to “never sing one vowel sound where two belong... Break it up; sing both parts separately and distinctly.” Here, he is advocating that the final vowel sound in a diphthong be given equal footing with the first vowel sound.<sup>86</sup>

There are also non-musical elements of choral unification employed by Shaw that certainly affect ensemble sound including mental commitment and spiritual unity. In a letter to one of his ensembles, he wrote:

This is a contemporary participation which allows a person to contribute at his own completely highest level of personal intellectual commitment,

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85. Ibid, 13.

86. Ibid.

personal physical control, personal technical discipline and only gain new strengths and new self respect through this common endeavor.<sup>87</sup>

Shaw also had an awareness of the power of music to connect to what he might call ‘our spiritual existence,’ and that there was something in the music to be found once unity of sound, quality, and interpretation were achieved. He often remarked, “There shouldn’t be a single tone that lacks spiritual expression.”<sup>88</sup> Gail Burnaford, a former chorister, wrote “technique and precision enable both listeners and performers not to settle for less than such spiritual unity.”<sup>89</sup> These reveal that Shaw saw the unification of an ensemble as something more than vowel colors and rhythmic cohesion, but the physical, mental, and musical bond of people giving of themselves to reproduce that which the composer could only imagine.

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87. Gail Burnaford, “The Legacy of Choral Director Robert Shaw: Beyond Technique to Music in Communities,” *International Journal of Community Music* 5, no. 2 (August 2012): 152.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

## Chapter 4: Rehearsal Strategies and Techniques

Frieder Bernius

Frieder Bernius is known throughout the world for his aptitude in achieving subtle nuances of phrasing and tone color from his ensembles. So, his expectations at the outset of a rehearsal are high. He characterizes his ensembles at the beginning of a rehearsal as “numb and immovable,” suggesting the obvious, that ensembles need time under leadership to work toward a common interpretation. It also insinuates that the conductor may feel frustrated that the ensemble does not produce the music as the conductor heard it in his mind’s ear. Bernius defines a successful rehearsal as one in which “something is stirring.” In other words, there must be movement toward his original conception of the interpretation of the music.<sup>90</sup>

In a choral conducting master class in 1999, Bernius gave constructive advice to many composers on the podium, as recorded by Fred Stoltzfus in *Choral Journal*. In teaching conducting and rehearsal technique, he displays a preference for working out music fundamentals before interpretation, suggesting that conductors should react quickly to issues of pitch, rhythm, and other musical errors, working to correct them before moving on to interpretation.<sup>91</sup> When dealing with problems of intonation, Bernius usually reminds his singers to sing with physical energy. He also suggests that poor intonation

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90. Constance DeFotis, and Frieder Bernius, “A Conversation with Frieder Bernius, Founder and Director of the Kammerchor Stuttgart,” *Choral Journal*. 34, No. 9 (April 1994), 36.

91. Stoltzfus, “A Fantasia on Teaching--Frieder Bernius,” 35.

can be a result of a lack of balance between voices.<sup>92</sup> Many conductors use neutral syllables and playing choral parts on the piano to solidify pitches in rehearsal. Bernius, however, recommends neither. With some exceptions, Bernius encourages the use of piano in rehearsal, but only to demonstrate voice leading or the harmonic structure, not to fortify the parts as they sing.<sup>93</sup> Regarding the use of nonsense syllables in lieu of the text:

I put at once (with very little exceptions) the text together with the sound, in order to make clear the individual vowel sounds, on which we are working more and more during the rehearsals. Also the tempo, which I have in mind, should be there from the first beginning (also with very few exceptions). So I give the singers from the first rehearsal the impression of the interpretation, with which I will do the following concert.<sup>94</sup>

There are three points of distinction in this statement—use of text in rehearsal, importance of tempo in rehearsal, and rehearsal as a simulation of performance—which may be investigated further. First, Bernius makes the point that since good intonation and unification depends upon similar vowels produced by each singer, the conductor must rehearse using the text early on in the rehearsal process. The advantage to this approach is that one can work on intonation with the actual vowels of the text. Many choral conductors use neutral syllables in a passage, or the entire piece, to work on intonation, but once the actual text is reintroduced, one has to do the work over again since the real vowels haven't been rehearsed. Vowels greatly affect intonation, and Bernius is suggesting that since that is the case, one should use the vowels of the text as early as possible to generate good intonation.

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92. Ibid, 38.

93. Ibid, 35.

94. Frieder Bernius, email message to the author, 21 February 2016.

Second, Bernius believes that phrasing is the single most important element (following the rudimentary basics) of the performance of a composition, and he also believes that it is the very thing most lacking when an ensemble takes up a piece of music in rehearsal.<sup>95</sup> Musicians tend to mark time as they play or sing in rehearsal, as if with a metronome. The result of this type of singing in a choral rehearsal is every beat and syllable will sound stressed or emphasized, which is out of character of the music and the text in most cases.

Tempo affects interpretation, even in a rehearsal. For example, there are differing opinions and interpretations of tempo in early music works. Some feel an urgency to perform early music at above-average tempi to avoid the loss of tension brought on by harmonic progression. Others argue that harmonic tension is always present regardless of tempo, and that its affect can even be heightened at slower tempi. Bernius admits that earlier in his career, even as a violin student, he would push the tempo in order to maintain the tension. He acknowledges that as of late, he tends to “take more time. The tension will be sustained nonetheless.”<sup>96</sup> For Bernius, rehearsing at the proper tempo is a way of enforcing the desired interpretation.

Exceptions to using text and performance tempo include very difficult pieces, e.g., dodecaphonic works. Bernius is also not above using sectionals and even “individual correpetitions”<sup>97</sup> especially with singers new to his ensembles. These are avoided if possible in Bernius’s rehearsals so as “not to give the impression that music making has

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95. DeFotis and Bernius, “A Conversation with Frieder Bernius,” 36.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Bernius here refers to sessions of individual vocal coaching.



to do with ‘work’...Only in [sectionals and correpetitions] I will use neutral syllables, and only in those the way to get a good intonation and knowledge of the piece has to do with ‘work’, not with music...But after this you will have to start from the beginning, if you haven't used the text so far.”<sup>98</sup>

Third, Bernius endeavors to simulate the concert experience in every rehearsal, demonstrated by his preference for rehearsing up to tempo and using text early in the process. He often uses the phrase “Proben ist simulieren”—that is, “to rehearse is to simulate,”<sup>99</sup> attempting to simulate the performance atmosphere as often as possible. In his master classes, he encourages conducting students to fix technical problems with intensity, but afterwards to return immediately to the simulation of a performance atmosphere.<sup>100</sup>

Finally, even with the best rehearsal techniques, a conductor must still be able to show the music with his/her gesture. Addressing this concept, Bernius says to his conducting students, “Es gibt weniger zu sagen, und mehr zu machen,” or “there is less to say, and more to do.”<sup>101</sup> In this, he makes the point that a conductor’s ability to demonstrate the music to the ensemble is just as important, if not more so, than his/her ability to verbally communicate in rehearsal. Bernius’s thoughts on conducting are discussed in the following chapter.

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98. Bernius, email message.

99. Stoltzfus, “A Fantasia on Teaching--Frieder Bernius,” 38.

100. Ibid, 40.

101. Ibid, 40-41.

Tõnu Kaljuste

Conductors exhibit different personalities on the podium, some more intense than others. Kaljuste considers himself to be one of the more intense conductors in the field. Speaking of the EPCC, he says “I drive it very hard, and not everyone stays in the choir, so the management is embarrassed that the photographs are always out of date!”<sup>102</sup> This assertion may be a reflection of the fluidity of professional choir personnel. Many professional singers perform in multiple choirs per concert season and do not retain the same personnel from season to season. Instead, they base rosters on the required forces for the selected repertoire.

Some conductors also use metaphors from personal life to illustrate musical ideas or interpretation. Kaljuste, however, prefers to keep the making of music unsullied by personal anecdotes or other personal viewpoints of belief surrounding the music.

We should not bring our personal lives into the rehearsal process...In art, one sees how powerful life can be. If you allow your private life or other social issues to intrude, the sensitivity of the art that we strive to bring to the audience will be ruined. I want people to concentrate only on the music.<sup>103</sup>

One might hypothesize that this avoidance of non-musical communication is cultural in nature, since in the United States, conductors often refer to spiritual ideas or personal anecdotes to illustrate particular points. However, this need not necessarily be the case, especially in the context of professional choral and orchestral organizations of which Kaljuste is a part. The measure of whether or not this technique is effective is to listen and evaluate the performance of the group. Ensembles conducted by Kaljuste, especially

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102. Stanford, “A Major Force in Choral Music.”

103. Wolverton, “Interview with Tõnu Kaljuste,” 34-41.

the EPCC, perform spiritual music and music inextricably connected with national and ethnic culture, requiring some emotional and/or spiritual awareness to be performed effectively.

Kaljuste is a serious musician deeply committed to reflecting composers' voices through his interpretations, especially Estonian natives Arvo Pärt and Veljo Tormis. His interpretations are strongly guided by texts, which in turn influence the course of the rehearsal. In an interview about his collaboration with Pärt, Kaljuste observes that "to delve deeply into the texts during rehearsals and concerts is an experience by itself. The depths and heights they take you to are extraordinary."<sup>104</sup>

#### Stephen Cleobury

In his rehearsal techniques, as with unifying an ensemble, Stephen Cleobury invokes ideas that are quite conventional in the field of choral conducting. When asked about his priorities in rehearsal, Cleobury replied:

Firstly, that it should be conducted in the most efficient manner possible, so that means that indeed you have to plan it... Secondly, there's a sort of predictable trajectory of attention span, as it were, particularly with the children. Each morning I have a rehearsal with the choristers of King's, which is of 55 minutes duration. The first five minutes, we're getting everybody warmed up and switched on, ready for the work, and then I would expect to do the most valuable work, say, within the next 30 to 40 minutes. So, if I'm wanting to teach a new piece or something that is particularly taxing, and then I might try to finish with something a little bit better known.<sup>105</sup>

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104. Tõnu Kaljuste, "A Process of Discovery," UE MusikSalon, accessed 18 February 2016, <http://musiksalon.universaledition.com/en/article/a-process-of-discovery>.

105. Cleobury, Skype interview.

His plan of beginning with a warm-up followed by working through more difficult music, then closing with something familiar, is replicated in choral rehearsals in churches and classrooms throughout the United States and beyond. Cleobury has a keen understanding of how his singers will respond, particularly since he has such a long tenure at King's.

I think you have to know your group, and you have to have a plan. You have to know what you want to achieve. You have to help them feel they've achieved something, by not getting exceedingly delayed or bogged down at a particular point, knowing how much to say, how much to leave, keeping their interest.<sup>106</sup>

There are 24 children between the ages of nine and thirteen singing in the same choir with adult male voices. This can cause issues related to the pacing of rehearsal and managing varying attention spans. For his part, Cleobury attempts to work quickly enough so as to challenge the more mature singers, but without leaving the children "complete baffled." "In recent years I've increasingly split them up into groups—the younger group and the older group—so we can work at different speeds, and work on solo work and semi-chorus work with the older ones, while the younger ones work at a slower speed on basic repertoire."<sup>107</sup>

In dealing with the text of a piece in rehearsal, Cleobury may separate the pitches and rhythms from the text depending on the language of the work, and the difficulty of the music. "I'm told that the parts of the brain that deal with text and which deal with music (pitch, and so on) are different, so you're obviously having to engage all of that...

