

Building a Repertoire of Gestures: Laban Movement for Choral Conductors

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Handout material from:

James Jordan, *The Conductor's Gesture: A Practical Application of Rudolf von Laban's Movement Language*. GIA, 2011.

Movement is multi-dimensional.

Figure 1: Diagonal Paths

Possible directional paths of movement

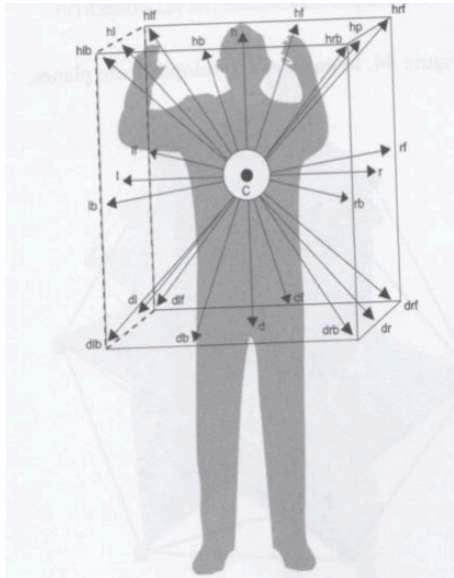
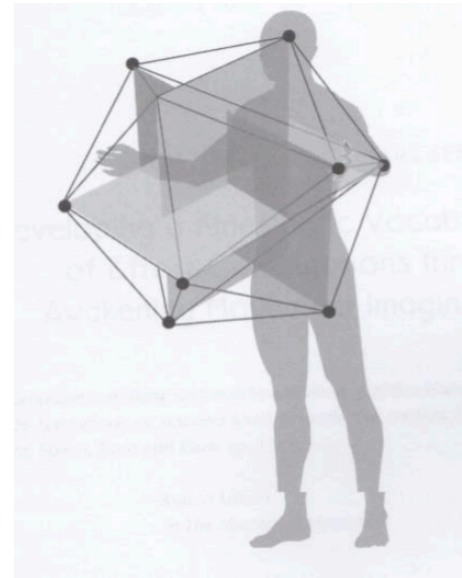


Figure 2: Laban's Icosahedron

20-faced, 3-dimensional spherical cube.

Note the 3 different planes within the figure.



* James Jordan *The Conductor's Gesture* pp. 225-227

There are **four basic effort elements (movement variables)** within any given movement.

- Space** The manner in which energy is used in action
Direct movements are channeled in a singular direction from one point to another.
Indirect movements can vary direction along the path of movement.
- Weight** The sensation of force or pressure exerted in a movement
Strength is movement that is forceful or uses increased pressure; communicated through the use of body weight and gravity to communicate strength (heaviness)
Lightness is achieved with delicate, soft movements that defy gravity.
- Time** The duration of time within a movement
Sustained time is characterized by stretching, prolonging, decelerating
Suddenness is represented by quick, instantaneous motion.
- Flow*** The variation in the quality of bodily tension that underlies the other effort elements.
Free flow allows movements to travel beyond the body boundaries.
Bound flow forces the mover to contain movements within the body boundaries

* "Flow cannot exist alone. It is the result of infinite combinations of Time, Weight, and Space, which provides an infinite variety of movement." (Jordan, *Conductor's Gesture*, pp. 231-232)

Effort Elements Continua

| | |
|---------------|---|
| SPACE | Direct, channeled path (precise; clear) -----→ Indirect, flexible path (more obscure) |
| WEIGHT | Heavy, Strong (force; effort; intent) -----→ Light (less effort) |
| TIME | Sustained, slow, prolonged movements -----→ Sudden, quick movements |
| FLOW | Bound (contained energy) -----→ Free movements |

8 Effort Actions

- The movements below comprise a gestural vocabulary to which we can refer as a means of creating movements that can evoke sound and influence style and articulation.
- Each action contains variants of the four elements: Space, Weight, Time, and Flow. How you vary the amount of these elements in your own conducting can be used to create your own unique style.
- Actions can be woven into beat patterns to create expressive and communicative conducting.
- Movements may be used sequentially or in combination.

