

American Choral Review

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This edition of *The American Choral Review* focuses on the discipline and practice of conducting. Dr. David Friddle has researched the practices and reception of Franz Liszt and Hector Berlioz, two conductors of differing sensibilities who influenced much of today's accepted practices. Dr. Doreen Rao is the 2019 recipient of the *ACDA Robert Shaw Choral Award* for her lifetime of contribution to choral music in many forms. I personally benefitted from her all-encompassing University of Toronto Bach Festival during which a small group of conductors worked with Maestro Helmuth Rilling in focused Bach cantata masterclasses and performances. Dr. Rao also reviews a recent conducting text by Harold Rosenbaum, conductor of the noted New York Virtuoso Singers and Canticum Novum Singers. Professor Timothy Sawyer has reviewed two recent recordings: Martin's Mass for Double Choir, by the Westminster Choir and conductor Joe Miller; the latest release, *Evolutionary Spirits*, from Grammy-winning The Crossing and conductor Donald Nally. It is clear, from these achievements, that conductors of choral music continue to set new standards as we establish what it means to be a conductor and choral musician in the twenty-first century.

Timothy Newton, editor

Franz Liszt and Hector Berlioz: Conducting, Interpretation and Two Underappreciated Legacies¹

DAVID FRIDDLE

The conductor has the chief part to play. He, as the chief virtuoso and artifex, is called upon to see that the whole is harmoniously articulated and that it receives a living form.²

As a pianist, Franz Liszt's preternatural technique paved the way for modern piano playing (Fig. 1, page 2). As a composer, he stretched traditional tonality to its breaking point; his work became the cornerstone for the serialism of Arnold Schönberg. Yet as a conductor, Liszt has received short shrift. "Histories of conducting, such as they are, give Liszt very

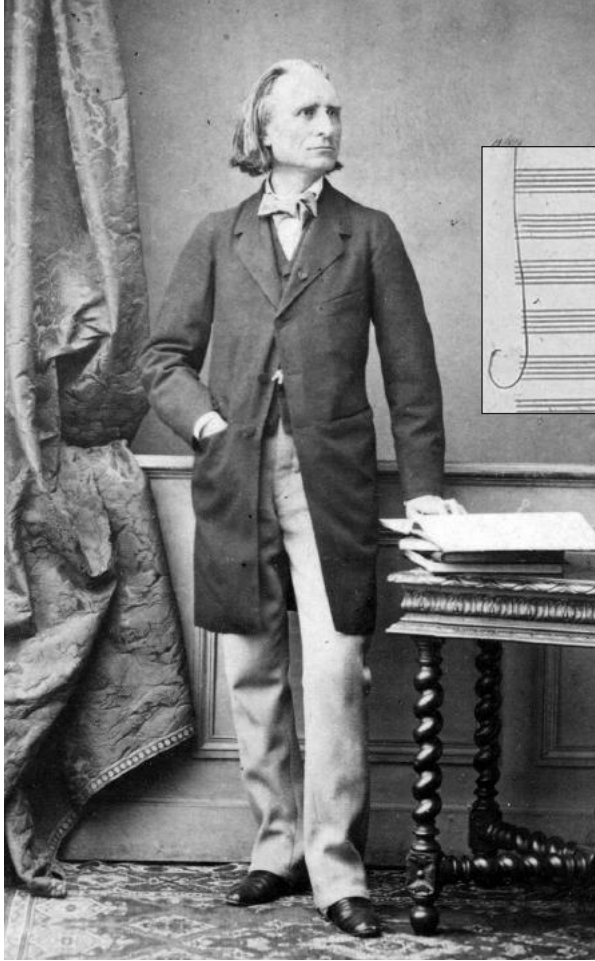
little space. He is not mentioned in the *New Grove Dictionary's* entry on conducting, for example, even though he was the founder of a style of conducting that is widely prevalent today."³ Perhaps because his conducting style so startled his contemporaries, his contributions to the discipline have been swept aside as a more conservative, minimalist approach has become fashionable.

"Liszt's contemporaries found [his] gestures original and strange, but they have become recognizable as the physical vocabulary of modern conducting."

¹Portions of the text in "Franz Liszt and Hector Berlioz: Conducting, Interpretation and Two Underappreciated Legacies" are taken from the Preface to the Urtext of Franz Liszt, Christus, ed. David Friddle (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006). Used by permission.

²Liszt to Johann von Herbeck, Rome, 9 June 1868 in Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszt's Briefe/Von Paris Bis Rom.*, Gesammelt und Herausgegeben von La Mara, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893), 120. "Wie bei anderen meiner Werke, hat der Dirigent die wichtigste Rolle dabei. Ihm liegt es ob, das Ganze harmonisch zu gliedern, lebendig zu gestalten, als hauptsächlicher Virtuoso und Artifex zu fungieren."

³Georg Julius Schultz and Johannes Werner, *Briefe Eines Baltischen Idealisten an Seine Mutter: 1833-1875* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1934), 83.



Ex. 1. Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Opus 125. "Molto vivace," m. 177. Beethoven indicated "Ritmo in tre battute. (Three beat rhythm, e.g. one beat per measure) [Source: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus LSWb 2125, f 61, v.] Reproduced by permission.

Fig. 1 Franz Liszt. Photograph of a Calling Card by Numa Blanc Co. in Paris, 1860s. Dim.: 31/3" x 2" Brahms-Institut an der Musik-hochschule Lübeck. [Inv. Nr. ABH 1.7.4.141]

He was "a conductor of a quite new kind" because he was "by instinct a performer and a soloist, and it was in the spirit of a concerto soloist that he approached the task."⁴

His historic career as a concert pianist might account for the scholarly neglect of his role as one of the progenitors of modern conducting. Harold Schonberg agrees that Liszt "was more pianist than conductor" but also believes that he "did point the way to the future." He also conjectures that if Liszt had "started as a conductor, he would have been the greatest of his day."⁵

As a conductor, Liszt brought to the podium many of the effects of his piano playing. He was far less interested in strict beat and literal interpretation than in color, flexibility, dramatic effect. He demanded that the baton 'must be handled with more care, suppleness and knowledge of effects of coloring, rhythm and expression than hitherto has been customary in

many orchestras.' To achieve a more expressive beat, Liszt discarded the standard triangular or rectangular motions and substituted a beat that outlined the rise and fall of a phrase.⁶

Liszt even presaged the use of the so-called super pattern: "When I conduct [the "Scherzo" from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*] I like occasionally to use Beethoven's method of beating four measures as four quarters, as if it were in 4/4 time (*ritmo di 4^e battute*, as in the Scherzo of the Ninth Symphony), (Ex. 1) thus securing more repose without affecting the precision in any way." Harold Schonberg states that he "brought to the baton new ideas, new expression and new rhythmic concepts, and with Richard Wagner he stands as the founder of the new German style, and hence as one of the founders of modern conducting."⁸ Liszt's biographer Alan Walker believes that Liszt "saw conducting as perhaps the greatest interpretive art of the future, and the many reforms he introduced to the podium bear witness to the fact that he was the first modern conductor."⁹

His physical mannerisms and forward-looking rehearsal techniques were not, however, the only conventions that he upended (Fig. 2 next page). His continual insistence on defining the role of conductor as interpreter—not a time-keeping "windmill"—was perhaps his greatest influence on generations of future conductors. Walker goes on to say that

Liszt was interested in purely musical considerations—in nuances, phrasing, shading of colors, a proper balance among the parts, and, above all, in the expressive device of rubato, an

⁴Hugh Macdonald, "Liszt the Conductor," *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, July–December, 1995, 84.

⁵Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Conductors* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), 162.

⁶Schonberg, 160.

⁷Artur Holde, "Unpublished Letters by Beethoven, Liszt, And Brahms," *The Musical Quarterly* XXXII, no. 2 (April 1946): 283

⁸Schonberg, 162.

⁹Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt/the Final Years, 1861-1886* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 278.

unheard-of phenomenon in orchestral music. In short, he treated the orchestra as if it were a solo instrument, obedient to his every impulse. In order to achieve these effects, Liszt developed a new repertory of body signals, for he recognized that conducting involves the whole man and not just the right arm. He frequently abandoned a regular square-cut beat in favor of an 'arc' in which the baton described the actual shape of a phrase (a technique that Furtwängler developed many years later). Sometimes he put the baton down and conducted with his hands (as Stokowski was later to do exclusively) if he felt that this would draw more expression from the players. He would shush the musicians, forefinger to lips, if they played too loud, or growl threateningly if they played too soft (about seventy years before Beecham made these characteristics his own). Sometimes, when he required a pianissimo, he would crouch low over the podium, his body apparently sunk in on itself; at others, when he demanded a fortissimo, he would raise himself to his full stature, hands outstretched above his head.¹⁰

Disputes about Liszt's envisioned role of the conductor and his gestural palette cannot be ignored. Contemporary conductors still "have not ceased to argue whether the conductor's role in performance is simply to provide ensemble and exercise control over the players or whether he should be the music's interpreter to the audience, providing a visual counterpart to what the listener hears. Liszt...played a crucial role in disseminating this latter conception of the conductor's role."¹¹

It is unfair to remember Liszt only as a virtuoso showman who transferred his *modus operandi* from the piano to the podium; his legacy is profound—if not immediately apparent. Even his sternest critics recognized that he was a masterful interpreter, and it may well be that his championing of the right of conductors to guide the performers towards a re-creation of the score that pays homage to the composer's innate sensibility is his most lasting contribution to the art.

