The Conductor's Preparatory Gestures: Techniques of Starting Effective Orchestra Performance.

By

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Abstracts

The success of the preparatory beat secures the psychological communication between the conductor and players. The conductor will accomplish this clear preparatory beat and downbeat by also breathing with the ensemble as well as indicating this with eye contact and/or a nod of the head. The conductor must execute the gesture in a synchronized fashion so there is no doubt about where the ictus is placed or what will be the conceived tempo of the music. To accomplish a precise attack at the beginning of a selection, section, or phrase, the conductor insists that the players breathe in time with the preparatory beat. When all players do this, the chances are excellent that good precision on the attack will result. The paper adopts Laban Movement Analysis Theory (LMA) led to developing an approach to conducting gestures that is the preparatory beats of the pieces selected. The theory to discover and navigate conductor's path towards the convergence of music and movement thinking is the essence of the art of conducting. Primary and secondary data were utilized to get reliable data. Various aspects of information were obtained through journals, books, e,t.c. Other method includes personal experience with the selected pieces. It is discovered that preparatory beats are always in exactly the same tempo and style of beat one. When the conductor's hand fall straight down to the plane for the ictus, the rebound follows the same imaginary line straight back up, depending upon the style of the music.

This study aims at

i. Stating the impact of conductor's gestures.
ii. Examining the techniques of beat pattern
iii. Showcasing the influence of preparatory gestures on orchestra

Purpose of Conducting

There are three distinct purposes in conducting:

- To present the metric course of the orchestra music.
- To indicate preparatory beat pattern for the orchestra pieces.
- To actually display beat time in standard simple metric patterns

Introduction

The musical significance of the preparatory beat connects with the idea of the essence and spirit of the music. The conductor discovers this essence and spirit of a given work or section so that the preparatory beat reflects these important musical qualities. The essence is the basic or fundamental nature of the work. The spirit is the vitality or driving force of the work. Unless the conductor has studied the score and discovered this essence and spirit, even the initial start of the piece will lack valid communication with the players, and then subsequently with the audience. Showing the essence and spirit of the music with the preparatory beat, when starting on beats other than beat one in the measure, the rule is that the preparatory beat always precedes the beat on which the music begins (beat of execution). Therefore, if the piece starts on beat three, the preparatory beat is beat two in the designated meter. In a few instances where the tempo is relatively fast, there might be reason to show more than one preparatory beat to ensure establishment of the tempo. In showing this initial preparatory beat, the motion must be clear and not anticipated with a slight motion before the preparatory beat. In such a situation, the players might erroneously try to play on the preparatory beat. The conductor shows the preparatory beat in the proper direction for the players to understand which beat is the beat of execution.

Statement of Problem

The most significant influence on the preparatory beat is the orchestra. What instruments enter, whether they enter alone or with others, and under what technical, dynamic, and musical circumstances they make their entrance. When

the prep attack is not reliable or is not executed properly, it becomes confusing and the beginning of the performance will be in jeopardy.

Conductor's Identity

Adeyera and kehinde (2012) define a conductor as "the director of a number of performers in a unified musical effort, by means of gestures, bodily motion and facial expression" (p. 64).The position of a conductor and the orchestra is so important that it affects the music performance. He or she is authority personified. The conductor interprets the score in a way that reflects the specific indications in that score, set the tempo, ensure correct entries by ensemble members, and shapes the phrasing where appropriate. Conductors communicate with their musicians primarily through hand gestures, usually with the aid of a baton, and may use other gestures or signals such as eye contact. Conducting gestures according to Schuller (1997), "are equivalent to the signalling motions used by conductors in orchestra ensembles" (p.5). The strength of the conductor's communication to shape gestures using a mental image of the patterns comes from the conductor's awareness, understanding, and total commitment to the orchestral composition. The conductor also knows each member of the orchestra and their capabilities. He or she holds performers together and make them translate the piece into a meaningful whole. Kinanee (2011) states that "a teacher (conductor) who knows so much about what to teach (music), and so little about the performers (musicians) he or she is to teach, is half prepared" (p. 13). The importance of this statement is that the in-depth knowledge of the members of the orchestra is as important as the music itself. With all these knowledge about who the conductor is, managing and controlling the orchestra requires strategies. After examining the score and digesting the score, the conductor can apply the external approaches which are: Posture, baton handling, conducting patterns, and general body movements that aid the conductor to achieve an effective performance presentation.

