

Conduct With Me: The Gestural Language of Mirroring and Empathy
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The science of mirror neurons has strong applications in the choral community, and has been recently featured in the Choral Journal and several conference presentations. Drawing from the research of mirror neurons, music education research has begun to understand how meaning, empathy, intent, and feeling are communicated through gesture.

This presentation will draw on connections from a variety of research, including: the mirror neuron system (hMNS), motor resonance, emotional contagion, empathy, and gesture which accompanies speech. From this research, a gestural language is created, upon which efficient and meaningful rehearsal pedagogy may be developed. Further connections will be made to current research on the vocal mechanism and possible gestural connections to breath, onset, and mechanistic movement.

The language of “Conduct With Me” suggests a participatory and kinesthetic approach to gesture, which involves mirroring and harnesses the power of empathy to create meaningful connections between sound and sensation. In turn, singers are empowered to engage in gesture in a way which provides the ability for immediate assessment by the director. Further, by incorporating one-to-one teaching, conductors may create a culture of empathy in which peer-to-peer learning empowers students both musically and emotionally. Connections for instrumental ensembles will also be addressed.

Overview

Mirror Neurons

- What we know, and what we don't know
- Developing a language for choral music
- “Mirror me,” “Breathe with me,” “Conduct with me”
- Resources for further information

Empathy

- Creating a culture of empathy in your rehearsal space
- Why is this important, and how does it relate to gesture?
- Resources for further information

Gesture

- How do we create meaningful gesture?
- How do we communicate intention through gesture?

From Gesture to Sound

- How does mirroring improve sound?
- Why is empathy important?
- How does this change the way we are able to assess sound and singers?

Score Study

Score study requires that a conductor knows what they want, and how to achieve it. Score study is about creating a roadmap of techniques and skills required for success in a given piece of music.

Sound Ideal

Your sound ideal is informed by a variety of things: choirs you listen to, performance practice for a given piece, the age and experience of your choir, etc. It will likely change over time as you develop skills as a listener and as a conductor.

Audiation

Audiation goes beyond inner hearing to suggest technique. It is informed by score study and your sound ideal. Audiation is communicated to the choir through gesture. It is mediated by empathy.

Pattern

Conducting pattern is an agreed upon structure for displaying the rhythmic organization in a piece. Alone, it is good at communicating **when** things happen, but is only truly effective when it is able to communicate **how**.

Gesture

Gesture is the physical manifestation of audiation combined with pattern. It communicates not just **when** things happen, or **what** to do, but also suggests technique. Gesture is strengthened through mirroring and motor resonance. It is achieved through proprioception and the ability to link sound and sensation. Conductors should regularly ask singers to “Conduct with Me”.

Face

Gesture (and singing/playing) begins with Face. This includes facial expression and also implies posture.

Space

Different sounds require different space. This may include vowels, resonating space, etc.

Breath

One must breathe for the sound they want to make. Not all pitches or all styles require the same type of breath.

Sound

Sound is a result of everything that comes before it - everything in music is preparatory. If you do not get the sound you want, this is only a symptom, the problem lies not in the sound, but somewhere earlier in the process.

“Posture”

Posture is not a fixed set of rules, rather it is a physical preparation which allows for efficiency in achieving the sound ideal. It is fluid and flexible related to style and setting.

Conduct With Me

Additional information and a copy of the power point can be found at <http://www.bradpiersonmusic.com/#!research/c20x9>

Dr. Brad Pierson

Brad Pierson is the Director of Choral Activities at the University of Toledo. Brad earned his B.M. from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, M.M from California State University-Los Angeles, and D.M.A. from the University of Washington. Prior to his appointment at Toledo, he was an Assistant Professor of Music Education at Western Illinois University. Previously, Pierson taught at Cheyenne High School and Desert Oasis High School in Las Vegas, where his choirs earned superior ratings in Nevada, California, and Arizona. In 2005, Brad founded the Las Vegas A Cappella Summit, an event bringing contemporary a cappella music to high school students. Brad has presented at the Nevada Music Educators Association All-State Convention (2009, 2010), ACDA Western (2010), Southwestern (2016), and Northwestern (2016) Division Conferences, as well as the Illinois Music Education Conference (2015, 2016).

In 2012, Brad founded whateverandeveramen., a project-based choral ensemble which is focused on breaking down the traditional audience/performer paradigm by creating unique, and non-traditional performance events. w&ea. has performed the world premiere of works by Paul Ayres, David V. Montoya, and several other young composers. Most recently, in an effort to bring a new voice to choral music, they commissioned a new work for eight voices by critically acclaimed singer/songwriter Gabriel Kahane.

Dr. Brian J. Winnie

Dr. Brian J. Winnie is the Director of Choral Activities & Voice at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas. There he teaches courses in undergraduate choral conducting, vocal pedagogy and diction, and general music/choral methods. He also is the Artistic Director and founder of the Southwestern College Choral Union, conducts the A Cappella Choir, SC Singers, Musical Theatre Ensemble, and is head of the voice department. An active festival conductor and adjudicator, Dr. Winnie has been artist-in-residence in Ekaterinburg, Russia and worked with festival choirs throughout the United States in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Washington, Kansas, and Alaska.

Prior to this appointment, Dr. Winnie served as lecturer at the University of Washington-Tacoma where he helped create and establish a choral component to their interdisciplinary arts program. He was also the Artistic Director of the community-based choirs *ChoralSounds* and *VocalSounds Northwest* located in Burien, WA. Previous to his career in higher education, Dr. Winnie taught for seven years in public schools at both the middle and high school levels having served as Director of Choirs in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania where his choirs consistently achieved the highest ratings at festivals and competitions. His 2007 Lower Macungie Middle School Cadence Choir was selected to perform for the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association convention, and in 2008 he was the recipient of the "Outstanding Young Conductor Award," presented by the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Choral Directors Association. In 2010 he was named "Teacher of the Year and was nominated for the "Excellence in Teaching Award" at the University of Washington in 2013.

Dr. Winnie is an active member the American Choral Directors Association and the Music Educators National Conference. He has served as Secretary for the Central New Jersey Music Education Association, and is a former Middle School/Jr. High Repertoire and Standards Chair for ACDA-PA.

A native of Pennsylvania, Dr. Winnie received his B.S. in Music Education from the Pennsylvania State University, Master of Music Education from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and his Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting from the University of Washington, where he studied with Geoffrey Boers & Giselle Wyers. Additionally, he received his Certificate of Figure Proficiency in Estill Voice Training in 2014. His main research interest involves the study of contemporary vocal technique in the choral rehearsal, which explores a more holistic array of vocal qualities singers can healthfully produce within the choral setting.