The conducting historian Karl Krueger sums up Liszt's far-reaching authority when he writes that

...Liszt strove for a musical declamation so free that it could accommodate every vicissitude of the poetic idea underlying a work;



Fig. 2 Parody of Liszt conducting, 1850. [Attributed to Gottlob Theuerkauf]

this implied a degree of release from the mensural—a flexibility of treatment—that instrumental music, before him, had never known.... Bar and Tempo, said Liszt, represent the trunk of the tree, which stands fast and immovable while branches and leaves wave and billow. His concept of conducting represented a giant stride forward in the long and slow humanization of this art, it centered about an ideal toward which conductors will strive so long as they have their gaze on the ultimate.¹²

Any modern conductor must free him- or herself of the restraints of mechanical time-keeping and step into the world of artistic imagination. Liszt stated his case succinctly and respectfully:

A performance that corresponds to the intentions of the composer and is intended to give them sound, color, rhythm and life, will be achieved in my orchestra works most efficiently and least time lost with divided rehearsals. I therefore allow myself to ask the conductors who intend to perform my symphonic poetry that the full rehearsals and sectional rehearsals be preceded by the string section, then with wind and percussion instruments separately.

¹⁰Walker, 278.

¹¹Macdonald, 84.

¹²Karl Krüger, *The Way of the Conductor: His Origins, Purpose and Procedures* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 141.

At the same time, I should like to point out that I would like to see mechanical, indifferent time-keeping, inaccurate playing and sight-reading (customary in some places) discarded as much as possible; I believe that continuous interpretative performance that brings out the special accents and rounds off melodic and rhythmic nuances is essential.

Although I have tried to make my intentions clear by means of precise descriptions, I do not conceal that some—even the most essential—cannot be put on paper; only artistic ability and sympathetic, vibrant reproductions by both the conductor and performer all achieve a profound effect. It is therefore up to the goodwill of my fellow artists to highlight what is most exquisite in my works.¹³

Criticism of the Conductor-Interpreter

By mid-century Liszt's unconventional style had unleashed stinging rebukes. He

did not command the conventional conductorial technique, but led the orchestra by methods which were peculiar to him, methods he had himself created, as he had created his own specific piano technique. His originality earned him the wholesale condemnation of musicians and critics; he was regarded generally as 'a bad conductor,' mainly because those who rejected him in this capacity had not the faintest idea of his performance aim.¹⁴

One of Liszt's most entrenched foes was the Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick. In 1846, Liszt told the orchestra of the *Concerts Spirituels* in Vienna that "it is not necessary for me to conduct but merely to indi-

cate the rhythm, the phrasing, and to cue the entries. Of course, such behavior could easily confuse a lesser orchestra." Hanslick responded that "the group in question must indeed have been a lesser orchestra."¹⁵

The debate about the future of German music was equally vociferous. The clash between more conservative thinkers—Johannes Brahms, the Schumanns, and Hanslick—and the "New German School"—Liszt, Richard Wagner, their disciples Hans von Bülow, Hans Richter and, eventually, Richard Strauss—was played out in public and it quickly became personal. For example, the violinist Joseph Joachim was Liszt's concertmaster in the Weimar Court Orchestra. However, after Joachim departed Weimar, he became one of Liszt's harshest critics. "At the conductor's desk Liszt makes a parade of moods of despair and the stirrings of contrition...and mingles them with the most sickly sentimentality and such a martyr-like air that one can hear the lies in every note and see them in every motion...I have suddenly realized that he is a cunning contriver of effects who has miscalculated."¹⁶

This kind of invective typified the conflict between the more conservative musicians and the New Germans. Wagner pointed out Joachim's ingratitude to the man he so readily disparaged—and from whom he had learned a great deal—when he wrote: "If Herr Joachim thinks it expedient to profess that he has developed his fine style in the company of Herr [Ferdinand] Hiller, or of R. Schumann, this may rest upon its merits, provided he always plays in such fashion that one may recognize the good results of several years' intimate intercourse with Liszt."¹⁷

A merciless critic of performances of his own music, Wagner was almost always kind to Liszt's conducting. In Weimar, for example, Wagner said that "On the day when I unequivocally and finally realized that my personal situation was giving me cause for concern, I saw Liszt conduct a rehearsal of my *Tannhäuser*, and

¹³Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszts Musikalische Werke*, Serie I: Für Orchester, Abteilung I: Symphonische Dichtungen, Band I, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907), 5. "Eine Aufführung, welche den Intentionen des Komponisten entsprechen, und ihnen Klang, Farbe, Rhythmus und Leben verleihen soll, wird bei meinen Orchester-Werken am zweckmassigsten und mit dem geringsten Zeitverlust durch geteilte Vorproben gefördert werden. Demzufolge erlaube ich mir, die HH. Dirigenten, welche meine symphonischen Dichtungen aufzuführen beabsichtigen, zu ersuchen, der General-Probe Separat-Proben mit dem Streich-Quartett, andere mit Blas- und Schlag-Instrumenten-ten vorangehen zu lassen.

"Gleichzeitig sei mir gestattet zu bemerken, dass ich das mechanische, taktmaßige, zerschnittene Aufspielen und Abspielen, wie es an manchen Orten noch üblich ist, möglichst beseitigt wünsche, und nur den periodischen Vortrag, mit dem Hervortreten der besonderen Accente und der Abrundung der melodischen und rhythmischen Nuancirung, als sachgemäss anerkennen kann.

"Obschon ich bemüht war, durch genaue Anzeichnungen meine Intentionen zu verdeutlichen, so verhehle ich doch nicht, dass Manches, ja sogar das Wesentlichste, sich nicht zu Papier bringen lässt, und nur durch das künstlerische Vermögen, durch sympathisch schwingvolles Reproduzieren, sowohl des Dirigenten als der Aufführenden, zur durchgreifenden Wirkung gelangen kann. Dem Wohlwollen meiner Kunstgenossen sei es daher überlassen das Meiste und Vorzüglichste an meinen Werken zu vollbringen."

¹⁴Krueger, 140.

¹⁵Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte Des Concertwesens in Wien*, Vol. 1 (Wien: W. Braumüller, 1869–70), 310.

¹⁶Joseph Joachim to Clara Schumann, Hanover, 10 December 1855, in Henry Joachim, "Joseph Joachim: First Violinist of a Modern Art," *The Musical Times* 74, no. 1087 (September 1933): 299.

¹⁷Richard Wagner, *Über Das Dirigieren* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1913), 99.

by this feat was astonished to recognize in him my second self: what I felt when I composed this music, he felt when he performed it; what I wanted to say when I wrote it down, he said when he let it sound.”¹⁸ Wagner’s praise is as much for Liszt’s remarkable interpretative abilities (which were already well-known in Europe because of Liszt’s decades of concertizing as the foremost pianist) as for his conducting.

In order to secure a successful performance, Liszt felt strongly that conductors must necessarily provide artistic leadership. He codified these views about interpreting his own music in the preface to the *Symphonic Poems*: “The conductor’s spiritual connection to the music contains the essence of a symphonic production, provided that the orchestra has the technique to achieve it; otherwise, it would seem more advisable not to present works that are unpopular with the public.”¹⁹

Liszt regarded interpretation as a creative process, so that the performer—whether pianist or conductor—should always make the music his own.²⁰ He was concerned with the music’s sum and substance. He believed that performers should make a score their own and that each artist was self-responsible; consequently, his views on the role of the conductor were infinitely more flexible than any of his contemporaries except Wagner. “He was in the forefront of a new attitude, whereby the performer could create, and at the same time maintain that he was returning to both the original spirit of the work and the original performance practice of the composer.”²¹

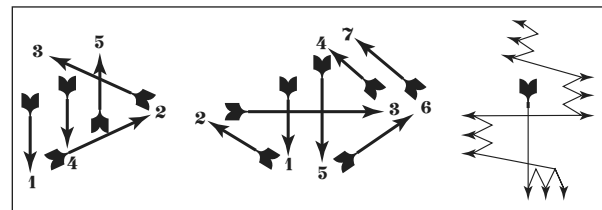
Liszt reasoned that it is not the bar and the strict tempo or the regular flow of measure and rhythm that hold the clue to the performance style, but the musical idea, the meanings inhering in themes and theme-groups; it is not the single bar with its accents which determines the tempo and expressive statement of themes; it is, instead, the period—the motif-unit—that determines these factors. This was indeed

a revolutionary idea for those accustomed to viewing a composition in mensural terms. (Later, Wagner was to suggest that, once one is familiar with the structure of a composition, one should rub out the bar lines!)²²

Divergent views: Liszt and Berlioz

While Liszt believed one should internalize music and then express it in a way that was true to both composer and performer, Hector Berlioz “hotly defended the sanctity and integrity of a composer’s score, always attacking those who improved and corrected the scores of the masters, yet “he represented the first real instance of the modern interpretive conductor, his essential criterion being faithfulness to a composer’s intent.”²³

Liszt and Berlioz disagreed chiefly about how a conductor best leads his orchestra. “Liszt insisted on a subtlety of accent that often involved a complete disregard of the bar line. ‘It is not enough to beat down the life-nerve of a beautiful symphonic performance.’ Thus he pleaded with conductors not to mark regular accents by coming down heavily at the bar lines.”²⁴ Berlioz held the opposite view: “With four beats in the bar the first downward gesture is universally adopted to mark the first strong beat at the beginning of the bar.”²⁵ Louis Spohr first published beat patterns in *Violinschule* of 1831; however, it was Berlioz who codified the most basic—and compound—beat patterns as we know them today (Ex. 2).



Ex. 2 Hector Berlioz. *Le Chef d’Orchestre: Théorie de Son Art*. Paris: Henri Lemoine & Cie., 1844, 15.

¹⁸Richard Wagner, “A Communication to my Friends,” in Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften Und Dichtungen* (Leipzig: Fritsch, 1897), 4:340. “An dem Tage, wo es erhaltenen Anzeichen nach mir immer unzweifelhafter und endlich gewiß wurde, daß meine persönliche Lage dem allerbedenklichsten Falle ausgesetzt sei, sah ich Liszt eine Probe zu meinem Tannhäuser dirigieren, und war erstaunt, durch diese Leistung in ihm mein zweites Ich wiederzuerkennen: was ich fühlte, als ich diese Musik ersand, fühlte er, als er sie aufführte; was ich sagen wollte, als ich sie niederschrieb, sagte er, als er sie ertönen ließ.”

