

# PROFESSIONALISM—ON AND OFF THE PODIUM

Presented by Paula Thornton, FMEA Clinic, January, 2007

Webster's dictionary defines professionalism as follows: "the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person". As band directors and music educators we have the responsibility to exhibit conduct of the highest ethical standard and educational quality. We touch the lives of our students on a daily basis, sometimes spending more time with them than their parents do. Through music, we aim to create extraordinary experiences which result in a positive impact on their lives. The qualities that characterize or mark our profession—commitment, passion, compassion, musicianship, etc.—all center around one fundamental quality: **integrity**. We are the models upon which our band programs are based. You see it over and over again. Bands and band students are a reflection of their directors.

Twelve years ago, while in my 17<sup>th</sup> year of band directing in Florida and my 1<sup>st</sup> year at Buchholz High School, I attended a clinic here at FMEA entitled "Conductor Stage/Podium Etiquette. It was presented by Dr. Bentley Shellahamer. Having attended previous presentations by him, I was certain that the clinic would be well-organized, informative, and professionally presented; however, I had no idea how much I would take away from his clinic. Since many of his words echo in my mind to this day every time I approach the podium or watch another conductor on stage, I knew that I needed to share his information, ideas, suggestions, and admonitions with you here today. So, I emailed Bentley and asked him if I could get a copy of his hand-out. He was in Europe at the time. The next time I saw him, he had a folder with him and gave it to me. It contained not only his hand-out, but his clinic outline and his speaking notes. Most of the "On the Podium" portion of today's clinic is courtesy of Dr. Shellahamer.

## ON THE PODIUM—CONDUCTOR STAGE / PODIUM ETIQUETTE

### I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Conducting, as we now practice it, is a relatively recent phenomenon, having developed over the past 150 years or so. *Time-beating*, however, has been around much longer, historically speaking. For many centuries, time-beating was used to keep organist, voices, and choirs together. From prints and other pictorial evidence, and from the writings of music theorists of the times, it can be learned that various methods of marking the beats included: (1) Visual time beats made with the hand, a finger, a stick or baton, a roll of paper, a cloth or handkerchief, or, in one case a handkerchief tied to the end of a stick; and, (2) Audible time beats made by stamping on the floor with the foot or with a stick, or striking other objects with various *beaters* (one case reported that the "*time beater*" hammered on an organ bench with a key).

Audible time-beating appears to have been freely tolerated during the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth centuries. In fact, in Paris it was common practice to control the performances of ballets and operas with audible time-beating. The story that Lulli died from the effects of a wound on his foot, accidentally inflicted with his "*baton*" while "*conducting*" may or may not be true; if true, it points to the use of a heavy stick being thumped heavily on the floor as the means of keeping time for the performers. Writings of music critics frequently included complaints about the distractions caused by the conductors beating implements on the floor. One such critic, a Baron Grimm, writing in 1753, dubbed the conductor at the Paris Opera a "*woodchopper*." Another commentator noted that choirmasters who mark time audibly with their feet are doing so only because they are more clever with their feet than with their heads.

*Although time-beating was a recognized means of keeping performers together during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it should be remembered that it was employed only for the rendering of Church and choral music, and not for purely orchestral music, nor for opera, except at Paris, where audible time-beating prevailed. The orchestral conductor, like the purely orchestral*

*concert, was as yet an unknown thing. Yet, during the course of the eighteenth century, the earlier forms of purely orchestral music – concerti, suites, and symphonies – were quickly developing and forming a class of instrumental music which began to seriously challenge the supremacy of the older vocal forms. A means of directing these orchestral works without any time-beating had in the meantime established itself, and consisted of a sort of dual control under the direction of a so called "conductor" who played on a keyboard instrument, and a violinist-leader who gave the tempo and kept the orchestra together by means of motions of his head and body while still playing the violin. Thus, secular music was controlled by the joint efforts of a "conductor" and a leader who played on their instruments, while sacred choral music was in the hands of organists or choirmasters who "beat" time with their hands. (Carse, pp. 91-92)*

The "conductor," sitting at a piano, or other keyboard, realized the figured bass line, kept a general "look out" over the performance, filled in thinly orchestrated spots, and picked up the slack when performers missed entrances or otherwise didn't play their parts. In general, he was an interactive artistic director/improviser/arranger during the performances.