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106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

it depends on what the piece is.”<sup>108</sup> Cleobury has a talent for understanding the disposition of his singers, in musical ability and their general mood from day to day. His ability to sympathize with his singers, including how best to learn music together and keep their attention, enables him to refrain from forming hard and fast rules of rehearsal process.

The King’s College Choir, although a chapel choir of developing musicians, functions much like a professional choir, rehearsing and performing great choral repertoire almost entirely throughout the year. And like most every other professional choir, they have developed traditions in rehearsal that reflect on their workmanship as musicians. Over the years, the choir has created a system of self-correction where the choristers raise their hand during rehearsal to acknowledge a mistake they made. Apparently, this tradition started decades prior to Cleobury’s residency with choristers staying after rehearsal to apologize for making a mistake. Cleobury paints this tradition in a positive light, explaining that this culture attempts to “create faculties of self-criticism” within maturing singers and that it serves to save time in rehearsal. If he hears a problem in the rehearsal followed by a chorister raising his hand, he may discern that he can move on without stopping to correct it, depending on the experience of the singer.<sup>109</sup>

#### John Eliot Gardiner

There are many sides to John Eliot Gardiner in rehearsal. The stories told by his singers of his ability to hear and diagnose problems and inspire the chorus, and even his

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108. Ibid.

109. Cleobury, *Carols from King’s*, DVD.

propensity to display a bit of a temper, are legendary. His singers freely admit there is an incredible weight of expectation, brought about by Gardiner wanting them to be the absolute best they can be at every moment. In a rehearsal conducted by Gardiner, there is no place for a lack of concentration. His demanding ear requires exact phrasing and articulation, with a fundamental understanding of the rhetorical content of the text.

A model rehearsal with the Monteverdi Choir can be viewed in *John Eliot Gardiner in Rehearsal: Christen, atzet diesen Tag, BWV 63*.<sup>110</sup> Since his groups are full of highly-trained professional musicians, time is spent rehearsing high-level musical ideas, and very quickly. For example, he often stops to ask for a “gentle accent” on a hemiola, trying it again, and continuing on. All this happens in very rapid succession. He repeats this rapid sequence for other details such as asking for more explosive consonants (especially voiced consonants) at the beginnings of phrases. These small details, of course, add integrity to the music, but actually function as a unifying element as well (as discussed in the previous chapter), bringing the entire choir’s mental and vocal energies together.<sup>111</sup>

Gardiner also uses the text as a cornerstone of establishing how a work should sound and be interpreted. He often speaks the text out loud, using its meaning as a metaphor for the sound that should be produced. One may observe, there is also a language expert in the choir (when the chorus is performing a work not in their native tongue) who may be asked to read a passage of text in rhythm as a model for the choir. In the case of the Bach rehearsal, he used the German language speaker’s modeling as the

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110. Gardiner, *John Eliot Gardiner In Rehearsal*.

111. *Ibid.*

basis for the interpretative articulation for which he is striving. After having her speak the text in rhythm, he follows with asking the choir to repeat it. Having not exactly repeated the text according to the appropriate text stress, he asked them to do it again after demonstrating it himself. Speaking the text in rhythm is a technique employed by most choral conductors. What sets Gardiner apart is his insistence on syllabic stress (emphasis on strong/weak or long/short syllables), avoiding the “sack of potatoes on every note,” which becomes a hindrance not only to intelligibility, but also to stylistic articulation.<sup>112</sup>

There are times when Gardiner’s zeal for microscopic detail gets the better of him, as chronicled by Peter Phillips. The conductor of the Tallis Scholars, writing in *The Spectator*, recalls in the story of John Eliot Gardiner losing his temper with a London Symphony Orchestra trumpeter, referring to “notorious rudeness to performers and colleagues.”

What do we think of that? Do we love his music-making so much that we forgive him the odd peccadillo? Perhaps we think his music-making must be all the better for it. What is certain is that Gardiner is no Wagner: his achievements are likely to be forgotten soon after his death, as is the case with just about every conductor there ever was. If this is true, do we still indulge him?<sup>113</sup>

It may be an overstatement to say that John Eliot Gardiner will not be remembered, as some composers will be. However, Phillips is suggesting that the conductor is not as important as some would like to think, so the conductor should carry himself with less self-importance, and more humility.

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112. Ibid.

113. Peter Phillips, “The mean, bullying maestro is extinct – or should be,” *The Spectator*, 5 April 2014, accessed 9 September 2015. <http://www.spectator.co.uk/arts/music/9174471/is-it-possible-to-be-a-real-artist-and-a-nice-person/>.

I have a visceral reaction to any evidence that a conductor feels he is so above his colleagues that he can lord it over them and abuse them. Any music worth performing has to be a collaborative venture. Rank and file players and singers these days have already spent many hours being lectured to, on the way to becoming qualified—they do not need any more of it from the podium. They need to be encouraged.<sup>114</sup>

Gardiner does indeed have very specific ideas, and appears to be always in control of every minute of rehearsal. Although the piece by Phillips is instructive to all conductors, the singers in Gardiner’s ensembles, the Monteverdi Choir specifically, seem to have great respect for the man and his musical intellect.

In the rehearsal of BWV 63 referenced above, there arose an interesting debate between Gardiner and the German language expert about the word “*quälen*,” at the end of the work. The speaker remarked that the vowel of the first syllable was too “friendly”—that it needed to be more “ugly” and “noisy” as if to torment, which is the meaning of the word. Gardiner kindly took exception to that description, remarking that the chorus is triumphant overall. Therefore, the word should have a more playful tone (perhaps as in a child playing a game of tag), with a “knowingness” one would have if they were to escape the *quälen* of the devil.<sup>115</sup> This demonstrates the conductor’s ability to observe minute levels of textual articulation amid macro-level contextual understanding, which is drawn upon to form the overall creative interpretation for which his music is so well known.

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114. Ibid.

115. Gardiner, *John Eliot Gardiner In Rehearsal*.



Weston Noble

Few choral conductors are as encouraging and uplifting to singers in a choir as Weston Noble. He is well known for his emphasis on teaching psychology in the planning of rehearsals and conducting strategies. His lecture, “Three Methods of Teaching,” a study in how conductors can engage all students in their various learning styles, is a prime example. Three learning styles, and consequently teaching styles, are addressed: cognitive teaching, affective teaching, and kinesthetic teaching.<sup>116</sup>

Cognitive teaching deals with specific and fact-based instructions. Employing cognitive instructions may be the quickest way to solving a problem, because they communicate to the ensemble exactly what the conductor wants. Conversely, they can also be stale and without inspiration, and since one of the most critical elements of singing or any music is emotion, the conductor must take care not to overwhelm the rehearsal with cognitive-only instruction. To do so may result in uninspired or unmusical singing, according to Noble.<sup>117</sup>

Affective teaching, related to the Baroque doctrine of affections, employs imaginative metaphors and images to relate complex musical ideas to the choir. Such imagery may be spiritual in nature, especially in Noble’s case. If choristers can sing a given text with an accompanied visualization, they will likely be more expressive in performance. An affective instruction may be more understood by beginning singers, where a cognitive instruction might be confusing. However, Noble stresses that the conductor should always have a cognitive explanation for how to arrive at the affective

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116. Noble, *Creating a Special World*, 37.

117. *Ibid*, 37-38.

instruction. Framed another way: “Never ask an affective question without knowing how to achieve the answer cognitively.” The key is to connect visual imagery with concrete instruction, thereby exploiting two distinct learning styles, in order to have the choristers grasp the concept more thoroughly.<sup>118</sup>

Kinesthetic teaching employs the body. It is a style used often in early childhood education, but can be effective in adult ensembles as well, according to Noble. The machinations of kinesthetic learning are as varied as the conductor’s imagination. One could have the choir use their hands as if conducting, tap a rhythm on their chest, bend their knees on high notes, or dance around the room in triple meter. Movement enhances memorization and conceptualization similar to affective teaching.<sup>119</sup> Noble encourages the use of all three of these styles regularly in choral rehearsal to both accommodate (with respect to individual learning styles) and inspire every chorister.

In a 1991 interview with Dennis Shrock, he noted: “Every time I fail to observe psychological ramifications of rehearsal procedure, I reduce the optimum effectiveness of the time spent.”<sup>120</sup> In planning a rehearsal, Noble is not only thinking about his own musical priorities for the day, but how to use positive energy in the psyche of his singers to an advantage in the rehearsal. For example, he puts a great deal of time into selecting the first piece to be rehearsed and where in that piece to begin. The conductor aspires to impress the musicality and energy onto the students from the very beginning, in order to set the stage for the rest of the rehearsal. He places more challenging selections in the

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118. Ibid, 38-40.

119. Ibid, 40-41.

120. Shrock, “An Interview,” 10.

center of the rehearsal time, ensuring a more successful and gratifying experience with easier or more familiar pieces at first and at the last.<sup>121</sup>

Noble rarely begins from the beginning of a piece. Instead, he opts for a passage that can be performed successfully without a great degree of effort. This continues the upward flow of momentum and avoids deflating the choir on too difficult of a passage. Noble prefers a passage with all forces involved, and likely a climactic spot. The final piece in the rehearsal is one that the singers will hopefully hum as they leave the rehearsal, in anticipation of the next meeting, so it is usually one of lighter character.<sup>122</sup>

A further psychological concern of Noble's is the involvement of the singers. He acknowledges that when students feel involved in the process, they have a "sense of affirmation,"<sup>123</sup> which is important to building a team or an ensemble. Noble is fond of asking questions during a rehearsal—even technical questions—about how to modify a particular vowel, the meaning of the text, or how the composer elicits emotion. In Noble's view, this type of collaboration with the singers affirms that they are part of the process, and helps the singers "discover the spirit of the composition."<sup>124</sup> Involvement is also promoted by asking quartets of singers, or even an individual, to model a musical phrase during rehearsal. Not only is this technique an effective tool for demonstrating an idea that may be difficult for a larger choir to grasp, it provides an opportunity for the

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121. Ibid.

122. Noble, *Creating a Special World*, 31.

123. Shrock, "An Interview," 10.

124. Ibid, 10-11.

modeling singers to be affirmed in their singing, not only by the conductor, but by the rest of the ensemble.

Regarding specific rehearsal techniques, Noble encourages the use of neutral syllables, as is common, to aid in sight-reading, with the accompanist playing the full harmonic texture.<sup>125</sup> Encouraging student participation, he often asks questions of individuals, immediately after stopping, relating to solving a problem encountered in the music with careful attention to be affirmative and encouraging, perhaps by offering multiple choice answers.<sup>126</sup> Modeling is also an effective resource, but Noble, as mentioned previously, prefers to have members to model more difficult passages, sometimes individually, believing it to be a more compelling tool than conductor modeling.<sup>127</sup> Continuing to encourage active participation, he often asks singers to present brief research on a style, a formal structure, or a composer, with the purpose of training choral musicians who are preparing to teach, not merely training singers in an ensemble.<sup>128</sup>

The task of sustaining a singer's enthusiasm through the choral rehearsal is almost entirely the job of the conductor, according to Noble. The success or failure of rehearsal rests on the effectiveness of the conductor in planning and executing a rehearsal strategy. One of his primary axioms is that singers must be involved and engaged throughout the

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125. Noble, *Creating a Special World*, 31.