¹⁹Liszt, Franz *Liszt’s Musikalische Werke*, 5. “In der geistigen Auffassung des Dirigenten liegt der Lebensnerv einer symphonischen Production, vorausgesetzt, dass im Orchester die geziemenden Mittel zu deren Verwirklichung sich vorfinden; andernfalls möchte es ratsamer erscheinen, sich nicht mit Werken zu be-fassen, welche keineswegs eine Alltags-Popularität beanspruchen.”

²⁰Macdonald, 94.

²¹José Antonio Bowen, “The Rise of Conducting,” *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, ed. José Antonio Bowen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 88.

²²Krueger, 141.

²³Roland John Jackson, *Performance Practice: A Dictionary-guide for Musicians*, s.v. “Conducting: The Baton and Interpretative Conducting (19th c.)” (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

²⁴Schonberg, 161.

²⁵Hector Berlioz, *A Treatise upon Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration: Containing an Exact Table of the Compass, a Detail of the Mechanism, and a Study of the Quality of Tone, and Expressive Character of Various Instruments; Accompanied by Numerous Examples in Score, from the Works of the Greatest Masters, and from Some Unpublished Works of the Author*. (London: Novello, Ewer & Co., 1858), 340.

Rimsky-Korsakov described Berlioz's beat as "simple, clear beautiful. No vagaries at all in shading."²⁶ For Liszt, this kind of conducting was anathema: he "was, most obviously the enemy of time beating. He resisted giving out the 1–2–3–4 if it was not needed [and gave] only those directions that the players strictly needed."²⁷

Liszt's view was hardly universal, however. The German theorist and editor Hugo Riemann wrote in his 1887 *Musik-Lexikon* that "the conducting stick remains the most important factor, and its movements therefore have a fixed conventional meaning. As its name indicates (*Taktstock*—time stick) its chief purpose is to mark the time clearly, that is, to give the tempo and to indicate primary accents."²⁸

Berlioz discovered throughout his continental tours that some conductors had difficulties even with this technical fundament. Perhaps because of the widespread lack of simple skills among early conductors, he wrote that, "The ability to beat time, without considering any higher musical qualities, is none too easy to develop, and very few people do it properly. The gestures the conductor has to make, though simple in general terms, can be complicated by the division and sometimes the subdivision of the beats of the bar."²⁹

Liszt surely understood that conductors occasionally had to simply mark the time, especially at transitions or tempo changes. Still, he detested robot-like directors who merely indicated the beat without attempting to describe the shape of the phrase or the music's affect. Liszt gave specific conducting instructions at crucial junctures in *Christus*. He often wrote "Conduct in two" (*Alla breve taktieren*) into the score. Sometimes, as in movement 10, "The Entry into Jerusalem," he showed the conductor where the pattern should change from four to two beats per measure (Ex. 3). In *The Legend of St. Elisabeth*, Liszt is even



Ex. 3 Franz Liszt: *Christus*. "The Entrance into Jerusalem," third bar after K, violins, violas, cellos and double basses. Liszt indicated *Un poco meno Allegro, ma sempre mosso e alla breve*. [Source: London, British Library, add 34,182; f. 50, v.] Reproduced by permission.

more explicit: "The conductor is requested to barely mark the tempo $\overbrace{\dots\dots}$, and now that this has been said, the composer considers the customary manner of marking the measures a pointless, brutal habit and would like to prohibit it for all of his works."³⁰ He went even further in an 1853 letter to his disciple, writer and critic Richard Pohl, which includes perhaps his most famous quote on conducting:

I feel that I am professing to many of my colleagues, and while I like to recognize the good services they have provided and continue to provide to art, I do not feel compelled to follow their examples in any way—not more about the choice of works to be performed, than about how to design and run them. I believe I have already told you: The real task of the master of the chapel, in my view, is to make himself ostensibly almost useless. We are pilots, not oarsmen. And even though this idea would encounter even more opposition in detail, as I believe it is, I cannot change it.³¹

There are numerous written accounts of Liszt's conducting that are both entertaining and instructive. Hermann Uhde, seeing Liszt conduct Beethoven's *Ninth* in 1870 wrote that

Franz Liszt stood on the conductor's podium, as always in the long black robe, glowing with joy, apparently happy to celebrate the great

²⁶Nikolaj Andreevič Rimskij-Korsakov, *My Musical Life: Transl. from Russian by J. A. Joffe and Edit. with an Introduction by Carl Von Vechten*. N.A. Rimsky-Korsakoff (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 75.

²⁷Hugh Macdonald, "Liszt the Conductor," *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, July-December 1996, 95.

²⁸Hugo Riemann, *Musik Lexikon* (Leipzig: M. Hesse, 1887), s.v. "Dirigieren."

²⁹Berlioz *A Treatise*, 338.

³⁰Franz Liszt, *Die Legende Von Der Heiligen Elisabeth* (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest, 1982), 95.

³¹Liszt to Richard Pohl, 5 November 1853, from Paris in Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszt's Briefe/Von Paris Bis Rom.*, Gesammelt und Herausgegeben von La Mara, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von Breitkopf & Härtel, 1893), 142. "Quelqu'estime donc que je professe pour beaucoup de mes collègues, et quelque volontiers que je me plaise à reconnaître les bons services qu'ils ont rendus et continuent de rendre à l'art, je ne me crois pas pour cela obligé de suivre en tout point leurs exemples—pas plus sur le choix des ouvrages à faire exécuter, que sur la manière de les concevoir et de les diriger. Je crois vous l'avoir déjà dit: La véritable tâche du maître de chapelle consiste, selon moi, à se rendre ostensiblement quasi-inutile. Nous sommes pilotes, et non manœuvres. Et bien même que cette idée rencontrerait dans le détail plus d'opposition encore, comme je la tiens pour juste, je ne saurais la changer."

dead man [Beethoven]. The performance was full of splendor and power; it was Liszt's energy and spirit that permeated all—animated with zeal. But how does he conduct? Far from the steady swinging of his baton, in gestures and gestures he indicates in a unique way the spirit of the tone poem. He marks every forceful entrance of any instrument powerfully, often by faintly tamping his foot; in motifs of singable character the graceful white-haired man's hand floats in long and slow lines through the air, but suddenly rushes down, clenched into a fist, when a drastic chord occurs. With moving rhythms, the baton often moves with each sixteenth in tempo if he has not just shown it by his hand, which is very often the case. If a phrase concludes in louder, broad chords, he shakes both arms and spreads his hands wide; when a piano enters, his whole body seem to sink, while conversely it grows immensely when a crescendo is to enter; Liszt then often gets up on his toes as high as he can and stretches his arms over his head. The score did not need to be there for him; he hardly looks at it, and does not even look at moments that are self-explanatory, as for example, a longer-lasting theme in a slow tempo and a lighter time signature, thoughtful in front of him, moves no part of his body and crosses his arms behind his back. Then he is all ears, full of joy at the majestic, continuous stream of melodies, until he suddenly jumps up again to interject himself boldly and energetically. This is original, and some may find it bizarre; but you must have watched how the spirit that animates this conductor elicits a great performance from every instrument! An invigorating, fresh source of stimulation proceeds, as it does from every significant person, including this one.³²

In his biography of Liszt, Raabe included a description of Liszt conducting a concert at the “Akademie für Männergesang” [Academy of Male Singing] that

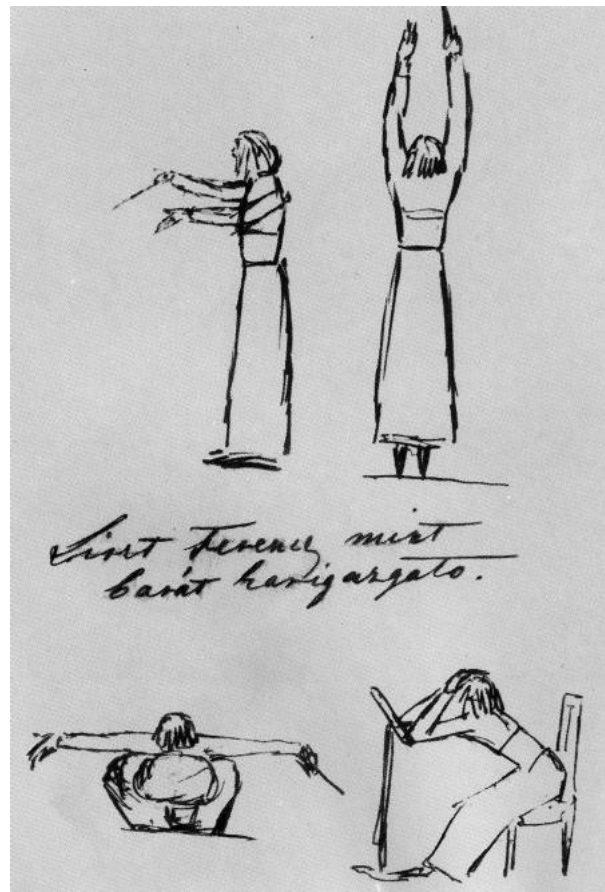


Fig. 3 Caricature of Liszt, sketch on paper by Sandor Lumniczer. Written in the middle: “Liszt Ferenc mint barát karigazgató.” [Franz Liszt as Abbé conductor.] [Museum es Könyvtar Budapest, I.A. Sachs, classified in: Liszt 217/ U 6/ Sobe, 30.1.1970]

the Berlin-based newspaper *Figaro* published on 18 February 1843:

Liszt on the conductor's podium offers a peculiar sight. In every moment we fear that he will be overcome by the violence of the music and move from calm intellectual control over the realm of sound that rages around him and plunge into the midst of the burning tide. His whole being trembles and pulsates;

