

**The “Available” Conductor: Techniques for Expressive Communication**  
**Michael Haithcock, Director of Bands, University of Michigan**

**PRODUCT: Physical availability to deliver expressive intent**

“Creativity is found where the search for a new and better ordering of life exists.”

*Linda A. Firestone, creative philosopher*

“For something to be truly creative, it must have an equal balance between the objective (craft) and subjective (substance).”

*Rollo May, psychologist, philosopher, and author*

The “available” conductor enlightens the members of his/her ensemble through a physical presentation of what is to be heard rather than what is only seen in musical notation. This enlightenment, often called interpretation, adds a subjective dimension of compelling leadership beyond the objective information necessary to navigate correctness.

“We are each born creative, then we forget our purpose, our mission. We believe our doubts and fears, and slowly we stop being creative as though it were a separate thing.”

*SARK, contemporary philosopher*

**PRIORITY: Hear, Move, Respond**

**HEAR: Prepare the mind.** Know what you expect to hear by developing a clear aural image through deep and detailed score preparation. Conducting is the gestural presentation of aural expectation based on this image. All movements should have the intention of eliciting a specific sound.

**MOVE: Train the body to be fluid instead of fixed.** The body must be flexible and free of tension. Be physically available to vary the expressive elements of speed, space, and weight to outline the desired musical shape. The available conductor utilizes these variables to illuminate musical expectation through the intention of each gesture rather than limiting motion in the hopes of minimizing mistakes. The creative challenge for the conductor at all levels of music making is to create a cycle of stimulus and response through gestures that provide insight and inspiration through a commonly understood but unspoken language.

“I can usually tell if a performer is ‘behaving’ to the music or ‘moving.’”

*Anne Halprin, improvisational dancer*

“We respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and in accordance with an elaborate secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all.”

*Edward Sapir, American anthropologist-linguist*

**PROCESS: (Re)Discovering Natural and Fluid Movement**

Gestures emerge from aural expectation (what one expects to hear rather than what is seen on the page) and should be delivered with intention (what one feels is necessary to gain the required response). In order to be “available” to be expressive, the conductor must train the body to be available in the moment.

*Move naturally*

- Movement is psychophysical process, the body naturally moves with purpose
- Movement should be free of artificial tension and/or habits
- Work to remove redundant patterns of movements that lack specific intention
- Focus on the quality of motion rather than the quantity of motion
- Feel your spine move and note the quality of your breathing

*Characteristics of natural movement*

- Body: All joints available to move and to balance/counterbalance
- Space: The “kinesphere” or the whole space available through a free range of motion and how that range of motion meets the space in the “work area” (the room).
- Shape: Contour/contrast. All movement has shape qualities (speed, space, weight create a feeling of rising or sinking for example). All movement needs shape flow support (how the whole body supports the intention)
- Effort: More is not necessarily good as quality movement theory means only move what is necessary to achieve the goal

*Learn how your body is designed to work naturally*

- Establish a fluid and balancing posture: touch the floor exercise
- Establish the height of the plane: touch your belly button exercise
- Establish the position of the elbows: perch exercise
- Develop and understanding of how to use the delivery system naturally  
Wrist, elbow, and shoulder are not hinges, but ball and joint rotation devices  
Learn to feel their rotation and not “fire” to open or closed

“Blink!” perceptions of fixed or fluid. Analyze by identifying the characteristics below most evident in your conducting.

<b><u>Fixed</u></b>	<b><u>Fluid</u></b>	<b><u>Fixed</u></b>	<b><u>Fluid</u></b>
Control	Contour	Balanced	Balancing
Patterns	Possibilities	“How I conduct”	“What I conduct”
Mirroring	Momentum	“Start the ensemble”	“Start the music”
Pointing	Preparing	“Look like the music”	“Showing change”
Looking	Listening	Giving	Receiving (Taking in)
Time	Timbre	Correct	Beautiful
Attack	Articulation	Together	Stylistic Sophistication