126. *Ibid*, 31-32.

127. *Ibid*, 32.

128. *Ibid*, 33.

rehearsal, which builds on their positive energy and minimizes problems related to discipline.<sup>129</sup>

### Robert Shaw

Robert Shaw was committed to harnessing the power of amateur singers as an intellectual community. He valued the collective persistence of a group of amateurs who strive to get better for their own satisfaction. He was known to rehearse musical works, which he had conducted dozens if not hundreds of times, with a fresh enthusiasm and interpretation as if it was his first time conducting it. Gail Burnaford, a former chorister in the Atlanta Symphony Chorus and Chamber Chorus, recalls an evening rehearsal of a Bach chorale where a frustrated Shaw announced that what they were singing was “terribly difficult, and you’re not making it difficult enough.” His intellectually rigorous rehearsals required the amateur to see complexity in simple phrases. Burnaford states, “part of Shaw’s legacy is the commitment to intellectual collective persistence even when something appears easy.”<sup>130</sup>

Shaw’s choral warm-ups demanded more of the intellect than of the voice. His goal was not to warm-up the voice, but the prime the mind. As such, they were intended to directly relate to the music in rehearsal. For example, one of his favorites was a well-known exercise where the choir sings a pitch in unison, then raises it by half-steps gradually over several counts. The idea was to sharpen the pitch acuity of the singers and

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129. Ibid, 30.

130. Burnaford, “The Legacy of Choral Director Robert Shaw,” 149.

to reinforce the idea that “no note stays the same,” whether higher, lower, louder, or softer.<sup>131</sup>

Robert Shaw had two great influences on his music and rehearsal technique: Toscanini and George Szell. Shaw understood Toscanini to possess “extraordinary emotional commitment” to the musical product combined with an overarching artistic vision. Szell, on the other hand, influenced Shaw with his “happiness and satisfaction in the construction of the piece and in each measure of every movement.” “[Szell] marked all his music so meticulously that had everyone been able to play all the nuances of dynamics, articulation, and accentuation at the first rehearsal, the rehearsal would have surpassed most performances. He used to say to his orchestra, that they began to rehearse where other orchestras finished rehearsal.”<sup>132</sup>

Shaw was a “literary thinker” and often used metaphors to communicate sound ideas to the choir. For example, he was known to compare sopranos singing with an overly strident tone to “cats pulled through keyholes.” Burnaford once noted in her score that Shaw had asked the choir to “try singing forte [with a] quality of invitation rather than the quality of rape.”<sup>133</sup> Shaw was also known for rehearsing at slow tempi and soft dynamics mixed with rhythmic precision techniques such as count-singing. He waited to insert text and dynamics into a work until intonation, rhythmic precision, and choral balance and unification were firm.<sup>134</sup>

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131. Ibid.

132. Baxter and Shaw, “An Interview with Robert Shaw,” 11.

133. Burnaford, “The Legacy of Choral Director Robert Shaw,” 151.

134. Ibid.

Choral rehearsals under the direction of Robert Shaw are always governed by two major premises. First, “save the human voice! Avoid wear and waste of singers’ ‘gold’ when learning notes; invent devices which teach pitch, rhythm and text with a minimum of vocal effort.” Second, Shaw endeavors to “use devices which make it impossible not to hear, recognize—and correct—errors of pitch, rhythm and text.”<sup>135</sup>

In these two premises, he lays the groundwork for his innovative rehearsal method of count-singing, a device which aims to save the voice and encourage listening and quick corrections. Accordingly, he encourages quiet singing when learning notes, especially using the count-singing technique. Since “it has seemed such a waste to pour vocal energy into wrong notes.”<sup>136</sup>

Shaw often refers to the “proper order” of priorities in the rehearsal process: pitch, rhythm, enunciation, and dynamics and vocal timbre.<sup>137</sup> (N.B.: Count-singing involves only the first two of those priorities, while sequestering the others.) The introduction of dynamics and timbre, which requires a larger tone, is placed last to save the singers’ vocal gold for when it matters most. “Nothing will wear out a voice...so rapidly as attempting to sing at full vocal thrust before one is absolutely secure as to pitch, rhythm, and enunciation. Quiet count-singing...offers the quickest and most secure approach to pitch and rhythm.”<sup>138</sup> In addition to saving the voice and keeping rehearsal priorities in order, quiet count-singing also allows the entire ensemble to more easily hear the other

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135. Blocker, *The Robert Shaw Reader*, 51.

136. *Ibid*, 83.

137. *Ibid*, 85.

138. *Ibid*.

parts within the harmonic texture, which in turn encourages unification by training singers to be accustomed to hearing their own part in context.<sup>139</sup>

In another “Dear People” letter, Shaw gives six tactical advantages of count-singing. First, count-singing makes clear when sound should begin, and unifies the ensemble to this onset. Second, musical rests become blatantly obvious, and force the ensemble to heed them. Third, since a pitch is reiterated multiple times as long as the note’s duration, intonation may be improved as the choristers are forced to replicate the pitch multiple times. Fourth, the harmonic progression of contrapuntal textures is more readily apparent since counting out loud compels every singer to change at exactly the proper time. Fifth, tempo and dynamics changes can be more precise, as counting the subdivisions allows the ensemble to internalize the exact proportion of each change. Sixth, singing the widely varying vowel sounds within count-singing syllables prevents the voice from tiring on a common nonsense syllable, and may also give the conductor an opportunity to encourage the ensemble to practice a “continuity of vocal core (vocal color, vocal line) through changing pitches and vocal ranges.”<sup>140</sup>

Regarding the introduction of text into the learning process of a choral work, there is much debate and personal preference. As it pertains to practices of Shaw, he cautions to first learn the notes, rhythms, and phrasing until they are “right and ineradicable!” He uses Bach as an example of a composer highly motivated by the text. If one introduces text too soon, attempting to understand the spiritual and rhetorical affect of the text on our interpretation, we risk interpreting the music outside of Bach’s intentions. Instead,

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139. Ibid.

140. Ibid, 90.



Shaw claims that “phrasing, articulation, intonation, balance and the ebb and flow of dynamics are the means by which we contact Bach’s motivation.”<sup>141</sup>

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141. Ibid, 93-94.

## Chapter 5: Conducting Gesture

A choral or orchestral conductor wields heavy influence on the ensemble they direct, not only in leading a rehearsal or in mentoring musicians, but also in demonstrating the music with gestural communication in rehearsal and performance. There are some who suggest that the field is largely undefined, or at least lacking in principles that establish exactly the job of a conductor on the podium—not as rehearsal technician or vocal coach, but conductor. As evidence, instrumentalists and choristers around the United States are regularly confused by the gestures they see on the podium, and are not exactly sure what to follow. The examination of the conductors in this chapter attempts to build a consensus, or at least compare contrasting views, of how to best influence an ensemble with interpretive gestures by observation, and through analysis of their thoughts toward the concept of conducting.

Frieder Bernius

Bernius teaches a few master classes a year inviting students from around the world. Some of the students, after an audition, are invited to participate in the class from the podium, instructed by Bernius. In these classes, the attendees do not sing in the choir, as is customary in other master classes, but observe while a student conducts a professional choir assembled for the class. Bernius usually begins by placing an emphasis on posture, encouraging an open body, tall stance, and shoulders down and back. The conducting gesture should be at a low center of gravity with a mix of motion and repose.

“You want to appear as a *Baumsteher*—like a deeply anchored tree, a solid, balanced, and flexible presence.”<sup>142</sup>

Bernius also places a premium on preparatory gestures. Since the beginning of a phrase, section, or movement is of primary importance, he suggests developing “precise and evocative” gestures of preparation.<sup>143</sup> The object of a preparatory gesture is to clearly show three things: tempo, dynamic, and character. The words “precise” and “evocative” describe the attitude with which the conductor approaches the prep in order to influence the impulse, or the will, of the performer.

Students are encouraged in these master classes to heavily differentiate their gestures in order to make the invitation more insistent. One must always resist the urge to beat time, and instead, focus on a clear and compelling gesture. Bernius is often asked to provide useful exercises or fundamental approaches to improving one’s gesture, an idea he has resisted. In his judgment, a gestural style should be unique to a conductor, as long as it is musical, comprehensible, and compelling. In teaching conducting, Bernius refrains from suggesting particular gestures to his students. Instead, he offers discussions of ensemble sound, interpretation, phrasing, or balance.<sup>144</sup> Such discussions are meant to elicit a sort of higher-order thinking in his students. He wants them to connect their gesture with a purpose, or a “why,” rather than modeling his own gestural patterns or ideas.

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142. Stoltzfus, “A Fantasia on Teaching--Frieder Bernius,” 36.

143. *Ibid.*, 40.

144. *Ibid.*, 37-40.

The conductor cannot force an ensemble to sing musically and must not attempt to control through a heavy-handed gesture.<sup>145</sup> At times, less is more. Instead, the conductor must persuade the ensemble to sing with good phrasing, articulation, and interpretation, through a convincing gesture. “Forceful” and “convincing” are not necessarily the same thing. One must show the music as clearly and completely as possible, which, combined with eye contact and facial expression, can render a strong impulse from the singer to sing a passage precisely the way it is being demonstrated.

Finally, Bernius is watchful to make sure his students do not begin talking too much. Such is easy for passionate directors who want to explain what they want to hear, why they want to hear it, and how the choir can produce it. However, good conductors understand that the more they talk, the less the choir is committing to the music. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, Bernius is fond of saying, “Es gibt weniger zu sagen, und mehr zu machen,” or, “There is less to say, and more to do.”<sup>146</sup>

### Tõnu Kaljuste

Choral conducting students at the Estonian Academy of Music are taught by Kaljuste, who gives them ample time to work on the podium with university choirs.<sup>147</sup> Although he still performs around the world as a freelance conductor, he considers teaching at the Academy his most recent creative period on par with the time he spent developing the EPCC and the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra.

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145. Ibid, 36-37.

146. Ibid, 40-41.

147. Wolverson, “Interview with Tõnu Kaljuste,” 34-41.

If his teaching of conducting is a reflection of his own gestural style, his students are certainly fortunate to work with him. The author had the privilege of observing his conducting of the EPCC and Tallinn Chamber Orchestra at the American Choral Directors Association national convention in Salt Lake City in 2015. He is a towering presence of very tall stature, and he gives the appearance of being at all times in command through his facial expression and gesture. There is an extremely wide range of gestures used in the course of a concert, opening the possibilities of communication between him and the musicians. *Forte* and *piano* gestures are quite distinguishable, and he takes care to conduct each instrument or voice in the character of the phrase of music they are performing. For example, he may place his hands and baton at shoulder height for soft and minimalistic passages, with instruments at high pitches, using a very subdued facial expression. Later, during passages of agitation employing low basses and cellos, he points the baton toward the ground, shaking it vigorously on each pulse of the beat to emphasize the accents, with a stern countenance, all of which appears irresistible to the impulse of the orchestra players. The connection between conductor and choir—between Kaljuste’s gesture and the choir’s sound—is astounding.

