Music Visible

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Part One

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Why a tutor?

Conducting remains one of the least formulated of all practical musical skills. Choral conductors in particular develop extremely free styles of gesture. Orchestral conductors generally do at least have to mark the beats of the bar (although Liszt, for instance, tended in later life not even to do that). Beyond this, the only rule that absolutely applies is that a conductor knows what he or she wants and succeeds, somehow, in getting it. A recent article on the death of Sir Georg Solti stated that he certainly did not have the finest of baton techniques and that outside observers could be forgiven for wondering how musicians made anything at all of his flailing arms - and yet he was a truly charismatic maestro, one of the great conductors.

But within that statement lies the admission that such a thing as conducting technique does exist and does serve to make a conductor's thoughts more easily intelligible to his or her musicians. And particularly for someone just starting out, a proper study of that technique can make an immense difference to the results they obtain and to the pleasure players and singers get from making music with them.

Not all the people using this book will have a vocation to conduct! They may have a vocation to teach, in which case they may well find themselves facing a school choir or orchestra. Almost any musician may find him or herself called on at some time or other to conduct a group, even if only for a few rehearsals. Classes in conducting therefore form a part of most 3rd level music courses. This series of three books is designed to be of use in such classes - one book for each of three years. By the end, the student should possess quite a high level of confidence and be well prepared to cope with whatever situations may first come his or her way.

Using a baton

Though a baton is only strictly necessary for orchestral conducting - where players must see a clear means of coordination from a certain distance and in conditions where they may not be able to hear all the other players particularly well - its use is recommended to all beginners because it focuses so well the various aspects of technique, disciplining and challenging the student to be clear in all their actions. Also, while it is easy later to lay aside the baton and conduct with the hands only, the reverse is not nearly so true, so that the conductor who has never learnt to use a baton effectively, if faced with a situation that requires it, will find him or herself at a decided disadvantage.

(It is a curious fact that there are far more male orchestral conductors than female ones. Why this might be is a matter for conjecture. And the conducting of small choirs, at which so many women excel, is in no way an inferior art. Nevertheless, to avoid cumbersome reading and whether rightly or wrongly, the male pronoun only will be used from here on.)

The choice of baton

A great variety and range of batons is available, but here are my own recommendations. A baton 14 inches long is suitable for small-to-medium sized groups of performers, 16 inches for large ones. (A small person with a small ensemble might just prefer a 12 inch baton.) The baton should be light and quite fine. It should balance about 4 inches from the base end, not far from the point where the forefinger and thumb touch the stick. In order to be light, it will probably be made of wood, and the handle of either cork or wood, but light, well-balanced plastic or fibreglass ones are available and break less easily. The handle shape is very much a matter of personal preference, but my own choice would be for a medium or narrow shape (usually in the region of 3 inches in length). Those with large hands may prefer a bulbous-shaped handle.

The baton-hold

When held, the baton should become a natural extension of the arm. When a good conductor takes hold of a baton, the impression received is that it instantly becomes a natural part of himself.

Turn the palm upwards and lay the baton from the centre of the palm across the middle joint of the forefinger. Close the lower three fingers gently and lay the thumb against the forefinger. Turn the hand over so that the palm faces the floor. Raise the arm a little so there is space in the armpit.
Check out the following points with a mirror:

The baton should lie in an almost straight line from the forearm and not too far from a direct forward angle from the body. For the moment it should lie just within the chest frame.

Though not held unnaturally high, the baton should be just high enough to create a single focus of attention with the face and eyes.

The space between the upper arm and the chest should be sufficient to imply 'freedom to breathe'.

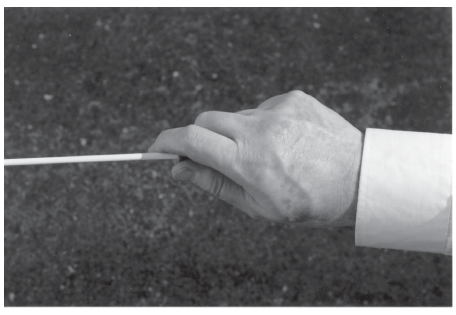
The turning of the palm to the floor gives a touch of authority to the presentation. Of course, this aspect of the hold can and will be varied according to the character of the music. And yet it can be surprising how one does well to keep the palm to the floor throughout a great range of different musical characters and a too easy relinquishing of it can come to feel like abandoning integrity of gesture for superficial effect, very much as if a wind player or singer, focusing on some effect of characterisation, were to let slip a proper breathing technique that should be the fundamental basis of all his playing.

Although the arm should not be stiffly straight but have some natural curve at the elbow, this should be only very slight, so that an open, direct appearance is made to the players or singers. Too curved an elbow will result in the baton pointing too much sideways, creating an enclosed impression and also failing to present the beat clearly to the players.