As a time-giver the leader was more important and probably assumed more responsibility for the performance than the piano-conductor. He was seated higher than the rest of the players, and was supposed to act as a sort of link between the piano-conductor and the orchestra. It was the leader who had to start the orchestra playing, who had to keep them together by movements of his head, violin, or body, who had to guide them at changes of tempo and rallentandos, and who had to re-start them after pauses.

During the second half of the eighteenth century the violinist-leader grew in importance, while the piano-conductor became less essential. This was hastened by the gradual disappearance of the figured-bass parts in orchestral works.

The first quarter of the nineteenth century, the period of Beethoven, Schubert, and Weber, saw the birth of conducting as we now understand it. The conductor who stood up in front of the orchestra without any instrument, using only a small stick or a roll of paper in his hand with which he marked the beats, was actually a further growth of the violinist-leader...in short, the bow was exchanged for the baton. During this period it was quite common for the conductor to face the audience while conducting, to stand to the side of the orchestra and face diagonally across the stage, or even to stand in the middle of the orchestra and turn to various sections as the music dictated. It seems that great measures were taken to keep from having the conductor turn his back to the audience. It wasn't until the 1880's that conductors were encouraged to place themselves so that they could see all the players and the players could see the conductor's facial expressions. This, of course, required the conductor to stand facing the orchestra, centered in front.

Since that time, conducting has grown from what must have been little more than mechanical time-beating to a highly developed musical role. In addition to technical ability, experience, and sound musicianship, a conductor is now expected to show a personality which will color each work he/she conducts. Nowadays, a conductor may be sensational, or restrained and dignified, but a conductor must **not** be dull and uninteresting.

## II. COMMON PRACTICE

Most of what we have come to accept as proper behaviors in performance settings have developed over a period of many years through the adoption and adaptation of practices which found common agreement among conductors, musicians, and audiences. These conventions are more a set of "common practices" than they are rules of etiquette. Our, that is band conductors, common practices have been strongly influenced by two sources: (1) orchestral performance practice, and (2) military code of conduct. How we, as conductors, behave on stage at a public performance DOES matter. The image we project to both the audience and the band plays an important part in the overall effect of the concert. It is for these reasons that it is beneficial for us to periodically review these common practices as a profession.