He is clearly a master teacher of conducting who knows the conventions of the discipline, with a wealth of intuitive gestures that can inform any ensemble. However, in the same way that the great composers of Classical and Romantic music understood how to manipulate formal structures to heighten the narrative tension, Kaljuste understands how to deviate from gestural norms. These eye-catching gestures are not for show to the audience, but they are intended to demonstrate precisely what he intends and expects at that moment from the performer.

Stephen Cleobury

Until recently, the study of conducting has not been in great demand in the United Kingdom. Indeed, some have said that if a British student wanted to study conducting, they would need to go to the United States. This is not to suggest that British conductors are somehow untrained or inferior to their American counterparts. Some of the best choirs in the world are in the UK. It is only to suggest that the study of choral conducting in the UK is less formalized. When questioned about the subject in an interview, Cleobury responded:

I think it's true to say that in my limited experience in America, you have a much more organized instructional system of teaching, which until recently we haven't had here, but it's something that's developing... When I was younger, I was never formally taught how to conduct, and most of what I do I picked up myself by looking at other people and seeing what works and doesn't work, by experience.<sup>148</sup>

Although, the pedagogy of conducting is expanding in his country, it is important to Cleobury for his students to retain their individual expression.

I sometimes think, however, that if the teaching method is overly prescribed, as it were, that it doesn't allow for individual expression, to such a great extent. I've also seen it in some conducting classes here in this country; a teacher will say, "this is how you conduct - these are the gestures you use," and then you find a series of people coming out looking like that conductor. But, they are different people.<sup>149</sup>

Cleobury views gesture as important because it prevents the conductor from having to talk too often. "I think that the habit of talking too much in rehearsal is quite problematic. They want to see it, and the more they see it, the more they learn about the

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148. Cleobury, Skype interview.

149. Ibid.

music.”<sup>150</sup> This is an interesting observation, that choristers can gain a further understanding of the music if they can “see it.” Music on the printed page is a logical representation of sound, but in a sense, it transforms a dynamic art, one that is revealed in time, into a static art. The way past seeing music as a static, prescribed presentation on the page is to see it in motion, which is where gesture comes in. Conducting gesture can show degrees of motion in the interpretation where the notated music falls short. When Cleobury says, “the more they see it, the more they learn about the music,” he is referring to another dimension beyond rhythm, tempo, or dynamics—he is referring to motion.

When asked about conducting techniques applied in his own style, and that of the students whom he teaches, Cleobury mentions several items to practice. One should avoid mouthing words to the choir, as it can be unhelpful particularly in polyphonic music. Avoid mirroring with the non-dominant hand what the dominant hand is doing. “If the left hand is used more sparingly, when it does enter the fray, it’s more effective. If you’re doing that all the time with two hands, there’s nothing left for you to do.”<sup>151</sup> Attention should be given to the size of the gestures, not overdoing either small or large gestures, taking into account the size of the ensemble and the distance they are from the conductor. In addition, choristers young and old should be taught to respond to gestural communication from the podium.

It can be very frustrating to be giving all the right gestures—and I’ve seen lots of people in conducting classes being told how to do these wonderful gestures, but isn’t much good if the singers aren’t going to follow them. On the other hand, with a really good professional choir, the boot’s on the

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150. Ibid.

151. Ibid.

other foot. They'll follow everything you do, so you have to make sure you're very careful.

### John Eliot Gardiner

Gardiner, like Cleobury, was trained within a system where conducting pedagogy was not a major part of the formal curriculum. Concentrated study in conducting gesture is relatively new in the UK, and as such, there are little resources to bring clarity to the gestural ideas of UK conductors. For Gardiner, success in choral and orchestral conducting has depended on his tenacity and industry in training himself as a conductor and interpreter. In a brief interview, he details some the difficulties of leading an ensemble.

If you're a guest conductor...it's like a one night stand. It can be euphoric and wonderful, or it can be a total disaster. There are many difficult things about conducting: mastering the score, learning how to communicate with musicians to bring out the best in them.<sup>152</sup>

Earlier in his musical career he studied harmony and counterpoint with Nadia Boulanger, after which he applied and received an appointment as apprentice conductor for the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra (now the BBC Philharmonic). It was a challenging job for Gardiner as the musicians were quite "hard-bitten," and "took no prisoners at all." During his first year, he was given the chance to conduct an overture. There was only twelve minutes available to rehearse a fifteen-minute work, so the only

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152. "Five Minutes With: Sir John Eliot Gardiner," YouTube video, 6:03, posted by "smtm: Entertainment," 10 November 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jE4453juLw>.



time he was able to conduct the entire piece through was when “the red light was on, and [they] were recording.”<sup>153</sup>

In your rehearsal, you had to be incredibly clear, both in your gestures, but also when you stop the orchestra to say anything—which bits you could take on trust that they would manage to do, and which [bits] you needed to focus on if you wanted to have any influence on the outcome.<sup>154</sup>

Situations in such as Gardiner found himself are teaching moments which may create an opportunity for the conductor to learn how to gesture the music and interpretation clearly.

In an interview, Gardiner explains his pattern of work before he sets out to rehearse with an ensemble. First, one must know the score.

You have to know the score inside out. When I say “know the score,” you need to commit it to memory as much as possible. You need to know its component parts in terms of orchestration, in terms of voicing, in terms of its harmonic structure, its rhythmic structure, and so on.<sup>155</sup>

Memorizing the score is a task that many conductors wish to do, but few find the time to do it. The advantage of knowing the score is obvious, in that a conductor, when free from observing the score during performance, can communicate more clearly with the ensemble in terms of gesture and facial communication. In addition, when a conductor has taken the time to know the score inside out, and committed it to memory, they will likely have a more robust understanding of the interpretive possibilities of the piece.

The second priority for Gardiner is that one must understand the historical and musical context of a composer and his/her work:

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152. Alan Macfarlane and John Eliot Gardiner, “Interview of Sir John Eliot Gardiner,” YouTube video, 1:32:46, posted by “ayabaya,” 28 November 2015, [https://youtu.be/igV\\_2aUzuZg](https://youtu.be/igV_2aUzuZg).

154. Ibid.

155. Ibid.

You need to also establish an empathy with the composer through a pretty good familiarity with the terms and conditions under which it was actually created, how it came into existence, for what audience, in what space, for what occasion. How was the orchestra composed? How was the choir composed? What type of voices it had? What type of preoccupations any composer had at the time of composing it? That to me as a historian, as a King's trained historian, is terribly important, to establish the context.<sup>156</sup>

These suggestions for how to study the context of a work are at the heart of the historically-informed practice movement, which Gardiner certainly helped to stimulate.

Finally, he reveals one of his methods of building creative and informed interpretations of musical works:

Then it's a matter of being very still, very quiet, and listening to it and reconstructing it in one's head, in one's inner ear. A lot of my colleagues as conductors are brilliant keyboard players. They can whizz through it and do it that way. I can't. I'm very poor keyboard player. So, I've trained myself, thanks to Nadia Boulanger, to learn a score sitting in a chair silently, reconstructing it in my mind.<sup>157</sup>

This skill of mentally reading and hearing an orchestral score in one's mind is not confined solely to Gardiner. However, it does suggest to other conductors how one might create an informed interpretation aside from listening to recordings. For Gardiner, it begins with the reconstruction of the score in quiet study, bar by bar, phrase by phrase, and voice by voice.

Weston Noble

In Weston Noble's world, choral conducting begins with community and spirit. His concept of community influenced every part of the music-making process. And, his

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156. Ibid.

157. Ibid.

gift in perceiving the spirit in and of the music was held in great affection by all in his ensembles. These ideas of community and spirit influenced Noble's gestures as well, producing an economical and concise gesture.

He displays a unique passion for helping singers explore the spirit within music and within themselves, and he was able to find the worth in each piece he conducted. Noble's choirs display a sound that demonstrates the axiom of "no entity calling attention to itself," and the refinement and consistency of their performances is as clean and precise as Noble's conducting gesture.<sup>158</sup>

Conductors wield a great influence over their ensembles, gesturing the tempo, dynamics, musical phrasing, and articulation. The discerning choir, or the choirs who are trained by their directors to understand and follow gesture, will perceive all of these, but also the character with which the conductor is gesturing. Noble is nothing if not humble, and this spirit of humility not only manifests itself in the unified sound of the choir, with "no entity calling attention to itself," but also in Noble's gesture, which is noted for its modesty and restraint. This gestural character further influences the singers in the choir to be sympathetic to one another, not restraining them, but freeing them to realize the proper tempo, dynamics, musical phrasing, and articulation, all within the context of the character of the piece.

Robert Shaw

Since Robert Shaw spent much of his career conducting both choirs and orchestras, it is no surprise that he often compares choral and instrumental gestures with a

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158. Kevin Fenton, "Repertoire & Standards: College and University Choirs - Eph Ehly, Rodney Eichenberger, and Weston Noble: Setting the Standard for Generations," *Choral Journal* 45, no. 10 (May 2005): 73.

goal of learning how to show the essence of the music. Shaw claims that his work with orchestras transformed his conducting gesture into a “more classically recognizable [pattern]” which is also “more communicative.”<sup>159</sup> These comments suggest that orchestral conductors might more often represent a standard conducting gesture than choral conductors, or that instrumental music requires a more standard pattern than choral conducting. In either case, Shaw is basically encouraging all directors to study their own gesture towards different performance groups.

Furthermore, Shaw goes on to say that the communicative quality of instrumental conducting, “which can and should be shared with choruses, is in the whole field of articulation and of clarity.”<sup>160</sup> It was Shaw’s belief that the chorus be approached as if it were an instrument, able to perform clear and agile articulation and phrasing. Thus, it is important that the conductor have a clear sense of how the music should be articulated, and demonstrate it with clear and recognizable visible gestures to reinforce the concept.

“On the other hand, I think, too, that the orchestra is in need of being approached as a singing instrument.”<sup>161</sup> This was in answer to a question about why Shaw approaches the vocal parts of the B-Minor Mass from an instrumental point of view in phrasing and articulation. Shaw clearly feels that instrumental part writing and execution can inform those of the choir. Orchestral instruments have ways of articulating with visible mechanisms: fingering, changing bow direction, and tonguing. However, the vocal

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159. Antonio Molina, “Choral and Orchestra Conducting: An Interview with Robert Shaw,” *Choral Journal* 18, no. 7 (March 1978), pp. 26-30.

