

THE CONDUCTOR - BETWEEN HEARING AND LISTENING

AUREL MURARU¹

SUMMARY. The conducting activity operates with two specific types of auditory attention – on one hand, the attention designed to correct potential errors that may occur in the musical text, and, on the other hand, the auditory attention that is specific to the performing process, in itself. The present endeavour aims at emphasizing the characteristics of the conductor's musical hearing, as well as its defining role in the art of conducting.

Keywords: musical hearing, conductor, musical performance.

Throughout time, the issue of musical hearing has been largely tackled, being debated and analyzed from various perspectives. It has represented an extremely important aspect in the education of every musician, whether a performer, conductor or composer. However, the issue of the conductor's specific musical hearing has almost been ignored. The treaties of choral singing and conducting released in our country are interested, rather, in the musical hearing of the members of the ensemble, almost neglecting the role it has in the activity of the conductor. Consequently, this endeavour aims at highlighting the characteristics of the conductor's musical hearing, as well as its defining role in the art of conducting music.

Overall, the musical performance is indissolubly connected to the musical hearing abilities of the conductor. Since, when it comes to conducting, we are faced with general scores that include a multitude of overlapping sound elements, musical hearing plays an overwhelming part in this art. Nevertheless, a well-developed or even absolute musical hearing is insufficient, if it is not backed by an enhanced auditory attention. Given the lack of this trait, even experienced conductors may overlook certain mistakes that may occur in terms of the musical text. What does perfect, or absolute pitch actually mean? It is the ability of a person to detect the intonational correctness of a single or even several given musical notes, played simultaneously, without the benefit of a reference tone. This ability

¹ Univ.Lecturer, PhD –Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Department of Social and Human Sciences, Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: aurelmuraru@yahoo.com

becomes completely unimportant, unless it is backed by an in-depth study of the musical score. The conductor must know the exact harmonic overlapping that the ensemble must sing, on each beat or fraction of a beat, during the performance.

The conductor's auditory attention plays a determining part in their activity of leading the ensemble, both during rehearsals and the stage performances. In the art of musical conducting, one must operate with two specific types of auditory attention: on one hand, the attention designed to correct potential errors that may occur in the musical text, and, on the other hand, the auditory attention that is specific to the performing process, in itself.

During the first stage of rehearsals, the conductor uses a corrective auditory attention, which helps detect the problems pertaining to the musical text, or signal potential rhythmic or intonational inconsistencies that may occur during the performance. In this stage, the auditory attention becomes purely analytical, having to do only with the correctness and not the profoundness of the performance. In order to detect some potential technical problems, the conductor shall listen, as he or she tries to absorb the entire sound edifice. Consequently, we can state that, at this stage, the conductor uses the musical hearing that is specific to any musician, the only difference being that, in the case of conducting, one must deal with full scores and plurivocality, which require an enhanced auditory effort.

On one hand, the conductor uses an overall musical hearing, and, on the other, a unidirectional, individual one, that would facilitate the "extraction", or recognition of a single voice, out of the entire sonorous flow. In this undertaking, timbrality plays an extremely important part. If, in the case of orchestra conductors, it is pretty simple to follow the melodic line of the oboe, bassoon, trumpet or of other musical instruments, in the case of a choir, it is more complicated to differentiate, for instance, the tone of baritones in the upper register from that of tenors in the lower register, or, even more complicated, of certain divisions in a particular voice type. In the case of SATB (4-voice) choral works, things are pretty simple and easy to control. Yet, in the case of choral works with multiple divisions, detecting a particular melodic progression requires a certain effort on the conductor's part.

Correcting an error in the score will undoubtedly lead to a correct interpretation, but not necessarily to a better, more profound or more artistic one. The quality of the musical performance depends largely on the second type of auditory attention that is specific to the conducting art, namely on the performing auditory attention. At this point, after the conductor has undergone the first stage of rehearsals and has reached the desired result in terms of execution of the musical text, the corrective auditory attention is put aside, in favour of the performing one. This way, a new stage of the musical interpretation is reached, in which musicality prevails, the arch contours within the musical phrases are pursued and the artistic side of the music being performed is emphasized.

I must mention here that ear training and musical dictation exercises are extremely important, but not sufficient in solving this defining aspect of the conducting art. During the musical performance, the conductor's attention is not focused only on the correctness of the musical execution; it is ramified and, hence, not unidirectional.

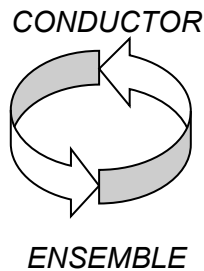
In the process of studying the musical score, the conductor creates a certain mental concept, a plan of the musical performance and this can only be reached by means of the musical hearing abilities. The late professor Petre Crăciun used to urge his students by saying: "When you analyze a score, do not use only your eyesight, but also your ear". Hence, the stylistic conducting analysis, this indispensable endeavour in determining the musical performance concept, becomes a complex process, constructive and defining to the field of conducting. Given the lack of some well-developed musical hearing abilities, this mental concept or model remains only an intention, without actually being put into practice. The inner musical hearing plays a determining role, both in the construction and especially in the implementation of the mental concept by the conductor.

The conductor must be able to hear and feel the evolution of the musical performance, to permanently compare it with his or her mental concept. To do this, the conductor must be able to listen, not just hear. One of the most important contemporary musicians, the pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim, noted: "I make a clear distinction between listening and hearing, as they are two separate things that must be learned. An orchestra produces a multitude of instrumental colours. The ear must identify very quickly what is important in terms of equilibrium and intonation, density, color and so many other things." By listening, the conductor analyzes, puts under the microscope the quality of his/her own interpretation, noticing potential performance-related problems and intervening constructively, in order to solve them. A simple change in colour, expressiveness or agogics may lead to a totally different quality of the interpretation. Hence, the conductor's supreme goal is not to detect the problems, but to find ways of solving them, without disturbing the natural flow of the music being performed.

The works which involve soloists, more specific to lyrical shows, but also to instrumental concerts, represent another facet of the conducting art, which requires an enhanced auditory effort and a perfect coordination between *hearing* and *listening*. In this case, the conductor must be able to listen to the soloist, pay attention to him/her and combine the two visions of interpretation – his own with that of the soloist.

A very important aspect must be mentioned here. Indisputably, it is the conductor that dictates the manner in which the music is to be performed; however, the musical construction depends on the way in which the members of the ensemble respond to the conductor's gestures. He or she conducts or, in other words, builds the sound edifice, depending on the way in which the members of the ensemble react to his/her commands. Let us

take, as an example, a simple issue of dynamics. In this regard, the conductor shall build the musical phrase not as he had conceived it mentally, during the study of the score, but starting from the intensity produced by the ensemble, on the attack of the first sound. The great conductor Sergiu Celibidache noted that *"everything, in the emergence of music, is unique"* and this uniqueness is born with every musical performance. Consequently, a circle takes shape, in which the main information starts from the conductor towards the ensemble, but it also comes back to the conductor, so that he or she can build the sound canvas, according to the feedback received from the orchestra or choir. In this situation, auditory attention is crucial.



The performing auditory attention develops in time, as a result of acquiring conducting experience. By detecting, in his/her interpretation, the repetition of similar mistakes in terms of rhythm, phrasing or tone colour, the conductor can focus, with anticipation, on the moments in which such problems may occur. Therefore, by monitoring such problematic moments in the score, the conductor can focus his/her auditory attention to those key points of the work. The identification of sensitive elements within the score is to be made when studying the work in question - an extremely important moment for any genuine conductor.

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