

The Art of Communication by Gesture (pt 2)

Geoffrey Brand

In an earlier article I listed five elements perceived to be present in successful conductors:

- Motivation ● Knowledge
- Communication ● Energy ● Integrity

Alongside these must be placed, no less highly, the requirement of confidence. Performers and audience alike are soon aware of the conductor who exudes insecurity or unsureness - the unmistakable signs of a lack of confidence.

Experience, offering the benefits of "having been there before" can be helpful in developing confidence, though my observations warn against regarding experience as a guarantee to produce a "confident" conductor. Many experienced conductors remain unable to believe in what they are doing, even some who know it to be right but somehow cannot communicate that "rightness" confidently.

But for most, one of the indispensable elements in building confidence is, I believe, KNOWLEDGE of the music one is working with. How does one decide when one has really absorbed a work; grasped understood and retained the whole of it? How often one returns to a score one thought one knew and finds something of musical significance which had previously escaped one's grasp.

Experience in score reading and maturing as a musician are factors in this; time and experience do play a part in developing the ability to read a score, of becoming more aware of what to look for and how to find it. What we are working towards in our score reading is the ability to conceptualise the music, so that the sum of the parts becomes a whole, and a convincing "inner" aural experience.

Listening with a copy of the score to a work we "know" can be a revealing experience. Hearing things in a performance which one had not previously detected is thought provoking - and should be. This leads to an important point concerning the use of recordings as a learning aid. I make it an unbreakable rule never to listen to a work I am to conduct unless, and until, I have studied the work myself and feel I "know" it. Otherwise on what basis does one assess the musical validity of a performance one is hearing? Not every recorded performance is a definitive reading. Even more importantly, as a conductor the performance which matters most is the one you are to give. Essentially, it must be your own performance of your own concept of the music. Someone else's concept, however splendid, will not sound as convincing in a copied form! By all means enjoy fine recorded performances, but not as a quick fix to learning a work. Anyway, even if you are not going to conduct the work yourself, I believe you will find listening more meaningful if you yourself have previously studied the music being performed.

So - to get back to the point I was making - CONFIDENCE BASED ON KNOWLEDGE - that is the message; and there are no short cuts!

I want to end by sharing with you a radio interview which I heard many years ago (fascinating how something heard years ago grows in significance in the mind!) It was given by Sir John Barbirolli and he was outlining his approach to presenting new music to an orchestra. Sir John was stressing the importance of really "knowing" the score, and the music it contained. In that lovely, deep "gravelly" voice, he stressed that he would spend many hours in study, absorbing all the details, all the aspects of a score, before taking it to an orchestra. I can hear him now, spelling it out; "only when I really have the score inside me will I take it to the orchestra. Then, when I stand on the rostrum, I hold my arms out, and the music flows out"

Now the more I think of that, the more Sir John's words make sense. Not until one knows and feels the music deeply inside oneself is it possible to be able to convey - to communicate - to others in an intelligible manner. Then the music flows out, confidently.

Geoffrey Brand

Two great Christmas numbers

In a very easy swing band style - we guarantee your audience will applaud before you finish!



WINTER WONDERLAND

arranged: Derek Ashmore

Carols in the James Last style - you've asked for something different, and here it is...

CHRISTMAS AT LAST!

arranged: Ray Woodfield



➔ send for samples now ➜

Hallamshire Music

Bank End North Somercotes · Nr Louth
Lincs LN11 7LN

Tel: 01507 358141 Fax: 01507 358034

E-mail: Hallamshire.Music@mcmail.com

Music at LCM²

Dean & Director: Patricia Thompson MA GRNCM ARMCM PGCE FRSA

The London College of Music and Media at Thames Valley University offers a range of innovative performance and composition programmes. Our portfolio includes:

- BMus Performance/Composition
- MMus/PGDip Performance
- MMus in Composing Concert Music
- MMus in Composing for Film & TV
- MMus in Composing for the Theatre
- MMus in Composing for New Media

Applications are particularly invited from wind players. For postgraduate programmes a number of bursaries are available.

Highlights of the 1998/99 season include a festival celebrating John McCabe's music (in the presence of the composer)

For further information, please contact:

Carla Willis-Smith

London College of Music and Media

Thames Valley University

St Mary's Road

Ealing

London W5 5RF

Tel: 0181 231 2304

Fax: 0181 231 2546

Web: <http://elgar.tvu.ac.uk>



**London College of
MUSIC & MEDIA**

Thames Valley University supports mass participation in higher education