³²Uhde, Hermann. “Die Äußere Haltung Des Dirigenten Und Sein Platz Auf Dem Chor.” *Musica Sacra/Die Zeitschrift Für Katholische Kirchenmusik* 11 (1910): 130–38. “Franz Liszt stand auf dem Dirigentenplatze, wie immer im langen schwarzen Gewande, die Züge von Freude durchglüht, offenbar glücklich, den großen Toten zu feiern. Die Aufführung war voll Glanz und Kraft, Liszts Energie und Geist war es, der alle durchdrang, alle mit Feuereifer beseelte. Aber wie dirigiert er auch! Weit entfernt vom gleichmäßigen Schwingen seines Taktstockes, deutet er in Gebärden und Gesten auf einzige Art den Geist des Tonwerkes an. Jeden frappanten Einsatz irgend eines Instrumentes markiert er scharf, oft durch leises Aufstampfen mit dem Fuße; bei Motiven von sangbarem Charakter schwebt die feine weiße Hand in langen und langsamen Linien durch die Luft, saust aber plötzlich, zur Faust geballt, nieder, wenn ein einschneidender Akkord einfällt. Bei bewegten Rhythmen geht der Taktstock im Tempo oft mit jedem Sechzehntel mit, wenn er ihn nicht gerade aus der Hand gelegt hat, was sehr häufig der Fall ist. Geht es zum Schlusse in sich steigernden, breiten Akkorden, so erbebt er beide Arme und breitet die Hände weit aus; tritt ein Piano ein, so scheint die ganze Gestalt zusammenzusinken, während sie umgekehrt riesig wächst, wenn ein *Crescendo* eintreten soll; Liszt erhebt sich dann oft auf die Zehen so hoch er kann und reckt die Arme über den Kopf. Die Partitur brauchte für ihn gar nicht da zu sein; er sieht sie kaum an, blickt überhaupt bei Momenten, welche sich von selber machen, wie z. B. ein länger andauerndes Thema in langsamen Tempo und leichter Taktart, sinnend vor sich nieder, bewegt kein Glied und kreuzt die Arme über dem Rücken. Dann ist er ganz Ohr, sich voll erfreuend an dem majestätisch dauerrauschenden Strome der Melodien, bis er dann plötzlich wieder emporschnellt, um kühn und energievoll einzugreifen. Das ist originell, und mancher mag es barock finden; aber man muß es beobachtet haben, wie der Geist, der diesen Dirigenten beseelt, jedwedes Instrument hinreißt! Ein belebender frischer Quell der Anregung geht, wie von jeder bedeutenden Persönlichkeit, so auch von dieser aus.”

his arms stretch out towards the enticing deluge; his eyes flame and his countenance quickly flies over into a bright smile and then from a gloomy Muse to deep pain; suddenly the flame of enthusiasm once again triumphs and transfigures his face into an Orphic image. Liszt doesn't beat time; he merely hints at the accents. I can't think of any orchestra that knows how to cope with Liszt's conducting." (Fig. 3, page 7).³³

His disdain for a mechanical beat was matched by his conviction that artistic integrity took precedence over all other matters. "Liszt...simply expected [the musicians] all to play splendidly; they had to do it by themselves, and this was much more difficult. Only occasionally did he exercise a tight control; occasionally he would rest his hand on his breast, nod his head, or his eyes would flash. Under Liszt the player had to know his business..." Such independence was crucial because Liszt had the habit of sometimes stopping conducting altogether: "Often Liszt barely gave a beat. He sometimes moreover laid down his baton and simply allowed the orchestra to play...Some of the players could not respond. They were not familiar with Liszt's views on the real task of the conductor, which was to make himself apparently superfluous, to make his activities pass unperceived."

He was not the first conductor to dispense with a pattern, though: "When Weber conducted his *Freischütz Overture* at Dresden, he would beat the first four bars of the Allegro and then stand back with folded arms, his task done, while the orchestra continued playing up to the pauses. Mendelssohn adopted a similar practice with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra; he would frequently stand back, putting his baton down on the desk, and let the orchestra play without further guidance."³⁶ Liszt's behavior on the podium was just another manifestation of his core belief that conductors are engaged to make art, not keep time. "In many places even the rough maintenance of time and each continuous bar | 1, 2, 3, 4, | 1, 2, 3, 4, | clashes with the meaning and expression. The letter, as elsewhere, kills the spirit..."³⁷

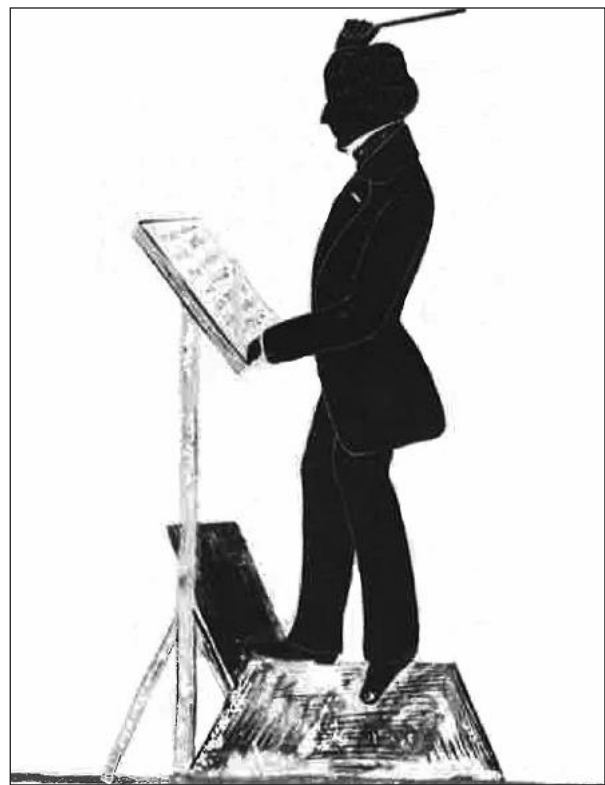


Fig. 4 Silhouette of Berlioz drawn at a rehearsal in Dresden, 28 April 1854. Unknown artist. [Bibliothèque nationale, Musique, Estampes Berlioz, no. 6]

Berlioz held dissimilar views about how best to control an orchestra, as was evident to anyone who saw him conduct:

Berlioz's beat was clear, brisk, and constant; he was proud of his technique and very precise in the application of it...the very opposite of Liszt's super-expressive style. Berlioz strove to keep his emotions under control when conducting (as he did also when composing); he found he conducted better when he was ill, because it prevented him from getting too emotionally involved with the music (Fig. 4).³⁸

³³*Berliner Figaro neue freie Zeitung*, Berlin: 18 February 1843, quoted in Raabe, Peter. *Liszt's Leben*, Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1931, 254. "Liszt am Dirigentenpulte gewährt einen eigentümlich Anblick. In jedem Augenblicke fürchten wir, werde er, hingerissen von der Gewalt der Musik, aus der Ruhe der geistigen Herrschaft über das Reich der Klänge, die ihm umwogen, mitten hinein in die brausende Flut sich stürzen. Sein ganzes Wesen zittert und pulsiert, seine Arme reichen oft beide sehnsüchtig hinüber in die lockende Flut, sein Auge flammt, sein Anblick überfliegt bald heiteres Lächeln, bald trübes Sinnen, bald das tiefe Weh—dann zuckt wieder triumphierend die Flamme der Begeisterung darüber weg und verklärt ihn zu einem orpheischen Bilde. Liszt taktiert nicht, er bezeichnet nur die Akzente; ein Orchester, das ich nicht kennt unter Liszt's Direktion zurecht kommen."

³⁴Dezsó Legány, *Ferenc Liszt and His Country: 1869–1873* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1976), 177.

³⁵Legány, 177.

³⁶Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt/the Weimar Years, 1848–1861* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 273.

³⁷Liszt to Richard Pohl, 5 November 1853, from Paris in Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, 143. "Dans beaucoup d'endroits même le grossier maintien de la mesure et de chaque basse de mesure | 1, 2, 3, 4, | 1, 2, 3, 4, | jure avec le sens et l'expression. La comme ailleurs *la lettre tue l'esprit*..."

³⁸Macdonald, 95.

The German pianist and conductor Charles Halle, writing about Berlioz conducting in the 1830s, penned “What a picture [Berlioz] was at the head of his orchestra, with his eagle face, his bushy hair, his air of command, and glowing with enthusiasm. He was the most perfect conductor that I ever set eyes upon, one who held absolute sway over his troops, and played upon them as a pianist upon the keyboard.”³⁹

To better realize his compositional success, Berlioz turned to conducting on a regular basis after 1834, and pioneered again with his insistence on clarity, steady tempi, and fidelity to the original scores; he often rehearsed his orchestras in sections for greater precision. Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, and Hans von Bülow were among the many who acknowledged his primacy on the podium. In 1832 he presented the *Symphonie fantastique* and two other works at the Conservatoire de Paris; among the luminaries present were Liszt, Frédéric Chopin and Niccolò Paganini, who was so impressed that he commissioned a concerto for his recently acquired Stradivarius viola. The following morning Paganini sent him this note:

My dear Friend.—Beethoven being dead, there remains only Berlioz who can replace him; and I, who have heard with delight your divine compositions, worthy of a genius such as yours, think it my duty to beg you to accept, as a proof of my profound respect, twenty thousand francs, which will be handed to you by Baron on you presenting the enclosed. Ever your friend, Niccolò Paganini.⁴⁰

Even Hans von Bulow, who did not suffer fools gladly, wrote to Liszt in 1854 that “The entire [Dresden] court orchestra and the singers are in the full flush of elation. They are happy to have been taught by this incomparable conductor [Berlioz] to appreciate their own talent and capacities.”⁴¹ Wagner, on the other hand, wasn’t so kind. At a performance in London in 1855, during which both he and Berlioz conducted, Wagner wrote that “I...was amazed to find a conductor who was so energetic in the performance of his own music sink into the commonest rut of the vulgar time beater.”⁴²

One might conclude that the differences between Liszt and his good friend Berlioz were all-encompassing. Although they held divergent views on the role of the conductor in performance, they were nevertheless in total agreement regarding the most important part of the musical process—rehearsals.