### III. THE BASICS

1. Backstage, prior to first entrance onto stage: Take a few moments to relax and collect your thoughts about the first piece. Take a few slow, deep, breaths before making your entrance.
2. Walk onto the stage with confidence and authority. Establish a professional, yet friendly, connection with the audience. Smile when you make your bow, stage front.
3. If the concert is very formal, it would be appropriate to have the concertmaster make a solo stage entrance just before tuning occurs.
4. Whether band rises when the conductor enters the stage is a decision to be made ahead of time, and it should be practiced with the band. There are three options:
  - a) Band remains seated; conductor bows as acknowledgement of the applause, on behalf of the entire ensemble.
  - b) Band rises on cue from the concertmaster as conductor enters the stage and as applause begins.
  - c) Band remains seated until the conductor cues them to rise and "share" the applause.  
[Note: Sometimes this is done when the conductor has taken his/her initial bow and the applause continues to be hearty.]
5. If the band rises during the initial entrance of the conductor, a predetermined cue should be arranged to indicate when the band should be seated. For example:
  - a) Watch the concertmaster; sit when he/she sits
  - b) Conductor turns to the group before ascending podium and nods
6. Bow before stepping onto the podium. The act of ascending the podium is a command for attention, both for the audience and musicians.
7. Establish eye contact with the entire band; smile or indicate in some other way that you have confidence in them as performers.
8. Focus your thoughts on the opening measures of the piece you are about to play. DO NOT raise your baton until you are ready to begin...YOU are in control, not the clock.
9. Be patient if the audience is restless and not settled-in. Don't start until it is quiet. Cues for audience to be quiet are: (a) remain stationary in a ready position, (b) raise left hand, palm extended upward facing the band, (c) step off the podium and remain facing the band.
10. ALWAYS acknowledge applause. It is rude to ignore applause.
11. Bowing is the commonly accepted way to acknowledge applause.
  - a) Always wait for applause before bowing !!
  - b) Bow should be unhurried; movement is from the waist—no lower—with a slight inclination of the head.
  - c) Avoid overly dramatic gestures when bowing.
  - d) Avoid "mouthing" thank you's to the audience—simply smile.
  - e) If you wish to "pass the applause on" to the band, make an unhurried sweeping motion with one hand toward the band, turning slightly toward the band as you make the sweep.
  - f) Instruct the band members to wait until the applause has stopped to move music and make seating adjustments for the next piece.
12. Asking the full band to stand after prolonged applause is a courteous act on your part. You are normally accepting applause on their behalf, but in certain cases it is appropriate for the band to receive the applause directly. (After all, it was THEIR performance which earned the applause, not yours!) However, asking the band to stand should be kept to a minimum—probably only once or twice on a concert.
13. When conductor motions for the band to rise, they should stand with the concert master (i.e. on his/her cue), face the audience, and smile. When the conductor leaves the stage they watch the concertmaster for the cue as to when to sit down. If the conductor does not leave the stage, use same cue for band to sit as in #5 above.
14. It is appropriate to recognize players within the ensemble who have extended solos. Always let the players know ahead of time that you may ask them to stand and receive applause (face audience) at the end of the piece, and try to practice the routine for doing this during one of the final rehearsals. If there are more than one or two soloists it is a good idea to affix a little note to the last page of your score reminding yourself who to have stand. Teach your players to present a professional, poised appearance when they are recognized, regardless of how they feel their solos went.

15. At the end of the concert, after acknowledging the applause, leave the stage; however, do not delay your re-entrance. Return almost immediately. Modesty at this point is not good showmanship! Make your curtain call bow gracious and if the level of applause warrants, ask the band to stand to share directly in the applause. Do not prolong your stay on stage. If a second curtain call is indicated by continued applause, the bow should be even less prolonged. Do not over-stay your welcome. It is lonely on stage once the applause has stopped!!
16. The conductor's handshake with the concertmaster at the end of the concert is his/her formal thank you to the entire membership of the band. It should not be interpreted as a "pat on the back" for the concertmaster alone.
17. A soloist precedes the conductor going on and off the stage. If the conductor is a woman, a male soloist may step aside for her to precede him going offstage; or he may precede her to the edge of the stage exit and then step aside and let her exit first; but this applies only to exits! A soloist always precedes a conductor when entering the stage.
18. At the end of a solo, the soloist thanks the conductor by shaking hands. The soloist, not the conductor, makes the first move toward the handshake. This prevents embarrassing occasions when a soloist is not happy with the band's accompaniment and turns to leave, leaving the conductor with outreached hand.
19. The soloist may also shake hands with the concertmaster if he/she so desires. But the soloist should NEVER motion for the band to stand. The soloist has no authority over the band. They should obey only the conductor! However, the soloist can ask the conductor to have the band stand.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### A. Between selections - *What To Do?*

Band directors are often unsure about what to do between selections. It is often important to give the band a few moments to prepare for the next selection. This is especially true for the percussionists. Options include:

- 1) If pause is to be short, stand to stage right of podium, facing the band.
- 2) If more time is needed, stand stage right, near exit, but still on stage and face diagonally across to opposite side of the house. As soon as band is ready, make a confident approach to the podium and continue with the concert.
- 3) If stage needs to be re-set, or if a significant number of personnel need to change positions on stage, the conductor should leave the stage.
- 4) An announcer with a script may present brief program notes for each piece during which time it is appropriate for the conductor to stand beside the podium looking attentively at the announcer while necessary transitions are made in the ensemble.

