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Demystifying Conducting

Conducting Technique,
Breath, and Center
as Rehearsal Technique

James Jordan

**Professor and Senior Conductor
Westminster Choir College
of Rider University
Princeton, New Jersey
email: jamesmjordan1@me.com**



Interest Session Outline

A musician is musical when their music making elicits an emotional response from players and listeners. To be musical is to “make music like God makes trees”—that is, in a manner and style that is natural and consistent with the performers personality, intellect and intimate emotional capacity. Being musical is more than juggling notes. One’s music making should awaken the soul.

—Frank Battisti
from “Principles for Achievement, Enhancing
Musicianship and Valued Colleagues”
by Eugene Migliaro Corporon
in *Teaching Music through Performance in Band, Vol. 8,*

I.

Why should we study conducting technique, the miracle of breath, and the human aspects of conducting?

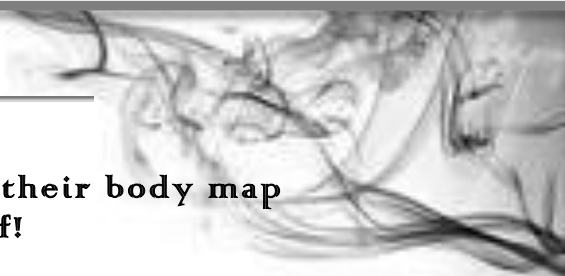
- a. Gesture and being DO directly influence sound**
- b. The game changer—somatics, Body Mapping, and mirror neurons**
- c. Building your protoself—the parallel with instrumental technique and technical “skill building”**

Organisms make minds out of the activity of special cells known as neurons. Neurons share most of the characteristics of other cells in our body, and yet their operation is distinctive. They are sensitive to changes around them; they are excitable (an interesting property they share with muscle cells). Thanks to a fibrous prolongation known as the axon, and to the end region of the axon known as the synapse, neurons can send signals to other cells—other neurons, muscle cells—often quite far away. Neurons are largely concentrated in a central nervous system (the brain, for short), but they send signals to the organism’s body, as well as to the outside world, and they receive signals from both. (p. 17)

Minds emerge when the activity of small circuits is organized across large networks so as to compose momentary patterns. The patterns represent things and events located outside the brain, either in the body or in the external world, but some patterns also represent the brain’s own processing of other patterns. The term *map* applies to all those representational patterns, some of which are coarse, while others are very refined, some concrete, others abstract. In brief, the brain maps the world around it and maps its own doings. Those maps are experienced as *images* in our minds, and the term *image* refers not just to the visual kind but to images of any sense origin such as auditory, visceral, tactile, and so forth. (p. 18)

To explain why neurons are special, we should consider a functional difference and a strategic difference. The essential functional difference has to do with the neuron’s ability to produce electrochemical signals capable of changing the state of other cells. (p. 37)

—Antonio Damasio
in *Self Comes to Mind*



II.

Conductors must understand their body map —remap thyself!

- a. **The “real” structure of your arm—hand positions that honor our body’s true structure**
- b. **The essential rotations**
- c. **The A/O joint—the control center for conductors**
- d. **Acceleration and deceleration of beat—the teachings of Hideo Saito**
- e. **How to remap yourself...“A picture is worth a thousand words”**
- f. **It is all about gaining awareness of your body and staying in that awareness as you cause ensembles to sing and as you *listen***

Center provides THE most direct line of communication from the artist outward.

Honest and sincere artistry cannot occur without center.

Center allows for the correct use of the body. Center places one at an anatomical advantage.

A constant awareness of one’s center becomes an enabler for all things artistic.

Center has limited effect upon art until it is revealed to others. One may have a centeredness to one, but one must want to both connect and share that center with others.

Center must be projected or propelled. Once one is centered, it takes channeled energy to transmit the power of that center to others.

When one is truly centered, and that center is grounded, one usually feels as if one has “lost control.” This feeling of losing control to center should be the goal for all artists.

The plant has two forces. The part that goes up into the light and the force that goes into the dark, into the earth. There is a place in some plants that is only one cell wide called “the crossing point”—where those two impulses co-exist. This is where our wholeness is.