Art of Preparation: Liszt, Berlioz and the Development of Rehearsal Technique

Cosima Wagner has often related how Berlioz brought to his rehearsals a tremendous command of the minutiae of orchestral techniques, a wonderful ear for delicate effects and tonal beauty, and an irresistible power of command. Upon all who heard or played under him he exerted an ineradicable influence.⁴³

In the same way that Liszt and Berlioz had to fashion the rudiments of conducting, they were likewise forced to devise rehearsal strategies that were suitable for their own music and that of their contemporaries. Part of the problem was that orchestral musicians in the 19th century maintained a less stringent work ethic than their modern counterparts. Salaried players, for instance, frequently sent substitutes to rehearsals. As a result of this widespread and accepted practice, the musicians who played the actual concerts were under-rehearsed; sloppy, chaotic performances were commonplace; sometimes the music simply fell apart.

Then, as now, “modern” music presented unusual, often taxing, technical challenges. Performers were frequently poorly equipped for the demands made on them by Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner. Indeed, Berlioz complained bitterly that graduates of music conservatories were inadequately trained and lacked the skills necessary to overcome the formidable technical hurdles they would find in the new music. Moreover, since by the second half of the 19th century, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments were greatly improved, the players could not blame their inadequacies on outmoded instruments. Berlioz and Liszt knew that audiences would be unable to appreciate either their new harmonic language or the progressive nature of their aesthetic until their music could be heard properly.

³⁹Sir Charles Hallé. *Life and letters of Sir Charles Hallé; being an autobiography, 1819-1860* with correspondence and diaries, edited by C. E. and M. Hallé. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1896, 64–70.

⁴⁰*The Illustrated London News*, 12 February 1848, 92. In 1832, 20,000 French francs could buy 207 ounces of gold, which is worth \$219,560 in 2015.

⁴¹Hans von Bülow to Liszt, 30 April 1854, from Dresden, Hans Von Bülow, *Briefe Und Schriften*, ed. Marie Bülow, Band II (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1895–1908), 199–204.

⁴²Schonberg, 115.

⁴³Tom S. Wotton, “Chapter Eight—Interpretation and Editions,” *The Hector Berlioz Website/Berlioz: Pioneers and Champions*, accessed August 8, 2019, http://www.hberlioz.com/champions/wottonch8.htm?zoom_highlight=rehearsal.

One novel solution to overcome the indifference and incompetence of many instrumentalists and singers was the introduction of sectional rehearsals. Even though 21st-century musicians take them for granted, in Liszt's day sectionals must have been truly rare, for he felt compelled to recommend to prospective conductors of his *Symphonic Poems* that, in order

...to achieve a performance of my orchestral works that corresponds to the composer's intentions—one that gives the music the required sound, color, rhythm, and life—sectional rehearsals, which are most efficient and minimize lost time, are recommended before the dress rehearsal. Accordingly, I take the liberty to request that esteemed conductors who intend to perform my symphonic poems rehearse the strings separately from the winds and percussion instruments before the dress rehearsal.⁴⁴

He reiterated the same principle to the German conductor and composer Gustav Schmidt, Kapellmeister at Frankfurt-am-Main, in 1853. Liszt wrote to him that in preparing for a performance of Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Faust*,

However, it will be necessary for you to hold several rehearsals of them—separate rehearsals for the strings and separate rehearsals for the wind instruments. The impact of Berlioz's works can only be extraordinary if the performance of them is satisfactory. Nor do they fit in with the commendable theater and concert making, because they claim a higher artistic point of view from the musicians.⁴⁵

Berlioz discovered the same kinds of problems in his travels and expressed his regret at seeing choral and orchestral rehearsals still so badly run.

The practice of massed rehearsals for big choral and instrumental works persists everywhere. The whole chorus is rehearsed at the same time, so are the instrumentalists. Dreadful mistakes and countless howlers are made, especially in inner parts unnoticed by the chorus-master

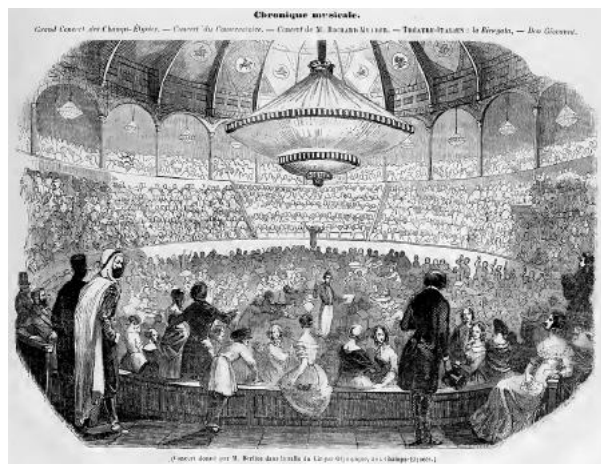


Fig. 5 “Concert donné par M. Berlioz dans la salle du Cirque-Olympique, aux Champs-Élysées. 1845.” [Concert conducted by M. Berlioz at the Cirque-Olympique Hall on the Champs-Élysées] L’illustration: Journal Universel, January 25, 1845, 325. Notice the enormity and seating of the orchestra and chorus as well as Berlioz’ position and stance.

and the conductor. Once established, these mistakes degenerate into regular practice and survive right through to the performance.⁴⁶

Berlioz knew from personal experience what havoc a substandard conductor can wreak on a chorus; when he was twenty, “scarcely knowing his notes, and only playing on the guitar and flageolet...he engaged himself as a chorus singer at the Théâtre de Gymanase.”⁴⁷ He recommends “directing the studies of an unknown score with the performers, to properly discover the author’s thinking, to make it clear and salient, to obtain from musicians the qualities of fidelity, ensemble and expression, without which there is no music, and, having mastered the material difficulties, to identify them with himself, to heat them up with his ardor, to animate them with his enthusiasm—in a word, to communicate his inspiration to them.”⁴⁸

In *Le Chef d’Orchestre*, Berlioz writes that

...The conductor must see and hear (Fig. 5), he must be agile and rigorous, know the composition, nature and extent of the instruments,

⁴⁴Liszt, Franz *Liszts Musikalische Werke*, 5.

⁴⁵Liszt to Gustav Schmidt, Weimar, 27 February 1853 in La Mara 1:131–132. “Notwendig wird es aber sein, dass Sie mehrere Proben davon halten—und zwar Separat-Proben für das Quartett und Separat-Proben für die Blas-Instrumente. Die Wirkung der Berlioz’schen Werke kann nur dann eine ausserordentliche sein, wenn die Aufführung ihnen Genüge leistet. Sie passen ebenfalls nicht zu der löblich üblichen Theater- und Concert-Macherei, weil sie einen höheren künstlerischen Standpunkt von Seite der Musiker beanspruchen.”

⁴⁶Berlioz, 363.

⁴⁷“Hector Berlioz,” *The Illustrated London News*, February 12, 1848, 12.

⁴⁸Hector Berlioz, *Mémoires De Hector Berlioz, Comprenant Ses Voyages En Italie, En Allemagne, En Russie Et En Angleterre: 1803-1865* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, Éditeurs, 1870), 389. “Dans la seconde au contraire, il s’agit pour lui de diriger les études d’une partition inconnue aux exécutants, de bien mettre à découvert la pensée de l’auteur, de la rendre claire et saillante, d’obtenir des musiciens les qualités de fidélité, d’ensemble et d’expression, sans lesquelles il n’y a pas de musique, et, une fois maître des difficultés matérielles, de les identifier avec lui-même, de les échauffer de son ardeur, de les animer de son enthousiasme, eh un mot, de leur communiquer son inspiration.”

know how to read the score and possess, in addition to the special talent we will try to explain the constituent qualities, other gifts almost indefinable, without which an invisible link cannot be established between him and those he directs, the ability to convey his feelings to them is denied and by means, then, power, empire, leadership completely escaped. It is no longer a leader, a director, but a simple measuring stick, assuming he knows how to beat and divide her regularly.⁴⁹

Both Berlioz and Liszt were known as strict disciplinarians in an age when rehearsals were generally ill-organized and unproductive. Indeed, Liszt brooked no laziness in his players, as demonstrated in the 1845 Beethoven Festival in Bonn where he

...wanted a concert worthy of the memory of Beethoven...He gave the orchestral and choral rehearsals extraordinary care day after day. But in him the performers found a kind of conductor to whom they were not accustomed...At his rehearsals, lasting half a day, he also plagues our musicians, who are not very accustomed to emotion...he is bent on seeing that every instrument performs its duty with honor...[Liszt] wanted to hear every detail performed in perfection on the spot. He wanted the signals given by his blazing eyes and the most minute gesture of his hand to be followed at once by the orchestra and choir.⁵⁰

Orchestral players were offended by conductors who tried to interfere with their free and easy ways; thus, they were naturally resentful of Berlioz and Liszt, each of whom demanded higher performance standards from them: "Liszt had earned a reputation for tyrannizing the players, for he would let them get away with nothing."⁵¹ He expected perfection from his players in Weimar and in the many cities where he guest conducted and tolerated nothing less.

Everything had to work right down to the minutest detail before he would allow the rehearsal to continue, and it might happen that

if the woodwinds, for example, had not played a passage to his satisfaction he would rehearse that passage with them for between half an hour and three quarters of an hour..."⁵²

Moreover, he was not above stopping performances if something went amiss:

If the mood took him, he would even treat performances as if they were rehearsals, and if serious mistakes occurred he would spring up from the podium and shout to the players to return to such and such a place. Far from being disturbed, the audience would applaud this sign of his vigilance.⁵³

Both Liszt and Berlioz recognized that one of the conductor's most important tasks was to rehearse the orchestra and chorus. Diligent, exacting preparation was especially pressing given the new harmonic and rhythmic elements of their music, and the originality of their orchestrations. In short, Liszt and Berlioz called for more from 19th-century players and singers than had theretofore been required. Elevating the performance standards was not just an afterthought on their parts: populating orchestras with consummate professionals, staffing opera houses with capable soloists and instrumentalists, and filling choruses with well-trained singers was essential. For, only dedicated, hard-working musicians would understand their extraordinary harmonic language and melodic idioms as well as their utterly original aesthetic; elevating the quality of performance was crucial to the evolution—indeed, to the survival—of the Romantic style.