Hunsberger and Ernst (1989), acknowledged that "Conducting carries with it many responsibilities, particularly to the composer, the orchestra members, the audience, and the conductor's own artistic and personal integrity" (p. 1). As there can be no kid without a biological father, no orchestra can function properly without a leader, and that leader is the conductor. It is simple to grasp the human

voice, but in an orchestra, there are many instruments to understand in terms of quality, tone, balancing the instruments, and colour. It is a lot harder leading an orchestra than a choir as a result, understanding the orchestra's instrumentation is crucial for every conductor. Scherchen (1999), suggests "Practical study of instrumentation along the lines outlined by the Berlioz-Strauss book" (p. 5). Due to the wide range of abilities and information needed to be an effective conductor, they must have a firm grasp of the path leading to this competence. Adler (2012) also confirms "mastering the art of orchestration leads to a greater knowledge of the sensitivity, and how each made this amazing instrument serve its musical ideas most brilliantly" (p. 43).

The Conductor's Tools

The tools of the conductor include the right hand, the left hand, the face, the music stand and the optional baton.

The right hand is the primary tool of the conductor. It indicates meter, tempo, dynamics, location within the measure, and style. In other words, the right hand does everything. The jobs of the left hand are to give cues, reinforce information provided by the right hand, and turn the pages of the music. The face of the conductor is his or her secret weapon. The conductor's face can magnify the emotional content of the music. The conductor's face registers approval or disapproval with what's going on in the music.

The Conductor's Music Stand

Music stand is an elevated rack designed to hold music score in position of reading. It enables the conductor to read music while conducting. It is constructed in a way it can be lowered or raised to accommodate standing position of the conductor. Music stand is positioned in front of the conductor not so high as not to get in the way of the beat patterns but low. The conducting is done above the level of the music stand so as to enable the conductor turn through the pages of the score. So many conductors are not making use of music stand. Some think it not important or necessary. They rather prefer to hold their score in their hand while conducting.

Diagram of music stand below:



Source: https://www.google.com/search?q

The Baton

The baton is optional because a conductor can do with or without one. Choral groups are not accustomed to batons but instrumental groups seem to perform better with them. The baton simply makes the conductor's patterns easier to see from a distance. The baton is helpful for instrumentalists because their eyes have to take in more detail from the printed page than the singer and, consequently, rely on their peripheral vision to get information from the conductor.

The Orchestra

An orchestra is an ensemble of multiple musicians with many different Western instruments. The great thing about orchestra is that it could be in different sizes. What makes orchestra unique is that it can play virtually all kinds of music. An orchestra with a lot of musicians can be seen as a team, and as a team needs a couch, every orchestra needs a conductor as their couch. According to Kamien (1980), "the conductor as head of a group of musicians symbolizes responsibility and power" (p.75). The role of the conductor is to keep the musicians together and inspire them to interpret the music in a way that is both creative and technically proficient. The right hand of the conductor holds a baton to indicate time, pulse, and pace, while the left hand interprets the music and keeps the instruments in harmony so that the most crucial musical themes may come through. Colson,

(2012) affirms Conducting as "one of the most apparent representations of leadership in action," (p. 22). The conductor, who is the group's star performer, takes center stage by standing in front of the musicians.

Effectiveness

Cambridge Dictionary defines effectiveness as the ability to be successful and produce the intended results. Here, for the conductor to be effective, he or she has to be current with the development in his or her music field. According to Nwankpa (2013), "what draws people to any concert is not the repetition of the previous performance, but some unique features introduced here and there by the conductor" (p. 202). The conductor is mostly at the center of attraction. The conductor's style or way of delivery his or activities determines his success. Must have full knowledge of his or her performing ensemble. According to Amaele (2012), "for the conductor to be effective he / she is expected to always seek, and sustain the interest of his performers" (p. 20). Amaele continues that the conductor should be "well equipped as a resourceful, dedicated and committed man or woman, who will encourage the power of self-expression, enthusiasm, self-respect, self-confidence, self-discipline and other positive qualities among the members of his/her ensemble" (p. 25). The above discussion agrees, the conductor is a character builder and must live by example for his work to be easy and effective. Here the conductor is the authority that has all the power to carry the concert to climax. His or her impulse will control the musicians.