160. *Ibid.*

161. *Ibid.*

mechanism is highly adaptable, agile, and able to emulate instrumental sounds and articulations. (In fact, great conductors, including Toscanini, often asked their orchestras to “sing,” beckoning them to imitate the voice in order to conceptualize the right character of a passage.) The essence of these instrumental articulations can be transferred to choral singing with a discerning ear and understanding of vocal technique. This transference was of great interest to Shaw.<sup>162</sup>

Antonio Molina conducted an interview of Shaw where he discussed these issues in detail. In the interview, Molina attempted to show that choral and instrumental conducting is fundamentally separate from each other. “I am, in effect, looking for some kind of affirmation that there are differences between choral and orchestral conducting, that there are two distinct, specialized aspects or branches of the art of conducting.”<sup>163</sup>

Robert Shaw replied:

...Primarily the difference [between choral and orchestral conducting] exists in the rehearsal and in the treatment of the orchestra of the chorus during the rehearsal period. But very, very little in performance. And almost none at all in the studying and preparation—exactly the same kind of effort and devotion and integrity are needed.<sup>164</sup>

Shaw acknowledges here that there are differences in how choirs and orchestras rehearse, which may be of little doubt. However, he challenges a commonly held supposition that choral and orchestral conducting (i.e. in terms of conducting gesture) are somehow different from one another. Shaw’s belief that there should be very little difference in the conducting performance of an orchestra and a chorus reinforces the idea

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162. Ibid.

163. Ibid.

164. Ibid.

that there exists a set of governing conducting principles that, when utilized, influences the impulse and will of the ensemble, and thus directly affect the way they play or sing. It also fortifies the idea that the articulation of the orchestra may directly inform the chorus, and *vice versa*. If one is to be influenced by the other, and as a result, produce a unified sound, then it is tenable that there can and should be specific gestures of articulation that work for both orchestra and choir alike.

Shaw proposes that choral musicians are at their best and most unified when they have score in hand. Many choral conductors prefer a choir memorize its music so that they might better follow the conductor's gestural commands. However, Shaw says that a unified ensemble is "not primarily the product of 'following the conductor.' Rather, it is the product of both of them *following the composer*." In this way of thinking, the singer does not have to preoccupy him/herself with "a willful or whimsical musical dictatorship" of a conductor free to alter course at his/her own prerogative. Instead, both singer and conductor are involved in a "productive relationship to the composer," with singers communicating with the conductor on precise points of attack, release, or tempo and dynamics changes.<sup>165</sup>

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165. Blocker, *The Robert Shaw Reader*. 20.

## Chapter 6: Leadership

The previous chapters have examined techniques in how these musicians interact with their ensembles on a musical level. This chapter focuses on how they connect with choirs on a personal or psychological level. How do they lead or influence their ensembles not only as musicians but also as human beings? What attributes make a choral conductor a great leader? What effect does that have on an ensemble? Questions of leadership and influence are no small matter, especially in a field where the conductor's word is final and not up for debate. When success, or lack thereof, depends so much on one person getting it right, there is all the more reason to lead well.

Frieder Bernius

Bernius frequently evaluates student conductors in master classes. Asked in an interview about what characteristics in young and upcoming conductors are most advantageous, he describes two things: 1) “have an idea of the interpretation of every work they want to conduct (and not to copy any other colleague),” and 2) “be able to give the right advice concerning all parameters like intonation, sound, balance and so on.”<sup>166</sup> The first requires a creative imagining of what a phrase or piece of music should sound like. The conductor should have a clear understanding in mind of exactly what the end product should be. The second requires competency, understanding exactly how to instruct or advise the ensemble in order to arrive at the desired goal. Bernius describes the second attribute in a metaphor:

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165. Bernius, email message.

[Do not] treat any choir like you would play an organ, where you cannot change the sound while playing the [keyboard], and where only the stops can do so. But they should be able to give the right advice concerning all parameters like intonation, sound, balance and so on, in order to get the same result as the tuner and sound-balanced organ builder has to do alone, before the player starts to interpret the music.<sup>167</sup>

Bernius is describing a process of choral leadership in which he puts priorities in order, beginning with intonation, pitch accuracy, and balance, and moving to interpretation once the basic foundation is present.

Regarding specific attributes that make choral conductors great leaders, Bernius enumerates seven characteristics:

- a) To understand voice technique and to have [your] own imagination of the sound, which you want to reach with voices together.
- b) To develop your conducting independent from the naturally different reaction between voices and instruments.
- c) To understand how important it is, to develop [your] own conducting technique, which shows that the arms depend on the body, but should work independent from it.
- d) To be able to look for two things in rehearsals at the same time: to listen to, and in the same time, to be energetic enough to show the singers' phrasing.
- e) To have a very good ear for keeping the pitch and for the intonation of chords.
- f) To be able to play on the piano the score you want to conduct.
- g) To get a certain radiance, which shows your competence for interpretation as also your will to bring this to singers and audience.<sup>168</sup>

These characteristics, while dealing with sound, rehearsal, and conducting, are all listed together to show the level of commitment a conductor must undertake if he/she is to be successful. It is no small thing to be outstanding at all of the above, given that, for a

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166. Bernius, email message.

168. Ibid.



conductor, they are mostly executed simultaneously. One aspiring to be successful in this field must take seriously the need to perform the above well.

More importantly, however, the last item on the list. A “radiance” that shows “competence” requires that one has done serious work on everything listed above in addition to knowing the pertinent score quite well. This “radiance,” or perhaps optimistic confidence, could be considered one of the intangible assets of leadership, which, in music, manifests itself as one who knows exactly what needs to be done to bring about the best possible performance. Since conducting an ensemble requires so much learning, study, and skill, this confidence requires a good deal of competence. Bernius’s point is clear: that one knows a good conductor by his competence and by his/her confidence, two attributes which are inextricably linked, and which are both obvious to the people whom they lead.

Confidence and competence, in the leadership of Frieder Bernius, are also linked to passion and seriousness for the music at hand.

To be serious in a way that people see, you fight for the music. You fight for perfection. You fight for the best results...The most important thing is that you have the same serious attitude for this fantastic music...I love this music I am doing. [If] I did not love this music, I would have no chance to be of any success or to bring music to life.

A conductor admired among his peers, according to Bernius, is one who demonstrates competence in the craft, confidence in one’s own preparation and skill, and passion for bringing music to life.

Tõnu Kaljuste

Choral leadership can take many forms. The life of Tõnu Kaljuste illustrates leadership in rising to the level of international freelance conductor and developing an amateur choir singing ethnic music to a world-renown professional chorus, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir. When talking about choral leadership, Kaljuste has mentioned a few essential characteristics: understanding of personnel, ambition, and inspiration.

I look for two things, which are the beauty of the voice and the singer's ability to be flexible and free in their techniques. I want them to be able to adapt their technique and thinking from such extremes as baroque to romantic, as our choir's repertoire is very wide ranging. I believe that there are two types of singers: those whose voices are their own instrument and know how to play them, or those whose voices are an instrument, but need someone else to play them. I prefer the first type of singer.<sup>169</sup>

Kaljuste illustrates a unique understanding of how to evaluate musicians' higher order thinking skills. In this situation, he looks for singers who have good voices, have an understanding of relevant performance practice, and know how to "play" their instrument in that style. These attributes describe a much more sophisticated musician than most singers who may have excellent voices. The significance of this is that Kaljuste comprehends exactly what kind of personnel he wants and needs in his ensemble, an important feature of choral leadership.

One of the most important qualifications, musically and personally, to be an effective conductor, according to Kaljuste, is ambition. In the interview with Wolverton, he discusses the typical conductor as one who enters competitions or conducts different

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169. "Tõnu Kaljuste - A Biographical Portrait."

ensembles, perhaps as a clinician. The ambitious conductor, he says, creates ensembles from the ground up. Kaljuste compares a new ensemble to a kitchen, assembled for a specific culinary, or in this case, musical purpose.<sup>170</sup> In his view, this is how high quality music is created, by assembling forces with a certain unique perspective. It takes vision to imagine a product such as the EPCC, and ambition to labor until it is in operation.

Another important attribute of choral leadership to Kaljuste is knowing the path of inspiration. There are times when an artist just gets stuck, not knowing how to proceed in a way that is musically reinvigorating or intellectually rigorous. Kaljuste suggests J. S. Bach. “You cannot be wrong when you start with Bach.”<sup>171</sup> Every musician has his/her own path through which they can be inspired and encouraged to keep creating art. For some, it is a composer, but for others it could be a style, or even a sense of purpose. Whatever it is, it is important for the conductor to understand why it was they began conducting, and return to that well of inspiration often.

As professor of conducting at the Estonian Academy of Music, Kaljuste understands that the process of training future conductors is unique to each student, and that it begins with leadership. He compares the learning of leadership to laying the foundation before building a house. The musical score and repertoire help determine one’s path, but all of a conductor’s study is centered on the study of leadership.

He gives students ample opportunity to develop their skills as leaders, conducting rehearsals with choral ensembles at the Music Academy. While discussing the training of his conducting students, he made the interesting observation that “the student conductors

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170. Wolverton, “Interview with Tõnu Kaljuste.”

171. Ibid.

hold the student singers' attention very well when they feel like the conductor is one of them and the communication is quite good.”<sup>172</sup> The statement is very telling in that it implies that leading an ensemble effectively does not require a top-down approach to conducting. Leadership simply requires a servant of the music and the musicians to communicate their passion and competence well.

Stephen Cleobury

Cleobury tells a story of an event in 2015, when participants of a football academy connected with the Norwich City Football Club visited him at King's College.<sup>173</sup> The participants were interviewing prominent people in several fields looking for similarities of leadership. Cleobury recalls, “You couldn't get much more different than a chapel choir and a football club.” They were attempting to find characteristics common in leaders, specifically in this case, in the fields of sports and music.

What is involved here are skills of leadership, which are expressed in different disciplines, through different skills. Leadership is about being on top of your subject, what you're going. Nobody is going to respect you if can't conduct five in a bar or if you haven't learned the score. It's about leading by precept, leading by example—being punctual, being efficient, being organized—hoping that people will want to emulate those various qualities. Obviously, some leaders are, how should we say, more forceful than others. That's the same in all walks of life, and in a way, I think what comes out in the differences in conductors or football managers, or whatever it is, in the end goes back to their own inherent personality.<sup>174</sup>

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172. Ibid.

173. European football, or soccer in the U.S.

174. Cleobury, Skype interview.

Regarding that personality, Cleobury encourages conductors to use persona to their advantage, or know when and how to act outside of your own personality.

Most people who meet me in a sort of social context think I'm reasonably a quiet and reserved person. But, if you're going to conduct Mahler's 8th Symphony in the Albert Hall, it's no good being weak and watery. You've got to project yourself. You've got to gain the respect of the people whom you're directing. Nowadays by and large, I'm happy to say, respect is not accorded by virtue of the position which you hold. You have to earn it.<sup>175</sup>

The Choir of King's College is a collegiate ensemble, although there are underage boys in the group, and so Cleobury has to adjust to yearly turnover in personnel. The men of the choir rotate out every third year, while the boys advance after four or five years. The job of training new singers from the beginning, in standard singing techniques and musicianship of the choir, can be laborious to some conductors, but Cleobury views it as a means of motivation:

...Curiously enough as I do the job longer, the more interesting I find the process and the challenge of these rapidly succeeding generations of new singers. That's one of the strongest motivations I have for wanting to continue in the job.<sup>176</sup>

In this, Cleobury exhibits leadership in the acceptance of that challenge, especially a recurring one over a long period of time, allowing the process to shape his own thinking and motivation. He demonstrates that leadership can be a rejuvenating exercise when one fully embraces a challenge.