Expressive Movements: ***GLIDE, FLOAT, PRESS, WRING***

| | GLIDE | FLOAT | PRESS | WRING |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Space | Direct | Indirect | Direct | Indirect |
| Weight | Light | Light | Strong-Heavy | Strong |
| Time | Sustained | Sustained | Sustained | Sustained |

Rhythmic Movements: ***DAB, FLICK, SLASH, PUNCH***

| | DAB | FLICK | SLASH | PUNCH |
|---------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Space | Direct | Indirect | Indirect/Direct | Direct |
| Weight | Light | Light | Strong-Heavy | Strong-Heavy |
| Time | Quick | Quick | Quick | Quick |

Effort Elements in Combination

Effort: GLIDE (S) direct (W) light (T) sustained

LH Movement Examples: touching velvet; ironing clothing; petting a kitten; treading water

RH Movement Examples: ironing clothing; conducting flat-shaped figure 8's

Musical Application: legato, flowing music, showing sustained breath/bow

Suggestions: minimal ictus; maintain horizontal plane; no vertical rebound

Effort: FLOAT (S) indirect (W) light (T) sustained

LH Movement Examples: a floating feather; using a bubble wand; graceful hands; tracing a rainbow

RH Movement Examples: feather/air resistance; reduced or nonexistent beat pattern

Musical Application: whole notes; floating chords; transparent music; connected, sustained phrase

Suggestions: minimal ictus; maintain horizontal plane; no vertical rebound

Effort: PRESS (S) direct (W) strong-heavy (T) sustained

LH Movement Examples: pushing a door; bicycle pump/raising a stuck window; lifting heavy object

RH Movement Examples: stirring a large pot; conducting in molasses; wrist leads tip of baton - no vertical rebound

Musical Application: intensely dramatic music; moments of stretch; crescendo/decrescendo

Suggestions: large and heavy prep beat; lower your conducting plane

Effort: WRING (S) indirect (W) strong (T) sustained

LH Movement Examples: turning a doorknob; wringing a towel; squeezing an orange

RH Movement Examples: conducting in molasses; stiffer wrist motion with intensity

Musical Application: dramatic moments; stress followed by relaxation; dissonant chord

Suggestions: large and heavy prep beat; lower conducting plane; intensely clearictus

Effort: DAB (S) direct (W) light (T) quick

LH Movement Examples: tapping window; testing hot water; bouncing a ping pong ball

RH Movement Examples: light tapping motion with compact rebound

Musical Application: light staccato; rhythmic music; need for sense of clear pulse

Suggestions: smaller beat pattern; light, quick rebound and clear, precise ictus

Effort: FLICK (S) indirect (W) light (T) quick

LH Movement Examples: brushing lint of clothing; shooing a fly; popping a balloon w/dart

RH Movement Examples: dotting an "i"; quick, light motion with stopped rebound

Musical Application: ultra-light staccato; lifted articulations; textures requiring lightness

Suggestions: effortless movement from wrist or fingertips; make the tip of baton dance

Effort: SLASH (S) indirect/direct (W) strong (T) quick

LH Movement Examples: karate chop; slamming a door; cracking a whip; using a flyswatter

RH Movement Examples: forceful downward movement with abrupt stop

Musical Application: extreme sfz accent; heavy, syncopated rhythm

Suggestions: movement into and out of gesture is heavy, with quick rebound

Effort: PUNCH (S) direct (W) strong-/heavy (T) quick

LH Movement Examples: punching a bag; hammering a nail with fist (low plane)

RH Movement Examples: forceful downward movement with heavy weight, low in plane

Musical Application: heavy accent with impact; Bass Drum "canon" shot; accent in basses

Suggestions: stay in lower plane; movement is quick in, quick out