Theoretical framework

The researcher seeks to draw a link from Laban body movement analysis theory. Laban Body Movement theory is a method of interpreting human movement created by Hungarian dancer and choreography Rudolph Laban (1879 – 1958). Laban movement analysis is being used by conductors to help them understand how they move and identify their movement signature. This (LMA) is divided into four categories:

- Body – total body connectivity
- Effort – Energetic dynamics
- Shape – conducting gestures/patterns
- Space – conducting plane

Analysing Body Movements is the receiving of attention motivated by the applications that rely on the analysis of human motion. For instance, analysis of a conductor's performance, and recognizing emotions based on the movements of the conductors body. The movements of the body usually form a synchronized (coordinated) pattern when performing activities. Those patterns can be analysed and described in the framework of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA).

The body category describes physical characteristics of the conductor's body .movement while conducting. It is responsible for describing which body part is moving, for example, the hands can be gesturing in connection with the eye or head in agreement that will influence the audience by the response from the ensemble.

Effort here is describe as dynamics. Dynamics about movement with respect to inner intentions strengths. The difference between legato and staccato conducting gestures is the level of force that controls each movement strength. The flow contained in legato is less compare to the effort flow in staccato.

Shape describes the conductor's gestures that form patterns into meaningful movement which involves motion with connection to the environment, (space).

Methodology

A qualitative research strategy was used to provide a realistic image of the world of preparatory beat. According to Osuala (2013), this is "a sort of study that presents or reports material or data acquired as it is" (p. 197). To get reliable and valid data the paper used both primary and secondary data. Various aspects of information were obtained through journals, books, and sources. Other method includes personal experience.

The hierarchy of gestures shows that the greatest division of conducting gestures exists between time-beating gestures, almost always performed exclusively with the right hand, and expressive artistic gestures, many of which are performed with the left hand. Wittry, (2024) defines gesture "as the use of motion of the arms and body as a means of expression that emphasizes an idea, sentiment, emotion, or attitude" (p. 1). Artistic expressive gestures can be conveyed through the

movement of the right hand, left hand, or auxiliary indications, such as head movement, facial expression, eye direction, breathing and posture.

Preparatory Beat

The first piece of information the initial signal needed to start an ensemble is called the preparatory beat. The preparatory beat begins with the hand or hands in a stationary position directly in front of the body.



Plate 1: Source: the researcher

After an extremely small but intense downward push called the ictus, the hand, as though having received an imaginary electrical shock, moves upward in a pull-away motion. As this motion reaches the apex of the trajectory, it gradually exhausts itself as if pulled down by the force of gravity, and falls downward to its original point of departure.



Plate 2: the researcher

The ensemble enters at the end of the downward motion, at which point the beat simply stops. The beat's trajectory a rebound motion helps the musicians predict the exact time of their entrances. Wilson, (2017) asserts, that, "When executed properly, the complete trajectory, beginning with the initial ictus and ending with the return to the same point, contains all the information needed to initiate a unified entrance of the ensemble" (p. 10). Although any other spot can be equally effective if the ictus is properly delivered, the beat is clearest when the downward motion concludes in the vicinity in which the ictus originated. The strength of the ictus and the resulting speed of the upward motion predict the precise arrival of the forthcoming entrance. Once the ictus is given, its upward motion must be allowed to continue without any physical interference. It simply runs its course. Breathing is synchronized with the physical movement of the preparatory beat: inhalation as the ictus begins and exhalation as the beat concludes. The ictus itself initiates tension, with relaxation setting in at the completion of the preparatory beat.

Orchestra's Response to the Preparatory Beat

In showing the basic style with the preparatory beat and downbeat, the variation in speed and the tension (or relaxation) of the preparatory beat will show how these notes should be articulated stylistically. Good preparatory gestures are necessary to ensure a precise attack and the desired response from the ensemble. If the conductor and players have rehearsed together for a considerable length of

time, it may be possible to achieve the necessary precision in playing on the fractions of the beat with just one preparatory beat, therefore, the recommendation is for giving two preparatory beats, thereby showing the length of one full beat before having to subdivide the beat. According to Rudolph (1969), this can be accomplished in one of two ways:

(1) the preparatory beats will simply be the two preceding beats before the fraction of the beat begins, or (2) the left hand can flick downward to show the first of the two preparatory beats and the right hand will then execute the preparatory beat before the fraction of the beat begins.
(2) In both conducting procedures, one full beat is shown before the players must enter and subdivide the beat properly.