### B. Tuning between selections?

Tuning between selections may be necessary if

- 1) Conductor notices recurring intonation problems with an individual or section
- (2) Personnel has changed between selections (i.e. new or additional personnel has entered stage)
- (3) A soloist enters stage. In each of these cases the tuning should be handled as efficiently as possible, with as little "conducting" as possible. Except in the very youngest of bands, it is not appropriate for the conductor to tune the timpani for the players.

### C. To Talk or Not to Talk!

There are occasions when it is appropriate for the conductor to talk to the audience. These often provide the most uncomfortable moments in the concert, for both the conductor and the audience! But with careful preparation they need not be too taxing.

### *When are comments to the audience appropriate?*

- (1) Announcing titles, composers, and movements for selections when printed programs are not available
- (2) Providing useful background information about the piece to be played if it will help the audience to better appreciate it. Keep spoken program notes brief.
- (3) Announcing corrections, changes, or additions to the printed program
- (4) Introducing guest conductor or soloist

### *What to avoid*

- (1) Making excuses for the performance—before or after
- (2) Unnecessary verbiage (e.g. chattering, redundancy, attempts at humor)
- (3) Off-the-cuff remarks — especially about individuals in the band
- (4) Business type announcements — Save these for intermission or after the concert, or better yet, print them on an insert for the program.

### *Finally*

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Not everyone is skilled at public speaking. Those of us who are not, should utilize other methods for accomplishing the same ends. Some suggestions include the following:

- (1) Write a script for the concert and either present it yourself or have someone who is skilled at public speaking present it for you.
- (2) If you know an especially talented public speaker, whom you trust, you can provide an outline of the things you want to say, and let him/her write and present the script.
- (3) For formal concerts, plan ahead, and prepare a printed program that includes all the necessary information the audience needs, and then don't talk at all!

*Remember: The audience is there to hear the band play. If you must talk, make it brief.*

### D. Non-verbal Communication

- (1) Conductor to Band—Even though you may be nervous and apprehensive about the performance, try to be positive in your non-verbal mannerisms. Conveying an attitude of confidence and support for the students reassures them and can put them in a frame of mind that will allow them to perform better. Try to remember that they are probably just as nervous as you are! A smile does wondrous things for students who are looking to you for support and leadership. Try to not show, through your non-verbal expressions, disappointments in a player's or the ensemble's performance while on stage. Save your critiques for the class room! If things don't go well, take command by showing a professional demeanor. But above all else, show encouragement and confidence through your facial expressions and body language.
- (2) Conductor to Audience—It is important for the conductor to strike a balance between confidence and warmth with the audience. No matter how you feel personally, you must provide the professional "*front*" for the performance. If you are cold and unresponsive to the audience, they will perceive you as being arrogant, moody, unhappy, or just plain mean! If you are too informal, they will perceive you as being immature, flippant, unprofessional, or just plain silly! Either of these extremes will distract from the overall effect of the performance and cause the audience to focus on you, rather than the performance and the music.
- (3) Practice!—If you are not comfortable in front of audiences it may be because you are inadvertently projecting conflicting non-verbal cues. Practice your

entrance onto the stage. Have someone tape you at a concert and analyze the tape for all non-verbal behaviors you are using. When the audience applauds, what are you giving back to them in the way of facial expressions, body language, etc.?