In auditions, every conductor has his/her own processes for determining the abilities of singers, and ultimately, their worthiness for an ensemble. During auditions for the Choir of King's College, Cleobury uniquely looks for a "bright spark" in the boys

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175. Ibid.

176. Robins, "From Rutter to Rachmaninov."

auditioning.<sup>177</sup> Of course, he also looks for a musical ear and intelligence (musical and academic). This “spark” and its attributes are hard to put into words, but it is interesting that conductors many times look for non-musical characteristics in selecting singers. It may inform the reader that musical intelligence alone does not guarantee a great ensemble, and the same is true for conductors. One also needs qualities of relational intelligence, ability to lead and be led, and a passion for personal growth.

Cleobury demonstrates that he is not only a servant of the music and his choral singers, but also a servant of the tradition handed down to him by stellar conductors preceding him. He is intimately aware of the history of the choir and its traditions, including the accomplishments of conductors many years before him. It is difficult not to be aware of a tradition like the one at King’s, particularly since the choir was founded as long ago as 1441, singing continuously for over 500 years, but Cleobury does not see himself above it, nor does he attempt to radically alter it. Instead, he continues to improve upon it, and thus, is a servant of it, “striv[ing] to maintain the reputation and style laid down by [his] predecessors.”<sup>178</sup>

Choral directors are often asked when the preparation for a particular concert begins. This is no less true for the conductor of the Choir of King’s College, especially in regards to the annual “Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols.” The practical answer for Professor Cleobury is late summer, sometime between July and September, after the new carol has been commissioned (an annual tradition at King’s). However, the real answer,

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177. Ronald R. Sider, “Interviews With the Directors of Five English Choirs of Men and Boys,” *Choral Journal* 32, no. 2 (September 1991), 11.

178. *Ibid.*, 12.

stated by Cleobury and his two predecessors, David Willcocks and Philip Ledger, is January. Cleobury views “Lessons and Carols” as a cumulative result of the training, rehearsals, and concerts throughout the year.<sup>179</sup> It is the mark of a true leader and conductor to train musicians in a way that improves the musical acumen of choir members so that they might respond to problems more quickly and be proactive about avoiding typical problems, rather than drilling notes, rhythms, and dynamics.

Stephen Cleobury is keenly aware of the psychological state of his singers, likely because many of them are young boys, particularly as it relates to performance anxiety. He learned from his viola teacher as a youngster that to overcome anxiety, he needed to concentrate 110% on the music in order to avoid thinking about the audience, and by extension, his own state of nervousness. This practice is passed along to his young singers, particularly the ones in their first year in the King’s College Choir. He understands that his role is to “bring the choir up to a peak of performance but without making them anxious and nervous about it, so that they can give it their best.”<sup>180</sup>

I’ve found that increasingly it works on “less stick and more carrot,” to use that old expression. In other words, it doesn’t do to tell them off straightaway. You need to start with encouraging or enabling compliments...It’s a basic didactic fact that most people will get better if they’re encouraged.<sup>181</sup>

Cleobury also considers it important for a leader to know when to move on:

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179. Stephen Cleobury, “Preparing for A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols,” *Organists’ Review* 95, no. 1 (February 2009), 38-39.

180. Stephen Cleobury, *Carols from King’s*, DVD.

181. Cleobury, Skype interview.

I always have a rule to follow for me, which is if you've tried something and it doesn't improve up to two or three times, best to leave it and come back to it. You can only exacerbate a situation like that.<sup>182</sup>

He also believes that leaders of an ensemble must also nurture their musicians.

Moreover, if you're working regularly with the same group of people, I think that to some degree, it's important to make sure you nurture them as people. They don't want you intruding on them or anything like that, but certainly with the children, if I know that one of them suffered a bereavement last week, or if he'd been in trouble at school, just the very fact of knowing these things is important, in the sense of how you're treating them. It's a difficult subject; it's more complicated really than talking about gesture. So I think a high proportion of my work with any choir is how I deal with the people. You want them to do really well, but they're not machines.<sup>183</sup>

Cleobury acknowledges the need of every musician to have some kind of relationship with their director beyond the perfunctory greetings and professional interactions, especially in groups that work together regularly. People need to feel encouraged and supported knowing that the conductor cares for the music, the ensemble, and their own well-being and development.

John Eliot Gardiner

As noted in the second chapter, Gardiner took time off from his studies at the University of Cambridge to organize a choir and orchestra that would perform Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* according to historical practice. He was currently studying History and Arabic, but had a strong desire to be a musician. He was "outside the conventional system," as he puts it, not a pianist, organist, or singer in the King's College

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182. Ibid.

183. Ibid.



Choir, but sensed that his love of music from childhood would “consume [him] very soon.” He desire was to put himself “to the test to see if [he] could really cut the mustard.” His current advisor asked him if he wanted to attend the Royal College of Music, or switch to the music faculty at King’s, to which Gardiner’s answer was an emphatic “no.” He thought those programs were too restrictive for what he wanted to do. The goal for him was to find a project or assignment that presented “huge challenges, to see if [he] could actually bring it off.”<sup>184</sup> He chose the Monteverdi Vespers, a work that was rarely performed at the time, especially in Cambridge. It turns out that taking the year off was advantageous, since he raised a choir and orchestra from nothing, applying to various trusts for the funding. This project was no small feat, especially in 1964, when the modern historical performance practice movement was in its infancy. The young Gardiner organized the entire project, and produced a performance that is still heralded to this day for its influence on the rest of the movement. No doubt, it took a great deal of industry, a necessary leadership skill, to pull off such an achievement so early in his career.

His productivity is connected with an ambition that seeks the mostly lofty goals (including recording all of J. S. Bach’s church cantatas in one year). While he is not known for a warm personality in a professional context, he is one of the most prolific conductors of our time, performing with choirs and orchestras throughout Europe, and recording hundreds of projects for major labels. “He exudes the businesslike charm of the *grand seigneur* who is used to having his own way in all things. Gardiner is known and

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184. Macfarlane and Gardiner, “Interview of Sir John Eliot Gardiner.”

admired for his work as a musician, not for being a nice guy. Certainly he is to the manner born.”<sup>185</sup>

Gardiner is efficient in rehearsal, known for the highest expectations, correcting at a rapid pace, and expecting his ensemble to keep up. In the DVD, *John Eliot Gardiner In Rehearsal*, one of his choristers remarks that one “must always look him in the eye” when he is speaking to you or your section, in order to “show that you are not ashamed of what you are doing.”<sup>186</sup> Whether or not this is an expectation from Gardiner himself is unclear, but it shows that there is a high level of respect and perhaps reverence in the members of the ensemble.

This document has already described the now famous episode when Gardiner lost his temper while conducting. It is worthy of note that only two members have remained with the group for at least 35 years.<sup>187</sup> However, few have raised and maintained a professional ensemble to the level of musicianship and international renown for such a length of time as has Gardiner.

Weston Noble

Much has been spoken of the inspiration Weston Noble has provided to choral conductors throughout the country and abroad. His leadership lessons are not

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185. Barrymore L. Scherer, “Beyond the Past,” *Opera News* 57, no. 8 (2 January 1993): 18.

186. Gardiner, *John Eliot Gardiner In Rehearsal*.

187. Warren Hoge, “A Year Overflowing With Bach,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), 21 August 2000, accessed 9 September 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/21/arts/year-overflowing-with-bach-conductor-s-odyssey-includes-198-cantatas-60-concerts.html?pagewanted=1>.

groundbreaking, but they are time-tested, and could be summarized in three points: 1) Enthusiasm for the music must be contagious, and conductors should have the courage to demonstrate that quality on their faces and in their voices. 2) “Be an encourager—a positive motivator.” 3) Demonstrate concern for the singer’s musical growth and personal welfare. It is important that they (especially student singers) feel as though you care for them. One of the over-arching goals for Noble is to help create a “special world” through music. He understands that his task begins with daily interactions with those he leads.<sup>188</sup>

Encouraging positive energy is something very much on the mind of Weston Noble. Every rehearsal is planned meticulously so that a student’s natural positive energy at the beginning of the rehearsal—and even the beginning of the semester—is encouraged and maintained through the duration. Noble begins this process at the start of the first rehearsal of the semester term. In his lectures, he emphasizes the importance of briefly talking to the singers, communicating the goals, schedule, and administrative details in a manner that conveys the conductor’s enthusiasm and joy. But, he cautions one not to be insincere in their enthusiasm, that it must be genuine to produce the desired effect, which is to promote enthusiasm positive energy in the singers.<sup>189</sup> Noble writes, “How are you going to sustain this enthusiasm? The responsibility is about 90 percent yours! The success or failure of each rehearsal is largely due to the conductor and what he or she did that day.”<sup>190</sup>

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188. Noble and Demorest, *Creating the Special World*, 34.

189. *Ibid*, 29-30.

190. *Ibid*, 30.

Associated with positive enthusiasm is encouragement, and Weston Noble is known for his encouraging attitude toward his singers, earning high praise and affection from his singers even years after they leave Luther College. This attribute is likely part of his personality, but he certainly learned of its efficacy, or the consequences when not employed, in the U.S. Army.

Often times I believe officers use absolutely the wrong psychology on privates. Encouragement often times goes much farther than force. As far as the example they set, it is a very poor one for American manhood. I'm so very thankful I'm firmly enough grounded in my Christian principles to be able to pass off some of the filth of this world.<sup>191</sup>

Noble is keenly aware of what he calls rehearsal “slumps.” There is much a conductor can do to help work his/her ensemble out of a slump by understanding what the typical causes are, and how to rectify them. In his lectures, he lists several possibilities: an abundance of emotionally demanding rehearsals, outside concerns such as final exams, or working too long on a particular piece. If such is the case, the conductor should involve the students (a common theme in Noble’s conducting), of the choir’s officers, to identify the problem and take steps to alter course. According to Noble, it is the job of the conductor to encourage the choir through this process and not succumb to exasperation. It is easy for a conductor to grow frustrated during a slump, but it is Noble’s *modus operandi* to accept the responsibility, be a catalyst for positive change, and always stay positive.

Some in the field of choral conducting have called him “reverent” in his approach to the historical context and emotional significance of music. He has a unique way of

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191. White, “The Whole Conductor: Weston Noble's Philosophies on the Psychology of Conducting and Musicianship,” 14.

exploring the “spirit” within every piece of music and encouraging his singers to explore it in relation to their own character. Moreover, the respect he has for each individual student, in his willingness to listen and show deference has been called “powerful and inspiring.” He is a model servant leader for his students, demonstrating a life of service for their community, art, and faith.<sup>192</sup>

### Robert Shaw

It has been said of Robert Shaw that he was a demanding taskmaster, which could be a positive or negative assessment, depending on one’s point of view. But, it could also be said that Shaw was determined and consistent. He believed that constant focus on his time-tested rehearsal techniques would yield the desired result, and he was consistent in his faith in the music.