Imagination is spiritual perception. Authenticity is spiritual presence. We can think of authenticity as the quality of expression, and imagination appears as the realm of the Source, what authenticity draws upon. Or the other way around: authenticity gives impulse, imagination gives us the image. We need the courage of authenticity to carry the originality of imagination into expression. Whichever way you want to figure it, imagination and authenticity are double doors to creation.



III.

The Musician's Breath

- a. How do we speak? How do we communicate?
- b. Singers do not always give breath the importance that instrumentalists do
- c. The breath impulse gesture—breath must be cyclic
- d. The “preparation” as a multi-step process
- e. The rule of constant exhalation
- f. Re-languaging the breath and leaving the musical line alone
- g. Re-languaging the rehearsal
- h. Locking, loading, and reconsidering
- i. Uploading expression
- j. Inspiration/expression
- k. Moving an ensemble from “manipulation” to trusting what they have learned in rehearsal
- l. Breath is the moment when ideas are visited
- m. Inspiring the hands with breath—the choir perceives only what you perceive



Breath cannot escape one's body without an opinion.

—Nova Thomas
on *The Musician's Breath* (DVD)

Now the interesting thing about singing is when we have the need or the desire to make audible this thing that goes on forever. I promise you, technically, ALL you want to think about is inhaling. Just keep the feeling of drawing in the breath while you are singing, and make your thoughts audible. Three things I want you to know today. The first is your mantra for the rest of your life: Hear it; I mean hear it exactly how you want it to be heard in every aspect.... You hear THAT, you breathe into THAT, and you make THAT audible.

—Thomas Hampson
from a Masterclass at Westminster Choir College
November 19, 2009
In James Jordan, *The Musician's Breath*

You don't have to justify what is in that space before you speak.

—M. C. Richards
in *The Fire Within*

Out of deep breathing issue physical and psychic energies. (p. 17)

—Wilhelm Ehmann
in *Choral Directing*

Therefore, the basic trick is in the preparatory upbeat. It is exactly like breathing: the preparation is like an inhalation, and the music sounds like an exhalation. We all have to inhale in order to speak, for example; all verbal expression is exhaled. So it is with music: we inhale on the upbeat and sing out a phrase of music, then inhale again and breathe out the next phrase. A conductor who breathes with the music has gone far in acquiring a technique. (p. 272)

—Leonard Bernstein
in *The Conductor's Art*

Inhalation exists and functions as the "beat-before," the upbeat, the physical preparation before phonation. Artaud offers that for every thought or feeling that a character has, there is a corresponding breath that relates to and *precedes* its expression. It is in this very moment of inhalation, at this exact pulse of time, that we have the opportunity to *author* (at least *co-author*) that which is to follow. We create the reason and occasion the need. We *inspire* the expression. (p. 153)

Perhaps in simpler terms, the advice is to "animate" the inspiration, and leave the expression to its own indigenous devices. (p. 156)

Breath is a tool, the connective tissue between truth and its re-presentation. (p. 163)

—Nova Thomas
in *The Musician's Breath*



IV

Conductor's live in “the crossing point”—transforming the choral rehearsal through awareness of the influence of gesture.

- a. Arriving at a new pedagogy that focuses on trust rather than manipulation**
- b. Building a gestural vocabulary through Laban–effort–shape pedagogy**

One of the most beautiful stories I know concerns a certain African tribe in which, at the time when the boy passes to manhood he must go off into the jungle by himself—there to indulge in an orgy of dancing and shouting and wailing and sobbing. He must leave the village—for his sounds would make the people in the village ill.

Kathleen Ferriers and Eileen Farrells and Toscaninis and Walters are great because they find the basic and, finally, simple human sound in what for the rest of us are mazes of complexity. (p. 346)

—Robert Shaw
in *The Robert Shaw Reader*

The head and heart cannot function without a unifying principle. That principle is to be found at the crossroads through which each element must pass. That crossroad stands at—and is—the center. (p. xv)

—James Conlon
in the Foreword, *Toward Center*

Centering, which I discuss in this book, is a severe and thrilling discipline, often acutely unpleasant. In my own efforts, I become weak, discouraged, exhausted, angry, frustrated, unhappy, and confused. But someone within me is resolute, and I try again. Within us lives a merciful being who helps us to our feet however many times we fall.