Berlioz' contributions are far more evident in orchestration techniques, placement, his insistence on players using the instruments he specified. He was indignant when a clarinetist, for instance, transposed a passage Berlioz specified as "clarinet in C" using an A-clarinet instead. "It is also imperative for a conductor not to allow clarinet-players to use always the same instrument (the clarinet in B-flat), without regard to the author's indications. Just as if the different clarinets—those in D and in A, particularly—had not a special character of their own, of which the intelligent

⁴⁹Hector Berlioz. *Le Chef d'Orchestre/Théorie de Son Art/Extrait du Grand Traité D'instrumentation et d'Orchestration Modernes*. Paris: Imprimerie Georges Petit, 1876, 26. "Le chef d'orchestre doit voir et entendre, il doit être agile et rigoureux, connaître la composition, la nature et l'étendue des instruments, savoir lire la partition et posséder, en outre du talent spécial dont nous allons tâcher d'expliquer les qualités constitutives, d'autres dons presque indéfinissables, sans lesquels un lien invisible ne peut s'établir entre lui et ceux qu'il dirige, la faculté de leur transmettre son sentiment lui est refusée et, par suite, le pouvoir, l'empire, l'action directrice lui échappent complètement. Ce n'est plus alors un chef, un directeur, mais un simple batteur de mesure, en supposant qu'il sache la battre et la diviser régulièrement."

⁵⁰Legány, 81.

⁵¹Georg Julius Schultz, *Briefe Eines Baltischen Idealisten an Seine Mutter: 1833-1875*, trans. Johannes Werner (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1934), 147.

⁵²Franz Von Milde, *Ein Ideales Künstlerpaar Rosa Und Feodor Von Milde; Ihre Kunst Und Ihre Zeit*, vol. I (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1918), 26.

⁵³Schultz, 141.

composer knows the exact value.”⁵⁴ He would openly scold trumpet and horn players for using valves to play chromatic notes (as is the practice today) instead of changing crooks as he indicated in the score.

A habit, as vicious, and still more pernicious, has crept in since the introduction of horns with cylinders and pistons, in many orchestras; it is that of playing in open sounds, by means of the new mechanism adapted to the instrument, those notes intended by the composer to be produced in closed sounds, by means of the right hand within the bell. Moreover, the horn-players now-a-days, on account of the facility afforded by the pistons or cylinders of putting their instrument into different keys, use only the horn in F, whatever may be the key indicated by the author. This custom gives rise to a host of inconveniences, from which the conductor should use all his efforts to preserve the works of composers who know how to write; for those of others, it must be confessed, the disaster is of much less consequence.⁵⁵

Timbre was of utmost importance to him and his music deserves the same kind of attention to performance practices as Bach or Beethoven.

Liszt, like Wagner, was fluid regarding interpretation of a composer’s score; they believed part of the conductor’s art was to layer his own musical and artistic sensibilities on top of the written notes. There are certainly modern conductors who ascribe to this philosophy, to be sure; nevertheless, Berlioz may have had more lasting influence with his belief that the score is paramount. Certainly he laid the groundwork for the Urtext scores, and his demands that the composer’s instrumentation must be honored paved the way for today’s ‘Historically Informed Performance’ movement, where period instruments and stylistically appropriate performance elements are used to produce a performance that is as close to what the composer expected—or hoped—to hear.

Perhaps we have Berlioz to thank for the method and structure of modern rehearsal techniques. In his *Treatise Upon Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration*, he writes:

I conclude, by expressing sincere regret at be holding choral and orchestral studies still so

badly organized. Everywhere, for grand choral and instrumental compositions, the system of rehearsals in the mass, is maintained. They make all the chorus-singers study at once, on the one hand; and all the instrumentalists at once, on the other. Deplorable errors, innumerable mistakes, are thus committed,—particularly in the intermediate parts; errors which the chorus-master and the conductor do not perceive. Once established, these errors degenerate into habits; and become part and parcel of the execution.⁵⁶

Berlioz saved his greatest invective for the deficiencies of 19th-century chorus masters. “I have not yet said all I have to say about those dangerous supernumeraries known as chorus masters. Very few of them are in fact competent to conduct a musical performance to a standard that the conductor can rely on.”⁵⁷ Berlioz must have repeatedly encountered poorly prepared choruses, because he wrote of it again and again. He laid the blame for the incompetence of the singers squarely on the shoulders of the director of the chorus, not the singers themselves.

Of all the performers the unfortunate chorus is much the worst treated during rehearsals, such as they are. Instead of getting a good conductor, who knows how to beat time and who knows about singing, to give the beat and make comments, a good pianist playing from a well arranged vocal score on a good piano, and a good violinist to play in unison or an octave above each vocal part as they are learnt separately—instead of these three indispensable musicians they are entrusted, in two thirds of the opera houses of Europe, to just one man who has no more idea how to conduct than to sing, not much of a musician, picked from the worst pianists they can find, or, more likely, who does not play the piano at all...using his right hand to give the chorus the wrong rhythm and his left hand to give them the wrong notes.⁵⁸

When he returned to Paris from his time in Rome in 1848, he “became alternately a critic and a composer—here, venting a flood of vitriolic sarcasm, or a flight of high-toned poetry—there elaborating a march or a scherzo—by wielding now the pen, now the *bâton*, with a wild and chivalrous devotion to both.”⁵⁹ There can be no doubt that Berlioz was a

⁵⁴Berlioz, *A Treatise*, 256.

⁵⁵Berlioz, *A Treatise*, 256.

⁵⁶Berlioz, *A Treatise*, 257.

⁵⁷Berlioz, *A Treatise*, 356.

⁵⁸Berlioz, *A Treatise*, 363.

⁵⁹“Hector Berlioz,” *The Illustrated London News*, February 12, 1848, 12.

towering figure in the 19th century; indeed, his influences as orchestrator, conductor, pedagogue and author are still felt 150 years into the future.

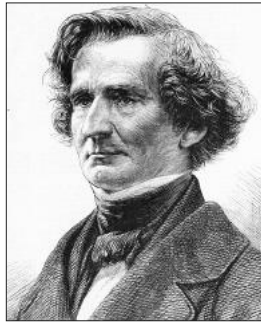


Fig. 6 Engraving of Berlioz published after his death. *The Illustrated London News*, 3 April, 1869, 345.

Berlioz was an astute critic, whose writings had far-reaching impact on musical and artistic sensibilities. After his death the *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung* wrote that “These lines are dedicated only to the composer, who, after so many struggles and insults, has, with only a few moments of compensation, been called from earthly trial to higher purification.”⁶⁰ In another obituary published with a stunning lack of acuity and foresight, *The Musical Times* and *Singing Class Circular* wrote that Berlioz “had a thorough command of orchestral resources, and an instinctive perception of all that was beautiful in art; but there can be little doubt that he will be more remembered by his able and acute contributions to musical criticism than by any of the compositions with which he hoped to revolutionize the world.”⁶¹ Even Berlioz himself believed such pernicious words near the end of his life (Fig. 6); his final sarcastic remark on 8 March 1869 was reputed to be “Enfin, on va jouer ma musique [At last, they will play my music].”⁶²



Fig. 7 Engraving of Franz Liszt made after his death. *Pall Mall Gazette*, (London), 2 August 1886, 10.

Liszt enjoyed favorable reviews after his death (Fig. 7), both for his keyboard pyrotechnics—the London newspaper *The Era* called him the “Paganini of the pianoforte,”⁶³ even Robert Schumann’s weekly newspaper, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, wrote somewhat grudgingly that “It is not our intention to reject here an overweening, in its way unique, but never-ending,

artistic existence, and to reject the mighty nature, the shining spirit, the high seriousness, the pure, selfless, ungrudging devotion and sacrifice with which the transfigured Master worked and lived.”⁶⁴

In the end, both Liszt and Berlioz created a legacy that can still be identified in modern performances. While their interpretations of early music were colored by the aesthetic of their time, it is because of them that we have a clear understanding of 19th-century, Romantic performance practices. Liszt and Wagner created the New German School yet Berlioz harbored no animosity towards their compositional style; rather, he primarily focused on imagining, creating and cataloguing the concepts, techniques and artistic sensibilities that are still the foundation of how conductors work and are taught today.

Despite their occasional disagreements about conducting technique and philosophy, Berlioz and Liszt became especially close friends, which led to a life-long collaboration. Between them, they created two distinct styles of conducting, both of which are still evidenced; while they differed on whether a composer’s score was sacrosanct (Berlioz) or a sketch from which a conductor should fill in the lines (Liszt), their contributions to the art of conducting, rehearsing, and interpretation are indisputable. Obverse sides of a single coin, we see their influence concert hall stages and on television and the Internet; we hear their aesthetic represented on recordings; and we read their words nearly two centuries after they were penned in textbooks, CD liner notes and reviews. Fortunately for us, and posterity, there is little chance their combined significance is likely to abate.

David Friddle is a conductor, organist, scholar and author. He earned his first DMA in Organ Performance from the Juilliard School and his second in Choral Conducting from the University of Miami. www.davidfriddle.com

⁶⁰*Neue Berliner Musikzeitung*. XXIII. Yearbook No. 12, 24 March 1869, 93. “Diese Zeilen sind nur dem Componisten geweiht, der nach so vielen Kämpfen und Kränkungen, bei gar wenigen Momenten der Entschädigung, nunmehr von irdischer Prüfung zu höherer Läuterung gerufen worden ist.”

⁶¹*The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 14, No. 314, Apr. 1, 1869, 53.

⁶²David Cairns, *Berlioz: Volume Two: Servitude and Greatness 1832–1869* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 775.