## E. Dress

As with other forms of non-verbal communication, what we wear sends a message to those around us. In a concert setting, it is important that we do everything within our means to insure that the focus is on the students and the music they are making. The following are generally accepted as appropriate guidelines for conductors' dress:

- (1) For formal concerts (i.e. evening concerts, festivals, evaluations, assessments, tours, convention/conference concerts, clinics, formal ceremonies, etc.)  
Men: tuxedo, black suit, or uniform\*  
Women: black suit or dress, or uniform\*
- (2) For semi-formal concerts (i.e. afternoon concerts, outdoor concerts, assembly concerts, community service performances, etc.)  
Men: dark business suit, or uniform\*  
Women: business dress or suit, or uniform\*

*\*Uniform= conductor may wear uniform if entire band is in a "traditional" band uniform*

## CAUTIONS:

- (1) Avoid flashy, unconventional, or trendy apparel; you are not there to make a **"fashion statement"!!**
- (2) If not wearing black, stay away from colors that do not match what the band is wearing. A royal blue blazer with brown trousers and an orange tie doesn't look good with a band wearing green uniforms!
- (3) Women should pay particular attention to the length and style of the skirt portion of their dresses or suits.
- (4) Students do notice what you wear. If you dress "up" to a highly professional level, they will likely respond with a more serious attitude.
- (5) Tails (long tuxedo) should be reserved for only the most formal of concerts, and then, should only be worn if the entire band is in black formal wear.

## F. Stage etiquette at Concert MPA (Music Performance Assessment)

Although most of the conventional concert practices should be observed in evaluative concert settings, there are a few special considerations which should be mentioned:

- (1) Whenever possible, the conductor should assign the task of setting the stage to a set up crew.
- (2) Tuning on the festival stage should be handled in an efficient and professional manner. If possible, the responsibility for tuning should rest with the concertmaster and students.
- (3) At the conclusion of the tuning routine, the conductor should stand stage right, facing the audience, and cue the announcer when the band is ready.
- (4) At the conclusion of the introduction, the conductor should begin the performance and pace the concert according to the needs of the ensemble. According to FBA procedures it is no longer necessary to establish eye contact with the head adjudicator, and wait for the adjudicator's signal to begin.

- (5) Between selections, the conductor may face the band and make brief comments which might help the students relax, or to correct minor problems, but he/she should make sure that the performance moves along seamlessly.
- (6) Tuning between selections, if necessary, should be done as on the regular concert stage (see IV.B. above).
- (7) Even if the audience is very sparse, you should acknowledge their applause in the same gracious manner as you would if the audience were full. The only difference you may wish to make is to forego asking the band to stand after the final selection.
- (8) Avoid "disappearing" between selections for anything other than just a few seconds (e.g. stepping offstage long enough to wipe your brow, or your glasses). Avoid going back into the percussion section and tuning things!

## G. Miscellaneous

### (1) Scores on the floor?

If you are performing a full length concert involving many scores, it may be prudent to leave the second half's scores back stage. Switch the scores at intermission. Another option is to have your concertmaster or first chair flutist keep the second half's scores under his/her chair and switch them for you at intermission. If several of your scores are oversized, a second conductor's stand may be needed. Avoid dropping scores you've performed to the floor between numbers.

### (2) Intermission or not?

Generally, an intermission is needed only if a concert is longer than 40-45 minutes, including announcements. An intermission allows the performers to rest their embouchures and to prepare for the second half of the concert. It also allows the audience to relax from the intense concentration needed to "stay with" a musical performance. The decision as to whether there should be an intermission or not should be based on the needs of the performers and the audience, rather than strictly how long the concert is. There are certainly times when an intermission is not needed, as it tends to break the flow and momentum of the performance. After deciding on the proper order of the pieces for the concert, the conductor should carefully time each piece, add up the total, consider the physical demands on the players, consider the demands on the audience, and then decide if an intermission is appropriate. If several ensembles are playing on the same concert, the time needed to change ensembles should be sufficient for audience purposes.

### (3) Recognize composers in the audience if you have just performed his/her piece.

## CONCLUSION

Hopefully this segment of the session has reminded us all that our demeanor, our dress, our non-verbal communication, and our leadership DO matter. We owe it to our students to practice stage procedures so that we are allowing the audience to focus their full attention on the music being performed.

## **OFF THE PODIUM—PROFESSIONALISM**

Bentley Shellahamer's willingness to share his knowledge and experience with us today through his clinic notes is a wonderful example of the first component of professionalism OFF THE PODIUM.