—M. C. Richards
in *Centering*

James Jordan

James Jordan is recognized and praised from many quarters in the musical world as one of the nation's preeminent conductors, writers, and innovators in choral music. He has been called a "visionary" by *The Choral Journal*. *Grammophone*, in reviewing his CD *Angels in the Architecture*, called him a conductor of "forceful and intimate choral artistry." *The American Record Guide* has called his recordings with The Westminster Williamson Voices "without peer." His career and publications have been devoted to innovative educational changes in the choral art that have been embraced around the world. A master teacher, he is one of the country's most prolific writers on the subjects of the philosophy of music making and choral teaching, he has authored thirty major textbooks and DVDs, and he is editor for several choral series. His choral conducting book, *Evoking Sound*, was named as a "must read" on a list of six books by *The Choral Journal*. His latest book is *The Musician's Breath*, with colleagues Mark Moliterno and Nova Thomas of the Westminster faculty. His philosophical books, most notably *The Musician's Soul*, *The Musician's Spirit*, *The Musician's Walk*, and *Toward Center*, have had a far-reaching effect upon conductors and teachers around the world.

Dr. Jordan teaches and conducts at Westminster Choir College of Rider University, where he is Senior Conductor. At the college, he conducts The Westminster Schola Cantorum and The Westminster Williamson Voices. Since its inception, The Westminster Williamson Voices has premiered over thirty new works by composers Jackson Hill, Roger Ames, James Whitbourn, Gerald Custer, Jaakko Mantylaarvi, and Blake Henson. The choir and Dr. Jordan have also enjoyed close musical collaborative relationships with major composers of our time: Morten Lauridsen, Jaakko Mantylaarvi, Tarik O'Regan, Blake Henson, and James Whitbourn. The Westminster Williamson Voices, in their short history (founded 2003), has an extensive recording discography. The choir made its Alice Tully Hall debut in 2011. In the fall of 2009, Dr. Jordan was appointed to panels for The National Endowment of the Arts. He also serves as Director of The Westminster Conducting Institute, one of the leading programs for conducting study in the United States, now in its tenth year. In 2011, The Westminster Williamson Voices will release a new CD on the Naxos label of the music of James Whitbourn.

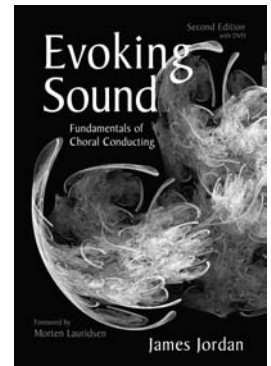
Dr. Jordan's book and professional activities are detailed on his website www.evokingsound.com and also at www.giamusic.com.

Evoking Sound *James Jordan*

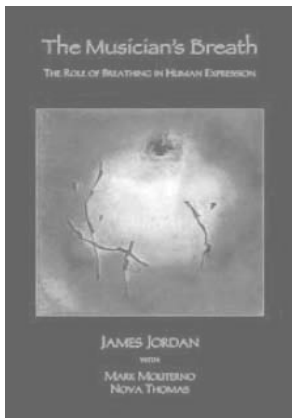
Evoking Sound set new standards for its vision of the choral conductor's role when it was published in 1998. Now significantly revised and expanded, James Jordan's groundbreaking book incorporates more than ten years of new conducting insights, pedagogy, and philosophy to create a resource that is not only informative but transformative.

Unique to this edition is the inclusion of a revolutionary DVD with Dr. Jordan and Eugene Migliaro Corporon of the University of North Texas. For the first time, a conducting text contains visual examples of patterns that—with the help of state-of-the-art animation and multiple camera angles—guide you to a deeper understanding of how conducting gesture influences sound.

