

Editorial

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“One of the elements that without a doubt influences the quality of a choir’s sound during a concert... is the gestural technique and physicality of the conductor’s movements.”

Dear readers,

With these words, Abraham Kaplan – one of the greatest American choral conductors – encapsulates a self-evident concept in choral practice: the conductor should demonstrate on the outside exactly how the sound of the choir should be at that precise moment. It is well known that the physical behaviour of a conductor has a direct effect on the way that a choir sings, at a psychological level which we may define as ‘unconscious and involuntary’. This effect does not derive solely from what may be considered the conductor’s chosen intentions but also, and above all, from positioning and movements. Why do I introduce this discussion? Simply in order to generate a subject for debate that is often undervalued, this difficult component to control and to correct, and often erroneously attributed to a person’s own character. On a number of occasions I have seen good conductors with bodily movements that would be more suitable for directing rush hour traffic and, *vice versa*, I have seen others equally good, who seem to be painting with a fine brush, using microscopic movements difficult to perceive. Both types of conductor are united, however, in the fact that, physical movements aside, they all succeed in transmitting their ideas to the choir. Thrusting your arms out as if you are preparing for take off

simply does not help when trying to obtain a *fortissimo* if in that moment one's physical tension and intense gaze are not sufficient to call forth the desired effect.

If we compare the activity that other musicians undertake in order to produce sound with that of choral conductors, a huge difference is immediately brought to our attention: the sound that conductors obtain from their chosen instrument – the choir – is not brought about with any physical contact between the conductor and the instrument. And the gestures the conductor makes, so striking to the spectator's eye, are an activity that every other musician performs mentally (beat the required rhythm and choose the right key). In short, the ability to use body language is an essential element of the success of good music. It is not dependent on what is being directed (as may be the case with, say, a pianist in the midst of a performance), but is rather a vehicle for giving information and interacting with those who are in charge of creating the soundscape: the singers. Unfortunately this aspect of the conductor's ability is difficult to acquire because it is a part of the musical and emotional make-up unique to a true artist. It is possible however to improve on it with experience, by study, and – above all – by cultivating an intense inner aural imagination of the repertoire concerned.

Translated by Aaron Kircher, USA