Those with qualities of leadership are not afraid to ask those whom they lead to improve, and they know how to ask with firmness and humility. In a 29 January 1949 letter to Juilliard Chorus members, Shaw wrote: “I admit that I am very much perplexed by the non-professional habits of a large percentage of those enrolled in a presumably professional school. This is really difficult to understand.”<sup>193</sup> Later in the correspondence, he continued (referencing the work of composer Bernard Rogers):

There is no lack of craft or heart on Rogers’ part. The weaknesses are ours—conductor’s (most of all), than instrumentalist’s and singer’s. The only question is whether we have—or can acquire in the next three weeks—musicianship sufficient to the music. I’m certainly going to try, and it would be nice to know that you were also.

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192. Fenton, “Repertoire & Standards: College and University Choirs.”

193. Blocker, *The Robert Shaw Reader*, 8-9.

One may observe that although Shaw is being quite direct and even scathing in his reprimand of unprofessionalism, he does not cross the line of being demeaning. Here, he closes with a harsh implication, but also with the hint of invitation—leaving the door open to those who want to make the effort.

In addition to his determination, Shaw was also a man of humility, which is on display in a 4 May 1973 letter, evidently after two ineffectual rehearsals.

The conductor's opportunities for failure are so manifold that it scarcely is worth mentioning those of his collaborators. In the first place it is the conductor's failure if, by pre-rehearsal information and in-rehearsal procedures, he cannot produce performing skills which are *accumulative*, *retentive*—and, in the main, pleasurable. His also is the ultimate responsibility of transforming group lethargy and flaccidity to commitment and tonus. - So, few of you can match the conductor's failures.<sup>194</sup>

He goes on to discuss the differences between amateur and professional choruses, namely that amateur choruses tend to, and must, bring more enthusiasm to the rehearsal. This, according to Shaw, is due to the fact that while professional choirs can make up for a lack of commitment with sheer talent, amateur choirs rely on enthusiasm which “discovers, enlarges and refines [their] capabilities.”<sup>195</sup>

To be a successful conductor, especially in both professional and amateur ensembles, one has to recognize the strengths of the musicians before them. In an amateur choir, one of the most useful strengths is passion. Shaw wrote often of the passion and love for music of an amateur ensemble, and its power to overcome shortcomings of musicianship in such groups. It is fitting for leaders of ensembles to

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194. Ibid, 24-25.

195. Ibid.

remind themselves of the passion for music held by many in their choirs in order to foster and encourage it.

The thing that I have to fight in myself all the time is this impatience or sense of irritation. I have to keep telling myself that these people are not here because they are being paid to be here. They are here because they love it. So I tell myself: don't destroy that love. And that's not always easy to remember.<sup>196</sup>

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196. Molina, "Choral and Orchestra Conducting."

## Chapter 7: What Can We Learn?

The six conductors, whose attributes are reviewed in this document, all bring different points of view on choral sound unification, rehearsal strategy, conducting gesture, and leadership. The object of this study is to discern the approaches of each conductor with respect to the four specific elements discussed. In order to ascertain what one might learn from this project, it is necessary to synthesize their positions to identify major points of agreement and individual approaches in each category. In the sections on sound unification and rehearsal strategies, the conductors' ideas are combined to form categories, or schools of thought, on certain methods. In the sections dealing with conducting gesture and leadership, all the findings are gathered to form more generalized conclusions.

### Unification

The process of unifying a choral ensemble, composed of varying voice types with different musical experiences and vocal philosophies, with varying degrees of commitment, is an arduous and complex task. Choral conductors tend to agree that in order to achieve any level of unification, there must be some yielding of one's personal vocal technique so that a satisfactory homogenous tone can be sought. Likewise, an ensemble singer, to a certain extent, must be flexible in his or her own interpretive ideas so that a unified interpretive approach might be reached. Each of these conductors has his own standard and techniques for harnessing the unique brilliance of each voice into a unified whole. One can group these conductors into three schools according to their



techniques of unification: tone and balance, interpretation and style, and rhythmic precision.

It is certainly on the minds of each conductor to train their singers to listen and adapt to the voices around them. However, in a certain respect, it appears to be a special focus in the work of Frieder Bernius, Stephen Cleobury, and Weston Noble. Bernius and Cleobury listen, and encourage their choristers to listen, especially for balance in order to improve intonation. Balance is not only a key to ensuring all parts are heard within a chord, but it is an essential element of intonation for these choral leaders. Bernius and Cleobury also share an acute interest in vowel colors and are demanding when asking their choirs to find a specific vowel timbre. In each of their choirs, one can hear a much brighter resonance than one might hear in an ordinary amateur choir. There is a sense of continuity of sound from one vowel to the next within a phrase of music, avoiding large contrasts of bright and dark vowels. Indeed, it is easier for choristers to unify when there is a specific tonal quality prescribed by the conductor, and when that tonal quality can be maintained throughout a phrase. Many conductors have specific approaches or attitudes toward the use of vibrato, although it was somewhat surprising that such a doctrinaire approach was not found in these conductors. Bernius and Cleobury, especially, deal with problems of vibrato as they might arise, but otherwise leave it alone. The stature of their choirs being what it is, one may conclude that unification of sound in a choir can occur without dogmatism on either side on the subject of vibrato in choral ensembles.

Tõnu Kaljuste and John Eliot Gardiner both share an affinity for understanding style and articulation, modeled by instruments, as a means of unifying their choirs. Focusing on style and interpretation is obviously more beneficial with a well-trained

chorus of professional singers, many of whom will already possess the skill to sing in many different styles. However, since many choirs gain much of their interpretive knowledge from emulating the vocal modeling of their conductor, it stands to reason that they can also learn from emulating instrumentalists playing a certain style.

Instrumentalists, in their private instruction, learn a host of playing styles from Baroque to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, while most private instruction of the voice focuses on *bel canto* style singing, which is associated with the nineteenth century. As established in chapter three, instruments of early periods modeled the voice as the ideal, and today may serve as a blueprint, or negative image, for the best vocal articulation.

Vocalists can and should study instrumental articulation and interpretive style of specific periods, because it directly informs the vocal style of the respective period. For Kaljuste and Gardiner, comprehending stylistic variations and being able to interpretively perform them is the beginning of unifying an ensemble.

For Weston Noble and Robert Shaw, unification can be developed from rhythmic precision. Unification of a choir around rhythm is based on the concept that if choristers arrive at a pitch in tune and with a common timbre, but not arriving at exactly the same moment, the result may yield an unclear, unbalanced, or out-of-tune sound. Count-singing appears to be the tool of choice for Noble and Shaw to encourage the choir to align the consonant and vowel sounds to a specific point in time, with the consonants measured to come immediately before the beat so as the vowel may sound on the beat. They do have slightly different approaches regarding when to introduce count-singing. Noble prefers to use the technique only after pitches and rhythms are secure, using it as means to unify the rhythmic drive only. Shaw, however, views it as a means of rehearsing

both pitch and rhythm, as discussed at length in Chapter Four, since everything in the music (excepting pitch and rhythm) including timbre, enunciation, and dynamics is sequestered.

Shaw was an advocate of natural vowel production, preferring not to overthink about the physical positioning of the jaw or the tongue. He also strongly encouraged the use of diphthongs and triphthongs, a feature of enunciation that is notoriously hard to unify. As many conductors prefer to emphasize the first vowel sound of a diphthong, Shaw preferred instead to put each vowel on equal footing, giving them equal time. However, this technique can only work if everyone changes the vowel at exactly the same moment, which is made difficult by the fact that there is no consonant separating the two sounds. This actually plays into Shaw's strength in assigning every textual sound to a specific point of time within a measure with the aid of count-singing.

Weston Noble used voice placement, a tool that was unusual in his time, to unify an ensemble. The practice, which involves placing singers in specific positions in relation to one another and moving them around to achieve the optimal blend, is used by conductors throughout the country. One of the problems in determining the effectiveness of this technique is that it is highly subjective, and one wonders whether it is the actual positioning or the singers' improved listening skills that produce the desired effect. One of its main advantages is that the process requires the singers to listen to each other in connection with their own sound for an extended period of time, an activity few choristers actually perform.

## Rehearsal

There is much greater variance between these conductors when it comes to rehearsal strategies, although there is room for comparison. The rehearsals of Frieder Bernius are governed by this principle: “proben ist simuliren,”<sup>197</sup> or, “to rehearse is to simulate.” His rehearsal strategies are based on simulating the performance.

Consequently, he prefers to introduce text fairly early in the process, uses the piano only to demonstrate the harmonic progression (not doubling the voices), introduces interpretation as early as possible after pitch and rhythmic errors are eliminated, and communicates interpretive ideas and corrections through the baton (avoiding too much verbal discussion). Introducing the text early in the process enables the choir to work on intonation of the actual vowels used in a piece of music, instead of tuning to a nonsense vowel, as stated previously.

It may come as no surprise that Tõnu Kaljuste and John Eliot Gardiner share techniques in common regarding unification of sound and rehearsal strategies since they work almost exclusively with professional ensembles. The choirs they conduct tend to perform music with a strong spiritual element, and so the use of text in the rehearsal to demonstrate interpretive ideas and connect with the spirit of the music appears to be a focus of each of these conductors. However, like most leaders of professional choirs with international stature, Kaljuste and Gardiner are demanding and exacting in rehearsals, which could contribute to a greater turnover in personnel.

Stephen Cleobury and Weston Noble are quite similar in their rehearsal planning and strategies in their consideration of a singers’ psychological needs. They plan

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196. Stoltzfus, “A Fantasia on Teaching--Frieder Bernius,” 38.

rehearsals meticulously to maximize the attention span and aptitude of their choirs. They put a great deal of time into the ordering and pacing of each session, preferring familiar works at the beginning and end with more difficult pieces in the middle of the rehearsal.

Both agree that if a choir rehearses a passage several times without much improvement, then one must move on or find a different way to communicate the solution. This is an extremely important concept that is often overlooked by many choral leaders. At issue is the reason why a choir does not improve when given a command by a director. Does the choir feel they are singing it better than the conductor imagines? Do they disagree with the director's instruction? Do they lack the ability? Or, do they not understand the instruction? Since common sense suggests that most choristers value the advice of their conductor, one can assume that the predominant issue is whether or not the choir understands exactly what the director is asking. Therefore, if the choir is not improving on a passage after a director's urging, it is incumbent on the leader to reevaluate his/her command, or allow the choir to come back to it later, so that one does not unnecessarily frustrate the singers.

Cleobury and Noble also put a premium on chorister involvement during rehearsals. For example, Cleobury has his singers individually raise their hand when they make a mistake to acknowledge that they knew about the error and will try to correct it the next time. Noble often asked probing questions of his choristers, and allows singers to model a phrase independently or with a small group to demonstrate a particular concept to the rest of the choir.