You will come away from *Evoking Sound* with a renewed sense of the totality of the conducting experience and also an understanding of how to better evoke honest and meaningful sounds from your choir.



- G-7359 Hardcover, revised edition with DVD \$49.95**
G-7359A Music for Conducting Study, a companion to *Evoking Sound*..... \$29.95



The Musician's Breath

The Role of Breathing in Human Expression

James Jordan • Mark Moliterno • Nova Thomas

In this provocative book, James Jordan examines why and how the breath is the “delivery system” for human and musical ideas in performance. “The breath,” Dr. Jordan writes, “is the most magical and human thing we can engage as artists.” This book makes a compelling case for the power of the breath and the power of submitting oneself to its miracles.

The Musician's Breath is divided into two sections: The first discusses the “why” of breathing, while the second provides the “how” with practical applications for singers, instrumentalists, and conductors.

Co-authors and Westminster Choir College colleagues, voice teachers Mark Moliterno and Nova Thomas, add their unique perspectives through chapters on yoga and other paradigms that reveal the power of the breath. A companion DVD (available separately) guides viewers through yoga practices that can provide access points to understanding breath, free points of tension, and “holding” in the breathing process. With *The*

Musician's Breath, all musicians, from choral directors to solo instrumentalists, will deepen their understanding of the miracle of human expression through breath. This pioneering book is also a passionate and compelling call for the use of the breath as a pedagogical tool for performers of all ages and levels.

- G-7955 Hardcover, 228 pages \$26.95**
DVD-844 DVD, 2 hours..... \$24.95

The Anatomy of Conducting

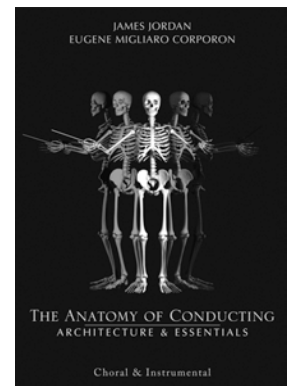
Architecture & Essentials

James Jordan • Eugene Migliaro Corporon

For the first time, two of America's most respected conductors—instrumental and choral—enter into a collaboration, using cutting-edge technology to illustrate their teaching principles for learning the basics of conducting technique. Through insightful masterclass dialogue, unique multi-angle video demonstrations, and state-of-the-art motion capture animation, conductors will be able to study the gesture of both renowned conductors. Revolutionary graphics show the skeletal movement of each conductor in real-time to give conductors an in-depth and accurate picture of body mechanics and architecture.

This DVD is a complete tutorial for basic conducting technique as taught and demonstrated by two of America's master teachers and conductors.

- DVD-745 DVD, 3 hours..... \$34.95**
G-7358 Workbook, 72 pages \$ 8.95

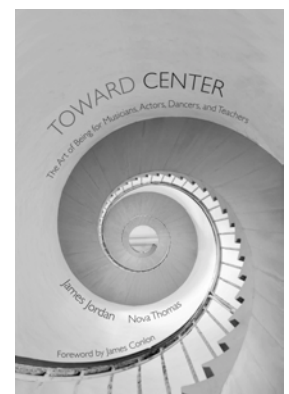


Toward Center *James Jordan • Nova Thomas*

In this book, conductor and educator James Jordan details how the power of Center grounds performance, teaching, and learning, bringing the reader full circle to the ideas first introduced in his best-selling book *The Musician's Soul*. Nova Thomas, an acclaimed singer and master teacher, relates how she employs Centering in her work preparing actors and vocalists for their life on the stage. The insights of these two renowned teachers reveal the importance of Centering in the day-to-day life for all performance, artists, and teachers—illustrating the “how's” and “why's” of Centering, and how Centering can transform one's performance and teaching. The authors also cover the groundbreaking contribution of M.C. Richards, whose efforts to define Center profoundly shaped the creative life of all musical and dramatic arts in the United States.

This book is an invaluable resource for performers, actors, conductors, and teachers alike.

- G-7661 Hardcover, 220 pages, illustrated throughout..... \$24.95**



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