

abcd: Gestures speak volumes for the silent musician

York, Saturday 21st October, 3.45pm

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Sound requires movement, but what should that movement look like and how do we show this through our gestures and conventional beat patterns? How can we initiate and invite the vocal sounds we desire through the silent movements we make? I will touch on a variety of approaches that will hopefully inspire you to think more broadly about how to teach and lead singing groups, both conventionally and unconventionally!

Content:

Teaching gestures for efficient learning (Kodaly, Dalcroze, Rhythmic conducting approaches)

Effective leadership skills techniques to bring choral music to life

Gesture

Oxford English Dictionary definition: movement that you make with your hands, your head or your face to show a particular meaning.

Kinaesthetics

(Greek) Kinesis, 'movement' and Aesthesis, 'emotion'

"Kinaesthetic reinforcement is the connection between movement and emotion, how the body and the senses work together, how our inner self perceives movement, and how we are cognitively aware of muscular activity" (Thomas Caplin, *The Learning Conductor*)^{[P][SEP]}

By implementing kinaesthetic reinforcement during warm-ups or when rehearsing specific passages, you can raise the level of musical and vocal awareness of your singers to a much higher level.

Mirror neurons

Discoveries show that the ability to learn, empathy and language development are all closely linked with the function of mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are purportedly able to decode the movements of another person, allowing us register (subliminally) the idea and intention behind the movements. It is thought that mirror neurons make it possible to process a gesture into a vocal reaction within milliseconds. Watching somebody doing something with their arms and mouth thus appears synonymous with doing it ourselves.

Kinaesthetic learning could be summed up by the following:

- Learning by doing
- Singing what you see
- Chinese Proverb: *I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand*

Pitch

Solfa hand signs (Kodaly)
Pitch placement or scaffolding (flat hand/ladder)
Body (parts of body represent a pitch)
Walk beanbag pitches (Dalcroze)

Rhythm

number of fingers held up can determine rhythms (ta, te-te, triola, ti-ri-ti-ri **OR** Di, di-da, di-ba-da, di-ga-da-ga)
Rhythm of pitched hand movement, possibly combined with foot pulse
Draw shape of notes in the air (1 bt = punch/dot, 2 bt draw minim, 3 bt draw minim w punch/dot, 4 bt, draw large circle semibreve)
[Should be able to tell what your subdivided rhythms are in any beat pattern!]

Movement

Can show length of note (walk, stride, running/jogging, skip, gallop)
Quality of note (in relation to the musical context, what comes before/after, galvanising activity)
Emotional dynamic of note (bold, tentative, warm etc.)

Teach **Fall fall fall** (words, pitches & pitch scaffolding)

Use Solfa

Use body movements to represent rhythms/silences

Use body connection to represent suspensions (pair work?)

Walk pitches on floor scale to represent tones, semitones, flow and rhythm

Useful techniques

Resistance (reducing speed and flow moving between beats) for suspensions and carrying the sound

Fall, fall, fall. Alec Roth Star-Struck.

Size of beat = dynamic of sound. Ictus level plays a big part in this. Harris, Bring us O Lord God.

Preparation with breath and emotion sets quality, speed and vocal onset of sound. Finzi, My spirit sang all day.

Most useful gestures for singers are carry-throughs/phrasing and cut-offs emulating quality of sound – non-beating arm independence required! Finzi, My spirit sang all day.

Active and passive beats (requires preparation and full body intention) Britten, Hymn to St Cecilia.

Circles for direction/accel. Whitacre, Leonardo. Swingle, Give us this Day

Subdivision. Debussy, Dieu qu'il la fait bon regarder. Orff, Carmina Burana, O Fortuna

It is important to have intention and trust in everything you do ☺

Laban handout on Intensity and Ictus level:

Legato = Float, Glide, Press, wring. **Non-legato** = Dab, flick, slash, punch