⁶³“Death of Franz Liszt,” *The Era* (London), August 7, 1886, 6.

⁶⁴*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, No. 32, 6 August 1886, 345. “Nicht uns will es ziemen, hier auf ein überreiches, in seiner Weise einziges, nun ausgeklungenes aber doch nie verklingendes Künstler-dasein zurückzuweisen und an die mächtige Natur, die leuchtenden Geisteseseigenschaften, den hohen Ernst, die menschlich warme, nie versiegende Liebensewürdigkeit, die reine, selbstlose, neidlose Hingabe und Opferwilligkeit, mit welcher der verklärte Meister gewirkt und gelebt, zu erinnern.”

An Interview with Doreen Rao, Recipient of the 2019 ACDA Robert Shaw Choral Award

At the ACDA 60th Anniversary National Conference in Kansas City, Doreen Rao was honored with the 2019 Robert Shaw Choral Award, which recognizes “significant contributions to choral music in America.” Dedicated to the intersections of choral artistry and music education, Doreen’s career as conductor and choral teacher, university professor and symphonic chorus master, and author spans decades of enduring leadership. Her seminal work teaching children to sing spearheaded the profoundly important children’s chorus movement in America. The eminent conductor Robert Shaw wrote, “The world of choral music owes her special thanks. She is preparing our future.”

Excerpted next from a series of interviews published in Melissa M. Mills, *Working with Young Singers*,¹ the following passages illuminate Rao’s philosophy of musical performance as “a continuous feast of musical relationships.” She begins her interview by stating the source of her identity as a choral conductor.

I’ve never considered myself a “children’s chorus” conductor, not then, not now. I thrive on the musical and interpersonal diversity inherent in conducting a wide range of music and musical ensembles. Each one of these experiences informs the other. What I learned from Margaret Hillis and her extraordinary work with the Chicago Symphony Chorus went into practice with my children’s chorus. What I learned from conducting children and youth choruses went into practice with my university and professional choruses. For me, it is a continuous feast of musical relationships enjoyed in diverse communities of children, youth, adults and professionals—all undertaking the same task with different sets of skills, perspectives and expectations. In each chapter of my professional life, I have found myself in a place “where everything is music.”² I think that finding the music in your life and relationships, as well as in your music making, is key to a long and happy career. Rumi says it perfectly:

*Today like every other day,
We wake up empty and scared.
Don’t open the door of your study
and begin reading.
Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel
And kiss the earth.*³

Rao speaks about ‘mindfulness,’ the conductor’s ability to be fully present in the moment. “The essence of conducting is the ability to listen, and to be still enough to hear what is really going on in rehearsal.” She probes deeper, stating “that conductors who lack confidence, or those suffering from unresolved emotional issues are less likely to be able to listen to their choirs. Conductors who cannot listen often use prescriptive, pre-planned rehearsal techniques unrelated to the musical realities before them. They can’t really hear the musical problems because they aren’t listening to the choir. They are listening to their fear.”⁴

Rao aspires to create the kind of musical experience “that changes lives, [and] the way we feel about ourselves and the world around us.” She works from the assumption that singers and aspiring conductors already are what they seek to become. “I have learned to listen to what the singers know intuitively. From that starting point, I am able to diagnose what the singers need to learn in order to reach their full potential.”

Regarding conducting gestures, Rao details “a multidimensional practice: as a form of listening, to actually hear and diagnose what the choir can and cannot do; as a form of teaching, to instruct non-verbally through nuanced and active movement; and as performance, to support and guide singers and audiences toward a deeper musical understanding.”

Toward the end of the provocative interview, Rao concludes that choral conductors need a “fresh vision—a fresh way of looking at things from outside the envelope, and beyond the borders of so-called ‘common practices’ and current trends...The best part of conducting a choir is when we can ‘get out of the

¹Melissa M. Mills, *Working with Young Choirs*. Chicago: GIA Publishing, Inc., 2017.

²Mills, 67. “Where Everything is Music” from Jalal al-Din Rumi, *The Essential Rumi* (translation by Coleman Barks), New York: Harper Collins, 2004, 34.

³Rumi, 36.

⁴Mills, 73.

way' and let the beauty we love be what we do! When we do more, the choir does less. When nothing we do helps to improve the singing, it's time to practice non-conducting!"

Congratulations to Doreen Rao for this important recognition of a lifetime of teaching, conducting, mentoring, and raising up a generation of choral musicians, changing lives wherever she goes.

Book Review

A Practical Guide to Choral Conducting

By Harold Rosenbaum

Review by Doreen Rao, Ph. D., Elmer Iseler Chair
in Conducting Emeritus, University of Toronto;
Music Director Emerita, Glen Ellyn Childrens' Chorus

*Every so often, think about how lucky you are to
be making music...*

I recently had the pleasure of hearing Harold Rosenbaum's New York Virtuoso Singers perform in composer Andrea Clearfield's new opera, *Mila, Great Sorcerer*, presented in NYC as a work-in-progress by the acclaimed Prototype Festival. Mr. Rosenbaum's confident and exacting ensemble of professional singers presented a solid background for the dramatic transformation of the Tibetan yogi Milarepa, a deeply moving and successful premiere.

Harold Rosenbaum presents a similarly confident and solid offering of experience and expertise in his recently published text, *A Practical Guide to Choral Conducting*. Divided into two distinct sections, Part I of this text constitutes a broad and wide-ranging look at choral conducting, defined by the author as "more of a calling than a profession." Part II offers an extensive anthology, defined by the author as masterpieces, from Machaut and des Prez to Debussy and Webern.

Organized into nineteen short and conversational chapters, the Part I synopses range from how to find a job, to the nuts and bolts of establishing a professional choir. Through the lens of his many years of experience as a choral conductor, Mr. Rosenbaum generously counsels his readers in a relaxed and easy-going stream of consciousness style rhetoric. With a sprinkling of personal examples, the author advises us on finding appropriate repertoire and program planning relative to choir size and venue acoustics. Based on his personal experience, the narrative addresses score learning in a three-page guide consisting of two separate lists on how to understand the score and how to prepare a score.

Part I continues with a focus on "the most persistent musical mistakes choral conductors make in rehearsals and performances," such as failing to hear and cor-

rect mistakes in rehearsal. Mr. Rosenbaum's chapter on conducting technique addresses gesture, and outlines movements that might be effective. The chapters on rehearsing, choral sound, concepts and techniques are liberally scanned, supported by bits of Mr. Rosenbaum's personal wisdom and experience. I appreciated the author's musical examples and personal stories inserted to offer contextual relevance to his discussions.

The book's wide range of practical advice on the subjects of organization, both for orchestral and choral ensembles, presented in digestible list forms, is indeed practical and valuable for emerging conductors. I found the discussion on concerts and venues perhaps too generalized. It was of course valuable to mention the relationship of acoustics and tempo. (While reading this chapter, I remembered my own blunder in presenting a Bach cantata in an ultra-resonant cathedral acoustic in Toronto.) But what comes first? Do we choose the concert repertoire to accommodate a particular acoustic, or do we choose a venue to accommodate our choice of concert repertoire? On the discussion of concert halls, there are many more variables and restrictions, particularly in relation to union halls versus non-union halls and in relation to budget and academic restrictions as well.

On matters related to the concert experience, Mr. Rosenbaum tells us that "having total control over your technique" is key to successful musical experience. He says, "When you are entirely confident about your technique, you can create magic." To take the musical experience from "average" moments to "special moments" the author makes a list of circumstances in which the reader may achieve special results. Readers may or may not be able to relate to these particular circumstances, but the list contains valuable insights to be adapted for conducting studies—which is of course, the point of the book.

In addition to his valuable insights on touring and recording, Mr. Rosenbaum courageously offers a chapter on when to "break the rules"—when "not to conduct" and when "not to interpret something that lies before you on the page." Again, the author adds musical examples and personal experiences to support his discussion.

As one who has conducted symphonic and professional choirs throughout their career, I found the author's insights into the world of professional choirs quite resonant, and particularly useful for emerging conductors seeking to start a professional choir. Finally, and in relation to the subject of performing modern music, I celebrate Mr. Rosenbaum's deep commitment to living composers as he makes a passionate plea for discerning conductors to embrace the challenges of new music.

He tells us to make a "special effort to support living composers;" he says that if we believe in the worth of the music, we should not be afraid of what the audience might think! I particularly appreciated his concern for current publishing trends to promote "easy to sell/easy listening repertoire." Along with Harold Rosenbaum, I too applaud those conductors who "take more risks" to find and perform cutting-edge music.

The author's selected lists of repertoire, from accessible to more complex are indeed valuable, as are his fine examples of unaccompanied contemporary choral music. These ready-made lists may be particularly useful for university choral literature and conducting courses.

As I read Mr. Rosenbaum's "Final Thoughts" in the last chapter of Part I, I chuckled at his curious collection of ideas. From his deeply profound words,

"Every so often, think about how lucky you are to be making music..." to his oddly basic advice to "carry breath fresheners" before greeting fans backstage, the author brings us the benefit of his broad and impressive history.

The Part II compilation of fifty public domain works from Machaut to Webern is organized as an anthology of selected masterpieces. The anthology contents span a vast repertoire of European classics accompanied by the author's performance suggestions and general thoughts embodied in the first page of each composition. While the anthology is focused exclusively on all male European composers from early Renaissance to late Romantic and early Contemporary music, this traditional body of repertoire nevertheless remains an important segment of any comprehensive choral conducting curriculum.

Mr. Rosenbaum's contribution set forth in *A Practical Guide to Choral Conducting* is indeed practical, pragmatic and personal. In an intimate and conversational style, this seasoned and successful conductor has generously contributed an abundance of practical information with personal insights offered honestly and decisively in his own voice. Who among us does not appreciate the enormous effort and generosity of spirit involved in compiling a lifetime of musical wisdom and experience?