In the rehearsals of Robert Shaw, every activity from warm-ups to count-singing was designed to fulfill a specific purpose within a well thought out list of priorities. One

of his mostly strongly held precepts was that the rehearsal should not exhaust the voice. Hence, warm-ups and activities like count-singing were performed at a soft to moderate volume. In general, the warm-ups in Shaw's rehearsals were not for the voice at all, but to prime the mind—to remind the singer of the difficult tasks of listening, unifying, and interpreting. He also favored exercises that drastically decreased the possibility of singers not recognizing pitch, rhythm, and enunciation errors. Count-singing was the most notable of these exercises in that, according to Shaw, it served his order of rehearsal priorities with pitch and rhythm at the forefront, followed by enunciation, dynamics, and timbre. He preferred to sequester the latter three areas until the notes, rhythms, and phrasing, were ineradicable.

Count-singing remains a supremely effective tool for any choral director willing to take the brief amount of time it takes to train singers and how to use it. Shaw thought it a useful teaching tool because it saved the voice during the learning of notes and rhythms. It requires soft singing that encourages listening, it improves the rhythmic precision of the chorus (singers may become mentally and/or physically exhausted trying to force others to keep pace with a tempo), and it uses a variety of vowel sounds as opposed to rehearsing on a singular nonsense vowel. The latter is most important since it requires a great deal of effort, not to mention it is unnatural, to hold a single vowel sound in place for a long duration of time. Utilizing a variety of vowels in count-singing more accurately replicates speech patterns, and may prevent the vocal mechanism from tiring too quickly.

## Conducting Gesture

These choral leaders all share similar thoughts about conducting, both in their expressed opinions and their teaching. However, it may be obvious that these conductors do not all conduct the same way before an ensemble. There is an individual element to conducting, but there is also a large element of conducting that remains undefined in the minds of many directors. Gesturing musical ideas in front of a choir or orchestra involves influencing the impulse and the will of the singers or players. Interpretive gestures need not be completely different from one director to the next if certain principles can be applied. Conducting gesture ought to be based on a set of precepts, which, when employed with commitment and persuasion, substantially influences how an ensemble plays or sings a passage.

The preparatory beat is of the utmost importance. It should clearly and concisely demonstrate the tempo, dynamic, and character of the piece or passage. In reality, all conducting gestures are preparatory, informing the upcoming beat. It should be precise and obvious, eliciting a faithful response from the ensemble. Gestures that are compelling usually show contrasting ideas and do not simply beat the tempo through several bars. One should also avoid forceful gestures attempting to control the ensemble. Forceful gestures may appear domineering, such as mirroring with the left hand what the right is doing (or *vice versa*), or mouthing the words while the choir is singing. Persuasive conducting places a certain level of trust in the ensemble, and manifests itself in modesty, restraint, and efficiency. This is not to say that one's gesture should be impeded, only that a truly convincing gesture maintains control over certain impulses to allow the interpretive ideas to stand out. This control begins with one's stance, posture, and level of

physical and mental repose. And aside from the movement of the arms and hands, it can also be aided by eye contact and facial expression.

On conducting choral and orchestral works, most of these directors point to the need for similarity between conducting a chorus and an orchestra. Since the purpose of conducting gestures is to demonstrate musical interpretation including tempo, dynamics, articulation, and character, and if there is an optimal way to show particular musical characteristics within a gesture, then that visual indication can and should be used in both choral and orchestral conducting. One should not allow his/her gestures to be more or less clear when conducting an orchestra or a choir. Choral conductors should avoid accompanying the singing of the choir with choreography, and instead address the choir with clear and comprehensible gestures, which shows articulation and clarity as if conducting an orchestra.

The choral director must also know the score to a level of extreme detail, even committing it to memory. Memorizing the score is beneficial to conductors for two reasons: 1) It frees them to show more interpretation since they are not encumbered with the score, and 2) It gives an opportunity for the conductor to conceive interpretive possibilities to a deeper degree.

Finally, conductors should teach their singers how to respond to gestural communication. As Bernius states:

It is very important for me, that a conductor...is aware of his body. And that the movements, which she or he is doing with his or her arms, work independently from it. This base of conducting should in no case be fundamentally different. And so-called choir conductors have to learn from orchestra conductors, that players should not been "drawn" as many conductors do it with their singers. That means, that they don't educate their singers to do their music first of all without the permanent help of a conductor, but only give so many impulses as necessary, not the whole



time. An orchestra player looks more or less in his or her music while playing, but is capable to understand the conductor's impulse.<sup>198</sup>

Many choral directors drill notes, rhythms, and interpretation many times without training the ensemble in how one's gesture can influence all of these. A conductor should give the choristers a chance to follow his/her gestural impulses, explaining why the music is being demonstrated a particular way, before resorting to verbal communication or rote repetition. Even if verbal communication and vocal modeling is necessary, it should always be accompanied by a gesture, which is in effect a teaching tool. This also reinforces the importance of gesture in performance.

## Leadership

There are as many ideas on leadership as there are leaders. The six conductors studied in this document share many similar views on how to effectively lead their constituent musicians, although they appear to have different foci, as illustrated in the previous chapter. The following is a synthesis of the conductors' thoughts on leadership into fundamental axioms.

One of the basic characteristics of good leadership is competence. In the conducting field, this manifests itself in many ways: a director knowing the score (which means he/she must know the transpositions well), being able to play the score on the piano, understanding the interpretive possibilities, being familiar with musical and historical context, and knowing the language. The conductor should always be developing a better ear for diagnosing problems and a better gestural technique for

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197. Bernius, email message.

influencing the choir in real time. The choral director should also understand singing techniques, especially regarding specific performance practices. These competencies, while basic, are the foundation for confidence, another essential characteristic of a good conductor. Confidence is determined partially by one's personality and ability to project, but in a field as demanding as ensemble music, it cannot be manufactured for long. Confidence on the podium is a direct result of the time one spends developing competence in musicianship and in the musical work at hand.

A successful leader formulates priorities. One needs to develop expressed priorities for how to approach the sound and unification of an ensemble, how to design a rehearsal, what to indicate in the conducting gesture, and how to demonstrate it. Frieder Bernius displays a strong ability to catalogue priorities regarding the sound of the choir, development of music in the rehearsal, and gestural communication. Robert Shaw demonstrated the same discipline in his leadership. Expressed priorities are important because they detail the job of the conductor and the expectations of both the choristers and their director. Establishing expectations of the singers of an ensemble in their musicianship, outside work, and commitment, is essential to developing a good ensemble since, more often than not, people tend to perform to the level of expectations.

A conductor must also be ambitious, not to elevate one's self above another, but to create something new and fresh, in the way Tõnu Kaljuste and John Eliot Gardiner have done. Groups like the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and the Monteverdi Choir are established to perform particular repertoire, with a certain market in mind. Along with harnessing ambition, conductors need inspiration. This can come from a variety of sources. For Kaljuste and Gardiner, their path of inspiration is the music of

Bach, which has the rhetorical and spiritual power to reach into the soul, yet contains a deep level of intellectual and musical curiosity that have proven difficult to match.

Good leaders of musical ensembles are servants to the music, the composer, and most importantly, to the musicians in their ensembles. Servant leadership requires emphasis on encouragement. Stephen Cleobury, Weston Noble, and Robert Shaw have established that encouragement is more effective than negative assessments. It is easy at times to critique the choir if corrections are not made, but it is the conductor's job to help the choir, especially an amateur choir, believe that they can perform difficult elements of music. This includes finding different ways to communicate ideas, perhaps to stimulate different learning styles, or leaving that section to come back to it later. Frustrating singers by over-rehearsing can very possibly inhibit their creative potential and their capacity to perform without great apprehension.

Leadership, like music, is a science and an art, requiring academic study and a degree of instinct and intuition. Conductors should study leadership as it relates to other fields, in much the same way that Stephen Cleobury was involved in the leadership study with members of the Norwich City Football Club. Colin Powell is one of the greatest military leaders of the present day, writing a book on leadership, *It Worked For Me*, which shares his thirteen axioms of leadership. In the book, and in his lectures on leadership throughout the country, rule nine is "Share Credit."

When something goes well, make sure you share the credit down and around the whole organization. Let employees believe they were the ones who did it. They were. Send out awards, phone calls, notes, letters, pats on the back, smiles, promotions—anything to spread the credit. People need recognition and sense of worth as much as they need food and water.<sup>199</sup>

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198. Colin Powell, *It Worked For Me* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), 20.

This philosophy is as applicable to choristers or instrumentalists in an ensemble as it is to employees in an organization. Conversely, Powell also maintains that leaders must take responsibility when things do not go well.

When things go badly, it is your fault, not theirs. You are responsible. Analyze how it happened, make the necessary fixes, and move on. No mass punishment or floggings. Fire people if you need to, train harder, insist on a higher level of performance, give halftime rants if that shakes a group up. But never forget that failure is your responsibility. Share the credit, take the blame, and quietly find out and fix things that went wrong. A psychotherapist who owned a school for severely troubled kids had a rule: “Whenever you place the cause of one of your actions outside yourself, it’s an excuse and not a reason.” This rule works for everybody, but it works especially for leaders.<sup>200</sup>

Leadership lessons can come from anywhere. Weston Noble illustrated his developing leadership skills as an encourager while observing military training exercises in World War II. Leadership not only involves competence, leading by example, and being efficient and organized, sharing credit, and accepting responsibility. It also requires being oneself. This does not mean that one should be shy on the podium if one is shy in life. Conductors must certainly learn to project themselves and put on a persona of leadership, but the conductor must understand his/her own strengths and allow them to stand out. One of the most important roles of a conductor is impart passion for the music to the ensemble. A conductor’s primary job is to inspire the singers—inspire them to love music even more, to love the repertoire even more, and to give more to the music.

Weston Noble claims that the conductor is largely responsible for maintaining enthusiasm. This is especially true for amateur choruses, whose success, Robert Shaw observes, depends largely on singers’ enthusiasm. One must be contagious in expressing

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199. Ibid, 21–22.

their love for the music. Choristers sing because they love it. Directors need to foster and encourage that enthusiasm, and also work to develop it. Conductors also have the power to hinder the passion a musician has for music, if they are not careful to remain positive, encouraging, and constructive. For many amateur choristers, the director is their primary connection to music making. That connection should always remain positive, encouraging, competent, priority-driven, and humble.

This document was conceived to understand how successful choral conductors around the world engage in leadership through music. Leadership in music is manifested in sound unification techniques, rehearsal strategies, and conducting gesture. It is also exhibited in leadership principles that cross the boundaries of disciplines. A wise conductor will study and improve upon methods that improve the sound and musicianship of their ensemble. One must also learn what makes a conductor a great leader, able to influence and inspire the ensemble through methods of leadership demonstrated by other successful conductors and leaders in all disciplines.

## Conclusion

Certainly, more research is needed in the leadership efficacy of many collegiate and secondary school conductors, many of whom are very successful in their positions. There is always more to be learned in the areas of sound unification, which depends on the understanding of a very complex instrument. Rehearsal strategies are constantly revolving and are consistently being studied. Conducting especially is an area which needs further study, as many choral conductors remain unconvinced that gesture greatly affects the day-to-day activities of the choir, nor is there much agreement on the best

ways to produce an effective gesture. While the practice of leadership is timeless and not limited to specific disciplines, the reader would do well to practice leadership, because it is the pathway to inspiring and developing the musicianship of the members of an ensemble. It is the author's hope that this document has explored new avenues of thought on how conductors can be more effective leaders and musicians.

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