Conducting patterns indicate beats of music. Each beat can be broken down into three elements: the preparatory (or prep), the ictus, and the rebound. These are all identifiable elements of the pattern but, in reality, are all part of one beat and should be practiced in one motion.

Most of the music are written in one or more of these meters. The one pattern for simple meter is a simple downward stroke. Begin your prep slightly to the right of the imaginary line where the down stroke will occur and lift your hand up. Your prep should be in exactly the same tempo and style of beat one. The conductor's hand will then fall straight down to the plane for the ictus. The rebound will follow the same imaginary line straight back up. The two or duple pattern begins the same as one but after the hand taps the plane the rebound bounces to the right of the ictus. At this point the conductor's hand is ready to fall back in the direction of beat one. For some conductors the ictus of beat two is in the same spot as the ictus of beat one. The rebound of beat two is straight back up. If the two pattern is executed in legato style it looks like a backward letter "J." In staccato style it looks like a backward check mark.

To execute the three or triple pattern, beat one falls in the same place…always does, but the rebound now goes to the left. This is because the ictus of beat two falls on the plane to the right of beat one. The rebound of beat two is up and right so that the hand can come down and left for beat three.

The four pattern used in quadruple meters like 4/4 is the most commonly used pattern. I recommend that you master the four pattern first. Again, beat one taps the plane and the rebound bounces up and right (as it did for the duple pattern) but this time the hand will cross over the imaginary line drawn by beat one so that the ictus of beat two can land on the plane to the left of one. The rebound of beat two then bounces up and left so the hand can cross back (down and right) over the line and place the ictus of beat three on the plane to the right of one. Beat three rebounds up and right so that the ictus of beat four can land on or near the ictus of beat one. Rebound up…start over!

The following images are rough estimations of the basic shapes of the three most common patterns.

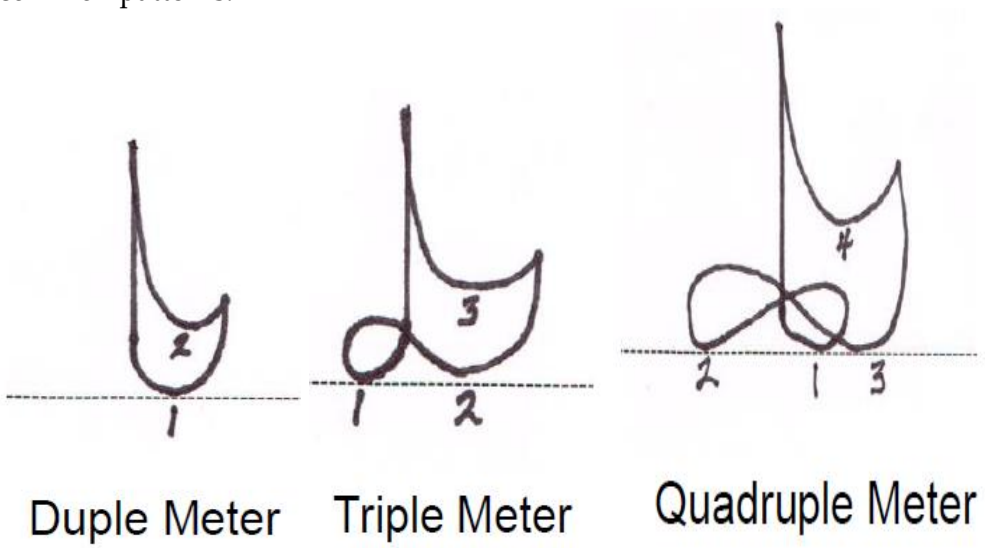
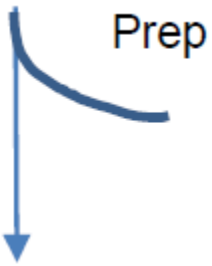


Figure 1

The Preparatory Beat

As stated earlier, the prep (or preparatory beat) is the first beat of a piece of music. The purpose of the prep is to get the music started, have a good idea of the tempo, volume, and style expected from the musicians, then translate that into a single motion that reflects those things. In addition, Wittry, (3014), states that, "the conductor considers upon which beat the music starts (p. 13). The prep always look like the beat in the conducting pattern that occurs immediately prior to the

start of the music. For example, if a piece starts on beat one, your prep will look like the last beat of the meter. Here are some specific examples.
Meter 4/4 If the music starts on beat 1 the prep is beat 4.