Recent Recordings

Reviews by Timothy Sawyer, Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities, University of Northwestern, St. Paul, MN

Frank Martin: *Mass for Double Choir* Westminster Choir

Joe Miller, conductor

Selected pieces by Bairstow, Phillips,
Öhrwall and Vivancos

Naxos, September 2018

The Westminster Choir enjoys a rich and storied history. With historic connections to the New York Philharmonic and Philadelphia Orchestra and its accomplishments and accolades under its founder John Finley Williamson and the late Joseph Flummerfelt, the choir has released a new disk featuring the rarely-performed *Mass for Double Choir* by Frank Martin under its current conductor, Joe Miller. From this disk, it is quite clear the current Westminster Choir is faithfully adhering to its institutional Latin motto:

"*Spectemur agendo*"—"let us be judged by our deeds." Judging by this performance, its sound and delivery, this choir lives up to its motto splendidly.

As the *Kyrie* begins, the listener is rewarded with the choir's rich and unaffected altos (with just a hint of countertenor in their sound), the soaring beauty of the sopranos, colorful and heroic tenors, and a warm and accurate baritone/bass section. This listener wished for more bass presence in both choirs throughout the entire piece, yet the choir's decisive rhythms, vibrant diction and urgent lines bring the text to life wonderfully. They enthusiastically launch into joyful and expressive musical phrases of the *Gloria*, with the varied colors and textures of Martin's masterful text painting. The *Cum sancto Spiritu* is a true highlight.

Revealing the influence of J.S. Bach's motets and *Mass in B Minor* on the composer, it is no surprise that his intricate depiction of the *Credo*—as the centerpiece of the *Mass*—is delivered powerfully and compellingly throughout. The tenors shine brightly on *Crucifixus*

etiam pro nobis. Perhaps the most familiar movement to choral aficionados is the Sanctus, with its undulating lines and impressionistic harmonies. Once again, the choir delivers masterfully as it navigates the rhythmic complexity of the *Hosanna in excelsis*. For my taste, the tempo of the *Benedictus* seemed too quick, perhaps just needing a respite from the “*plus vite*” tempo of the previous section; a minor quibble, not enough to mar the beauty and excellence of the choir’s singing. The *Agnus Dei* (added to the work later, in 1926) brings the Mass to a serene close, and the darker, more mystical tone the choir chose was well-suited to the text, providing a resolute ending to this remarkable work. A tour-de-force of choral virtuosity.

The balance of the disk includes four additional selections: First, a rewarding rendering of Edward Bairstow’s rich setting of the anthem *I Sat Down Under His Shadow*, followed by a surprisingly fresh and emotive setting of William Blake’s poem *The Lamb* by WCC composition faculty member Joel Phillips. Then, out of a blue Swedish sky, Anders Öhrwall’s wordless setting of *Fåbodpsalm från Dalarna*—a folksong from the Dalarna region—features an exquisite violin solo by David Kim, concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the haunting beauty of soprano Sherzade Panthaki. The disk closes with a commissioned work—*Lux Surgit Aurea* by Bernat Vivancos, a piece which combines chant, lush, rich chords reminiscent of Sandström, with a few Pärt-like bell tones mixed in. The overall effect of this CD is remarkable, lovingly and masterfully sung by the Westminster Choir, and well worth adding to one’s collection.

Evolutionary Spirits

The Crossing

Donald Nally, conductor, artistic director
 Music by Bruce Babcock, Gregory W. Brown,
 Edie Hill, Christopher J. Hoh, Jonathan Sheffer,
 James Shrader
 Navona Records, June 2019

The Crossing is a professional chamber choir conducted by Donald Nally and dedicated to new music. Founded in 2007, many of its over seventy commissioned premieres address social, environmental, and political issues. With fifteen recordings and three Grammy awards in as many years, a soon-to-be-released sixteenth recording entitled *Evolutionary Spirits* opens with a compelling performance of Edie Hill’s *Poem for 2084*, an eco-friendly poem by Joan Wolf Prefontaine commissioned by The Dale Warland Singers in 1996. Here, The Crossing shows its Grammy-worthy vocal virtuosity in choosing a brighter British-sounding tone with cleanly etched non-vibrato, impeccable balances between sections and crisp

rhythmic articulations. The text itself is difficult to make out here, but the title of the album takes its cue from her line “*take heart, evolutionary spirits...*” The challenge of hearing the text is more from the texture of the composition than from the ensemble’s diction; they do their best, and the inclusion of the poem in the liner notes is welcome. The bleak, apocalyptic text ends hopefully, “...to hear these words of a dead poet: gather rosehips for tea, share bread with chokecherry jelly...” Edie Hill’s work is also represented later on the CD with her setting of *Marvellous Error*, the Spanish poetry of Antonio Machado, translated by Robert Bly. Originally composed for and premiered by the Minnesota-based Cantus and the St. Olaf Choir, this piece is sung radiantly and thrillingly. The first verse also evokes the water theme that flows through this disk: “Last night, as I was sleeping, I dreamt—marvellous error!—that a spring was breaking out in my heart. I said: Along which secret aqueduct, Oh water, are you coming to me, water of a new life that I have never drunk?” Hill’s writing is both inventive, colorful and economical. This piece clocks in at just barely over three minutes, but she sets the text with great skill and clarity. The Crossing is at its best here.

Gregory W. Brown is a composer who lives and works in Western Massachusetts. His charming *Entrai, pastores, entrai*, is a haunting piece that combines undulating ornamented chant-like phrases together into a modern Portuguese neo-Renaissance motet for Christmastide. Commissioned in 2008 by Manhattan Choral Ensemble, this appeared previously on a joint 2015 disk with The Crossing and New York Polyphony entitled *Moonstrung Air*. Two other pieces penned by Brown also appear on this disk. The first, *Vidi Aquam*—a work with piano in three movements, the text of which comes from a 16th-century treatise, in a translator’s English version. In the composer’s own words, the aim of this piece is to cause the listener to “...become aware of the natural world emerging through the fog of our daily lives...” The first movement, *To Stir Up Our Wits* opens with the *Vidi aquam* chant and then flows into music invoking recurring, active images of water. *Observing Nature*—the second movement, begins quite boldly and dramatically, reminiscent of an epic movie soundtrack. Its thick, dense texture is evocative, dominated by the piano accompaniment. *Asking of Nature* is the third, most discordant and declamatory of the movements, arriving at a final stretch of lilting *alleluias*—the first recognizable word in the piece up to that point. Including liner notes and texts and translations for these movements would have been helpful, since the texture of the piece makes it impossible to clearly hear the text. This leaves the listener in the aforementioned ‘fog’ without any clear declamation of the poetry. Water is also a theme for Brown’s second contribution to this disk with *Five Women Bathing in*

Moonlight which is described on the Narvona Records website as a piece which, “depicts an idealized rendering of a sea-side party scene by poet Richard Wilbur, evoking a dreamlike and timeless atmosphere with shifting harmonic centers, imitative polyphony, quasi-Baroque ornaments, and canonic structures.” The piece begins in an ‘oooh’ vowel deep sea of blue, followed by the five verses of the poem, here again mostly a vowel-driven performance with minimal consonants. This is a more compact and compelling piece, but one cannot help wishing the complete poetic “story” could be experienced, impossible without the text. One notes the 2014 record date for these pieces—clearly The Crossing’s diction has come a long way in the five years since! Perhaps the mics were positioned further away from the choir to achieve a better balance with the piano? To this listener, despite being performed well, these pieces are the only disappointment on this disk, if not simply due to the recording quality.

Another featured Christmas selection is James Shrader’s *Angels Sang With Mirth and Glee*, a setting of an English carol often better known as *When Christ Was Born of Mary Free*, dating back to the 15th century. Utilizing the contrasts of its macaronic texts, this is a fresh, delightful musical setting with fanfare-like sections, chords full of sweet dissonance juxtaposed with a series of undulating and Poulenc-inspired harmonies. Reading the beautiful text in the liner notes would have been welcome for this piece as well.

Four other pieces by three different composers complete the disk. Noted Los Angeles film composer Bruce Babcock’s a *cappella* piece *Be Still* is a fresh and colorful, cluster-filled setting of the text “*Be still and know that I am God*” from Psalm 46:10. Exquisitely sung, with Singers Unlimited-level accuracy and tonal balance, the words of the text could be heard clearly the entire

time; both refreshing and soothing to listen to. Christopher J. Hoh, a Washington, D.C.-based composer offers two pieces to complete this collection: *To Elliott*, a colorful, rhythmic and cluster chord-rich piece, written in homage of composer Elliott Carter, a setting of the composer’s own ‘take’ on Robert Herrick’s *Charm Me Asleep*, with the text that begins: “*Charm me awake... your music may me take on flights of fancy free, where, presto, I may see Infinity...*” Hoh’s other contribution is *My Mistress’ Eyes*, a setting of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130 (“*My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun; coral is far more red than her lips’ red;*”) while adding a few playful final lines of his own at the very end: “*Compare my mistress —My mistress’ cheeks, her breath that reeks, her wiry hair; by heaven above I think my love is rare.*” Enjoyed a chuckle at the very end of the disk!

One of the truest highlights of this disk is by the New York-based Jonathan Sheffer: *Y’did nefesh*, with the composer’s description: “a piyut,...a liturgical poem, written by R. Elazar Azkari in the 16th Century in Sfat, which was one of the five holy cities of Judaism. This exceedingly emotional work,...rich in longing and supplication.” Sheffer is another composer and conductor whose work spans the diverse worlds of classical, opera, dance, and film and television. Here, Sheffer has written a radiant, ebullient song of adoration to Adonai, a soaring text that is sung on the Jewish Sabbath. The Crossing sings it in Hebrew with all the joyful *chutzpah* and verve it deserves, once again revealing its substantial choral virtuosity in action.

To be sure, this is a richly varied choral disk unlike any other, all works by living and working composers. Full of remarkable music and poetry, and sung by The Crossing with its characteristic virtuosity, this is well worthy of consideration and one to add to the collection.

Timothy Newton, *Editor*
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