

Self-Evaluation/Critique of Video Segment

Nobody likes to be told what to do. This is especially true for adolescents because this phase of life development is characterized by a breaking away from the restrictions of childhood and a move towards independence as an adult. Friction between teachers and students can occur due to a conflict between two social forces: the teenager's growing sense of autonomy and the teacher's need to control the classroom environment.

A good leader demonstrates respect for both the people and the music of the ensemble. Effectiveness in ensemble work requires a subordination of the musician's individual ego for the greater cause of group success. Making music as a group requires a special kind of understanding, whether the situation is an elementary school classroom or that of a professional symphony orchestra. I view my role as a teacher not as an authoritative dictator, but rather as a guide and mentor in the learning process. In fact, the Italian word "maestro" actually means "teacher," a concept which can apply to all levels of performance. While the conductor never lets go of the reins completely, all the musicians must be allowed to take pride in the ownership of their individual performances.

My video segment demonstrates various objectives and musical concepts as well as sound teaching techniques:

- I direct the musicians to observe subtleties in dynamic levels
- I encourage them to listen and adjust their playing to those of their colleagues
- I reinforce the notion of the importance of a thematic motif
- My conducting gestures are clear (clear beat patterns, indications of legato, staccato, accents, sostenuto, accelerando, ritardando, and other expressive devices)

As I encourage my players to strive for excellence I remark "And I'll try to show it to you." I feel that comments like this empower me on the podium because the right to lead a performing group effectively is one which must be constantly earned. I hope that by teaching in this way that I will act as a positive role model for my students and encourage them to bring a sense of humility to their future endeavors.

Sometimes an instrumentalist makes a mistake intentionally in order to see whether the conductor can detect the player's error. This phenomenon occurs in student instrumental ensembles and even in some professional orchestras. It is far less true of choral groups because the parts are not as individualized. Usually a raised eyebrow at the offending player is sufficient to solidify the leader's authority.

In general, a conductor should not stop the rehearsal to rectify a single wrong note. Oftentimes, with a repetition of the passage, the error will vanish as a player becomes more accustomed to the music. Sometimes there is a true error in the player's printed part. Sometimes the conductor is being tested.

In the case of the horn passage from my videotaped rehearsal of *Taras Bulba*, a specific verbal comment was necessary. Normally, a player follows the conductor based on the speed and relative space of the gesture. Here, I instructed the horn players to ignore the usual practice by playing this recurring motive in the tempo of its original presentation throughout the work. In school settings, the students need to understand both what a recurring motif is and how the composer uses it to achieve cohesion all through the piece.

If, for example, in a passage which had been previously played acceptably, a trumpet player intentionally plays a wrong note, a secondary school teacher must show decisiveness and leadership saying "I know which mistakes are the result of the rehearsal process and I also know which students are making mistakes on purpose." Once the point has been made in such an emphatic way, it may never be necessary to make it again. The teacher must never allow the students to think that the errors have gone unnoticed.

Choral ensembles typically function in a more "warm and fuzzy" way. Whereas the instrumentalist's tone is mediated by the instrument, the choral student is psychologically more vulnerable. A person's voice, involving its use of the life-sustaining breath and resonating chambers, is so tangibly unique and personal since its source is the individual's own body. I try to make frequent eye contact, occasionally intensifying my "aura" to make sure that **all** the chorus members are paying attention. For the teacher/conductor, the old adage applies "You've either got the score in your head or your head in the score." I am hardly likely to scream "You're not watching me!" I try to be a good role model by watching *them*.

In school settings, the teacher must know which students have medical issues which may give the *appearance* of misbehavior. If, for example, a student has an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, the music teacher should consult with the special education teacher to make the appropriate modifications in the student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan).

As a reflective practitioner, I realize that my conducting and rehearsal techniques are capable of infinite refinement. Sometimes I found myself guilty of giving a "careless cue," that is, executing the gesture at the correct moment, but without making sustained eye contact with the group. There's one particular moment in the Verdi selection where I must confess I gave a "careless cue" to the first violin section.

Of course there are certain times when the conductor must **not** make direct eye contact with a soloist, for example, a horn player or (heaven forbid) a violist (which was the case in the Menken). In that situation, I looked directly at the player shortly before the entrance. This affirmed in the player's mind that I was "with him." By conducting rehearsals and performances in this way I show that I trust the players to play well. Similarly, in school settings, I always try to give the students a chance to do it on their own. This practice strengthens the pupils' sense of self-esteem and helps me to avoid "over-conducting."