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Fundamentals of Conducting

Towards Center

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People often use the term “center” when discussing music and conducting. But what exactly does that mean? Is a person’s “center” physical, emotional, spiritual? I believe all musicians must ask themselves: what is my center? In *The Musician’s Soul*, Center is defined as: “The total integration of life and soul inner being an outer being becoming one.” (Jordan 10) This all-encompassing aspect of music is essential to being an honest and open artist.

I believe the spiritual aspects of Center to be much more complicated and not as easily reached. Anyone can achieve physical alignment by simply being aware, but achieving spiritual center is significantly more involved. A vast majority of musicians skip this essential step to honest artistry. To quote *The Musician’s Soul*, “A person's commitment to life, his awareness to the world around him, and his understanding of the beauty of the world and his own wife are the foundation of a musician’s center.” (Jordan 10) Also: “What is important is to understand that you are Center is defined by you. That is, life revolves around you, you don't revolve and adjust according to life's pressures... Your own awareness of yourself to find you, and consequently the things that comprise Center... All function concurrently in your life, with your being at the center of things.” (Jordan 40) For me, center is the spiritual connection from the heart to the music. Physical Center is much easier. This is the position where your singers are most welcome to sing. Physically, this means your feet are shoulder width apart, your arms are open and not closed off,

and your mouth is open (open mouth means an open heart). This can all be achieved naturally, and if bad habits creep in, adjustments must be made.

How does one achieve center? Both physically and spiritually, it starts with awareness.

Awareness to one's self, one's body, and, most importantly, one's soul. "Center is the place by which you stay both connected to the ground and the earth, and the world around you... Most importantly, one's Center is the place from which human love, care, humbleness, selflessness, and giving flow." (Jordan 51)

The reason I say this is harder for some people is because it can be scary to be centered. Being centered requires honesty and vulnerability. "This total state of awareness is painful. Many of us are not aware for that very reason and subsequently have no perception of our own Center. We avoid the pain of Our Lives. We detach from others when we need to give more, not less, of ourselves. (Jordan 51)

As I have mentioned in my previous papers, Artists are complicated people. In turn, center is a complicated subject. Awareness is not the end all be all solution; being aware and making adjustments are the keys to finding center.

A person who really understood this concept was MC Richards. She wrote the book *Centering: in Pottery, Poetry and the Person*. She also worked on the faculty as a poetry and pottery professor at the prestigious and pretty-much forgotten Black Mountain College. This school was dedicated to making artists grow into the best people they could be. Josef and Anni Albers, Ruth Asawa, Walter Gropius, Ray Johnson, Robert Motherwell, Dorothea Rockburne, Cy Twombly, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, Franz Kline, Willem and Elaine de Kooning and Allen Ginsberg, and many other important artists attended this institution. At the school students and faculty ate together, lived together, and

worked together to learn. Students graduated when they felt they were ready and it was free to attend. The focus was on the art and nothing else.

When the conductor is centered the choir is more connected, more in-tune and more authentic. The conductor's job is to welcome the choir to *evoke sound*. This welcoming can only be achieved when the mind the body and the spirit are all connected and centered. We have the gift to create wonderful authentic and soul restoring art. To do this authentically can be scary though. If achieved, the rewards however are unparallel with anything else. How blessed we are.