Meter 4/4 If the music starts on beat 4 the prep is beat 3.

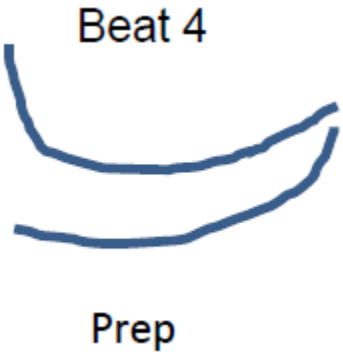


Figure 2

The following example illustrates how the preparatory beat can be shaped to meet the complexity and subtlety of the orchestration. The overture to Wagner's Rienzi demonstrates how the orchestration in three entrances with the same pitch, duration, and dynamic level nevertheless requires three different preparatory beats. The first entrance is orchestrated for solo trumpet. Because the trumpet enters alone in a comfortable range, little assistance is needed. Securing a precise attack from the two trumpets in the next entrance, however, requires a stronger and more assertive preparatory beat. The third entrance needs a less aggressive preparatory beat than the second because the combination of four trumpets more easily absorbs a slight imprecision

Wagner, Overture to Rienzi, bars 69–73
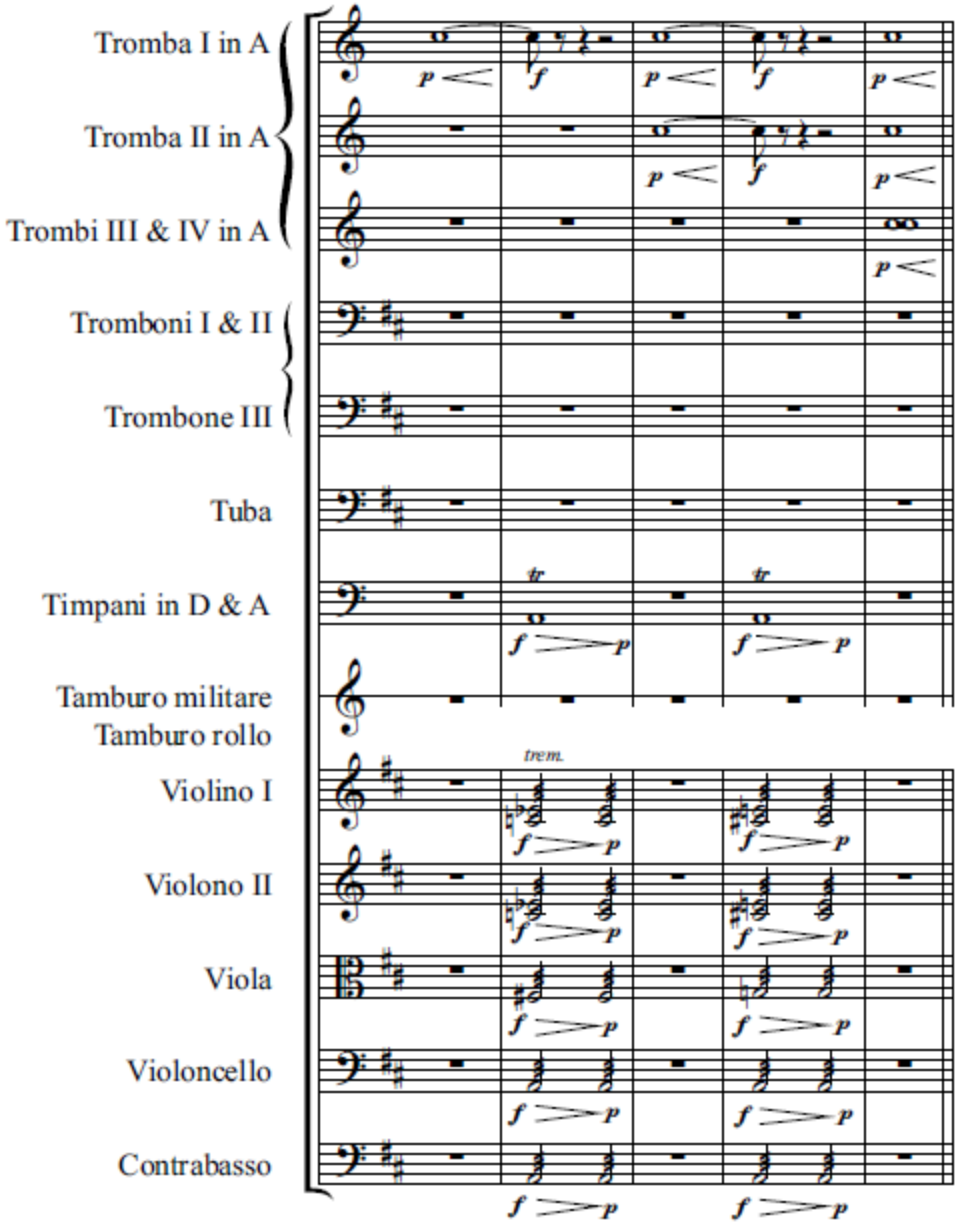


Figure 3

Each of the following examples requires a strong preparatory beat.

Beethoven, Egmont Overture, bar,1 (Sostenuto ma non troppo), and Haydyn, Symphony no 93, first movement, bars 1-2, (Adagio).

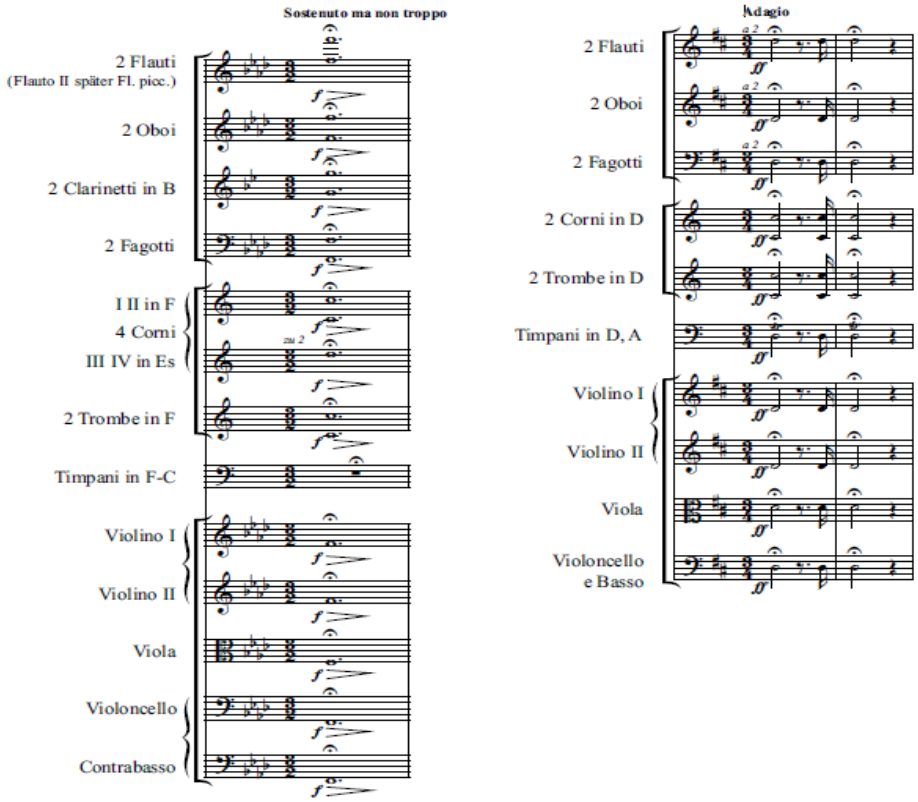


Figure 4

As a rule, the preparatory beat to count 1 of an irregular bar is of the same duration as the first rhythmic unit of the bar. In for example, the preparatory beat may be a quarter note or a dotted quarter note, depending on the rhythmic grouping of the bar.

Conclusion

The conductor's body is a very vital instrument used in interpreting musical ideas. The upper part of conductor's body is the real tool of the conductor in carrying out his duty. The eye, mouth, hands and head are the conductor's tool for interpretation The conductor uses eye contact, hand gestures, body language control and personality to provoke musical responses from an ensemble. Signaling and gesturing are the medium through which the conductor represents the time beating technique. The employment of a good time beating technique is highly

developed form of conducting. The preparatory beat is one of the most important elements of conducting. It is essential for starting the ensemble together. The prep beat is simply the breath and motion that happens before the sound begins. This beat sets the tempo for the piece, so it must be given in the exact same tempo or speed of the beats that follow it.

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