### 1. COLLEGIALITY

We are all in this profession together. Running a band program is like being CEO of a small company or being an administrator. We have so much to do and so little time in which to do

it, the job sometimes seems overwhelming. If we are really good at some aspect or facet of the job, we should share our expertise with our colleagues. A very young band director recently shared with me that he had tried to ask a successful, experienced director for advice. The young director came away from the conversation feeling that the experienced director did not want to share his “secrets”. I actually recall have that same sort of experience as a young director. It was certainly not very encouraging. We have to be willing to ask for help when we need it, and willing to share our knowledge and skills when asked.

## 2. MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Join and actively participate. Volunteer to serve on committees. Accept a leadership position if asked to serve.

## 3. ATTENDANCE AT PROFESSIONAL EVENTS

- a. District meetings and inservice offerings
- b. State clinics and conferences
- c. National clinics and conferences (MENC, NBA, etc.)
- d. International clinics and conferences (The Midwest Clinic, WASBE, etc.)
- e. Conducting symposia
- f. Summer institutes

## 4. PERSONAL PERFORMANCE (community band, adult band, professional performance)

## 5. ATTENDANCE AT CONCERTS—Continue to grow.

## 6. TEACHING AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE TO YOUR STUDENTS

- a. Entering/exiting the auditorium—when and how
- b. How to sit quietly and attentively with good posture (not slouching down in seat)
- c. When and how to applaud appropriately
  - i. Enthusiasm
  - ii. Sincerity
  - iii. Senza (without) whistles, “whoops”, or “hollers”
- d. No iPods, cell phones, books, etc.
- e. No food, gum, or drinks
- f. Listen and learn
  - i. Be polite.
  - ii. Be respectful.
  - iii. Demonstrate support of others.
  - iv. Appreciate the advantages you might have over other programs.
  - v. Appreciate (don’t be jealous of) the bands that are great. Try to figure out why they sound so good and how you might emulate them.
  - vi. You be the judge (fill out adjudication sheets on several bands).
- g. Prepare your students for success and for set-backs. Discuss in advance appropriate and inappropriate reactions. Set goals such as “presenting our best possible performance”, as opposed to “Straight Superior Ratings”.

## 7. TEACHING AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE TO PARENTS

- a. All of the above PLUS
- b. Remind them that a concert is not an athletic contest or a marching band event. There will be parents in your program who have never attended a formal concert, but have seen plenty of sporting events. Teach them to proudly represent your program with class and proper concert etiquette.



- c. Take the opportunity at your home concerts to musically educate your audience. You can teach them to appreciate music with which they may not be familiar. Prepare them for new or different sounds. Cultivate an appreciation for the fact that not all music is programmatic. Much of the “great” music—“Art Music”—exists for itself.

### **BACK ON THE PODIUM—CONDUCTOR ETIQUETTE FAUX PAS**

- Forgetting to bow
- Bowing awkwardly
- Backing away from podium between selections
- Arrogant appearance (It’s all about ME!)
- Insecure appearance (lack of confidence)
- Not acknowledging applause (back to audience)
- Condescending to audience
- Talking too much or speaking when unprepared to do so
- Scowling at ensemble or at individual performers (display of dissatisfaction)
- Glaring at audience (crying baby, cell phone going off, etc.)
- Gesturing or shaking head disapprovingly when audience applauds at inappropriate times

We all must make a conscious effort to avoid these and other Faux Pas of Podium etiquette while working to display a confident, competent, pleasant image as a conductor. The best way to evaluate ourselves for improvement is to listen to our friends and colleagues who are willing to be honest with us and/or to record ourselves in concert settings and then to discipline ourselves to watch the video—as painful or embarrassing as that may be. Additionally, we must set and communicate high expectations for our students in the areas of stage and audience etiquette. Remember that we are the models upon which our band programs are based. Bands and band students are a reflection of their directors.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have, or hear your comments. I do have copies of my complete remarks available if you would like them. Thank you very much.

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