

Julie Dzikowski

Dr. Christopher Kiver

Music 266

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Final Conducting Self-Review

Watching back my very first conducting video, “La Mourisque”, genuinely shocked me! Although I was aware that I had been making improvements in my conducting throughout the semester, I had no idea just how far I had come in my ability to show musical nuance through my gestures. Yay! In watching the first video, I immediately cringed at my sharp rebounds and excessive use of elbow hinge. My face shows very limited expression, and it’s obvious that I’m thinking hard about my movements instead of being engrossed in the music that is actively happening. Understandable. Comparatively, my final conducting of “Horkstow Grange” demonstrates growth in my appropriate use of rebound size, intentional eye contact, and dynamic contrast. By hinging mainly from shoulders instead of my elbows and showing virtually no rebound, my legato sections seem to float through the air. Yes! Great to see. Another large part of this improvement comes from my steady movement speed, especially in my upwards and outwards motions. In “La Mourisque”, I tended to shoot my hands up in-between beats, which contributed to the visual instability of the pattern. Finally, I improved the most in my ability to simply exist in the present moment while conducting. Interesting. I used to plan every facial expression, gesture, and adjustment, which of course negates the idea of reacting to the present ensemble. Again, understandable, and not a bad idea at this stage of your development. That said, I think we mentioned in class that we have to be both proactive (that’s the pre-planning from score study – preplanned moves that you think will get what you want, but then we have to be reactive – responding to what we hear in the moment. You also remind me as a teenager I

had great trumpet teachers who used to really mark up my scores with lots of expression markings, dynamics etc, but at some point they wrote less. I guess because I realized, oh, when I had that kind of figure in another piece I was meant to <. All this is to say that at some point we develop our musical instincts to a point where we don't have to think about it as much and as conductors can focus more on what we are hearing and shaping the musicians in front of us. For my conducting of "Horkstow Grange", I was totally absorbed into the music. It felt exhilarating to be a part of the sound, and I remember just being filled with so much joy as I truly felt connected to the ensemble. Love it!

Of course, this was only a few months of conducting practice, and there are still many areas in which I can improve. In watching back my final recording of "Horkstow Grange", I noticed that I glanced down at the music quite often. Although this didn't seem to break my connection with the ensemble, it made it harder for me to stay in the present moment. I checked the music more for security than actual necessity, because I was worried about messing up the changing beat pattern—but in all honesty, I might have conducted better if I had no music in front of me at all. Again, understandable – exam and all that. In addition, I will continue to work on my left hand independence. Make sure you download the Left Hand reading I put in "Files" before you lose access to the course on Canvas. Let me know if you can't download and I will send to you. I used my left hand a few times for dynamics or articulation, but it always quickly reverted back to mirroring the right hand. This is a start! I also still hold some tension in the fingers of my left hand, and tend to press my middle three fingers together while my thumb sticks out. Though better in the Final. Note that with physical movements we think we have kicked a habit, but they lurk close to the surface, so keep an eye on this in 366. Continued mirror practice will improve my ability to demonstrate music nuance through my left hand without

tripping up the pattern in my baton. No substitute for mirror/video practice. Finally, although I physically reacted to the ensemble's music in the moment, there are still some old habits that I should be consciously thinking about while conducting. For example, I tend to tuck my chin down instead of lifting up my head, Good catch – I wrote that in your assessment...I think...and my arm speed still varies when I widen my gestures.

Before taking this course, my only conducting experience was in marching band (which became apparent in my sharp, elbowy movements at the beginning of the semester). I had never had to break down an orchestral/choral piece down to its bare structure and intentionally create my own interpretation for its every musical direction. Of course, I had analyzed other pieces of music before, but I very rarely asked myself *why* THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IN ALL THAT WE DO!!!! the composer chose to put that chord here, or give this melody to that instrument, or adjust the tempo at this specific measure. During this course, I've developed a newfound appreciation for the intentionality of every note I perform. Great! As a musician, I've been able to transfer many of my conducting skills to other areas of my life. For example, I find myself breathing more deeply before playing my first note (which I didn't *have* to do before as a violinist!), physically communicating non-verbally with my ensemble members, and ensuring that every note I play is *meaningful*. Again, love it. I was a little surprised to read this in that one of the most intimate forms of music making I have experienced is in string quartets (did I tell you I played Viola?) and vividly remember eye contact, facial expression and breathing as necessary things to enhance the cohesion of the group. It seems like it would be obvious, but after my conducting experience, I find myself paying attention to every little detail that the composer chose to include on the page. I now approach music with a heightened awareness of articulation

markings, dynamics, and tempo changes, realizing how each detail contributes to the overall expression and emotion that the composer intended to leave for the listener.

Thank you for this, Julie. You have done very well this semester and I have appreciated your desire to improve and your ability to take on board things we talked about in one class and apply them to the next. It has been a pleasure to teach you.

As you move forward, as a future music educator I urge you to continue to think about depth of learning and how you can create compelling and profound musical experiences for your students. Music Education seems to forget about the importance of working on compelling repertoire that is taught in an engaging and innovative way. It's not about how many of your students went to All-State, or how many Superiors you received at adjudication – that is NOT why we “do” music. Maybe those have some importance, but they are SECONDARY.

Finally, I can't stress to you enough how important high expectations are. It's unusual for people to not want to meet expectations. Have them for yourself and for your students.

It's been a pleasure and you have done very well. Thank you for being a diligent student.

Final Practical Exam grade: A