Three Positions

It is possible to lighten the basic hold by raising the fingers slightly, the fifth and maybe fourth releasing themselves from the baton. It is also possible to make it more weighty by grasping more strongly, applying more pressure (especially with the thumb and forefinger) and allowing the baton to be squeezed into a more sideways position. These two variations on the hold and the standard hold taught in the previous section are known as positions 1, 2 & 3, 1 being the lightest, 2 the standard and 3 the heaviest. Positions 1 and 3 are however only rarely used; a simple lightening or strengthening of position 2 gives sufficient range for the majority of musical situations and certainly for everything in the present chapter.

position 1



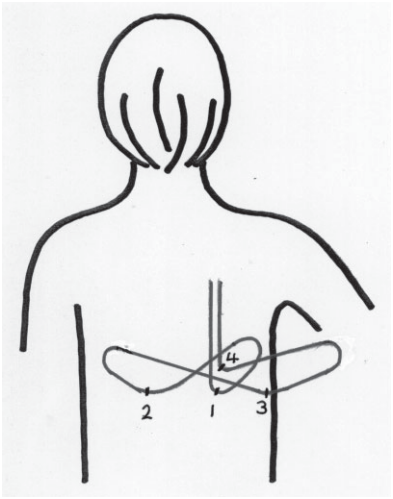
position 2

position 3

The chest frame

The pulse in music is defined by the moment that commences each beat. Think of the click of a metronome or a sequence of regular drum-beats. Indeed, think of your own pulse, heart-beat. This click is shown in the conductor's beat, more or less clearly depending on the character of the music, whether staccato or legato. But even in the most legato music, it theoretically exists in the gesture.

This click or point of the beat, in order to employ a natural sense of balance, will always lie within the chest frame, even if only just. The flow between the beats is free to go outside the frame.



If we superimpose the 4-time pattern on a picture of the body, even though the 2nd and 3rd beats lie somewhat to the left and right respectively, they still fall within the chest frame. Because we are using the right arm, the downbeat may lie just a little to the right of the centre of the chest.

(In the diagram, we are looking at the conductor from behind his back, in order that his left and right are shown left and right on the page, and not in mirror image. Left-handed students should feel free to take the baton in the left hand, but they will need to reverse all the diagrams in this book.)

Standing well but naturally and with the feet about shoulder-width apart, practise the 4-time pattern with an easy, average-sized beat. Roughly speaking, the louder the music, the larger the beat; the softer, the smaller. For now, imagine a mezzo-piano or mezzo-forte. Try to achieve a balance between a clear touching of the beat itself with a flowing overall movement. At this dynamic, these flowing movements themselves are not likely to go much outside the chest frame either, with the exception of the third beat. It is important not to cramp this beat but to flow freely through to the right.

The beats all lie at the same height except for the last, the upbeat. Although this can, and often will, lie at the same height as the others, it is a good idea at first to place it just a little higher. This will have the effect of lightening it, allowing the upbeat to flow naturally towards the downbeat. But if you prefer to keep the upbeat 'filled out', leave it the same height.

The arm, wrist and fingers

Though all the joints along the arm - shoulder, elbow, wrist, fingers - should be supple, no particular one of these should stand out or move out of proportion to the others. Again in front of a mirror, experiment with the following points to see both the right and the wrong way to use the arm.

The shoulder should remain relaxed and free, even though the arm is lifted.

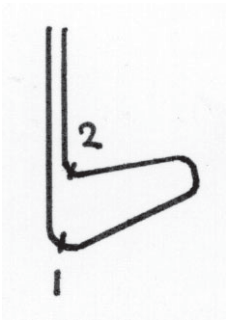
Much of the necessary movement comes from the elbow. However, unnecessary see-sawing movements of the elbow are extremely distracting and destructive of the musical line.

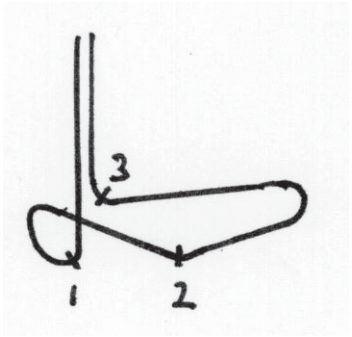
Some slight flexibility of the wrist gives ease and flow to the movement. But working too much from the wrist alone suggests casualness and a lack of physical involvement, while absence of any wrist movement would be too stiff and rigid. Billowing movements of the wrist, like those of the elbow, have a weakening and distracting effect.

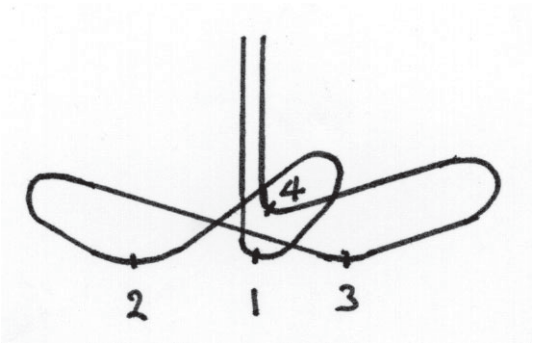
Flexibility in the fingers may take a little practice to develop. Try holding the wrist entirely still with your other hand, conducting then with only your fingers. Stretch the joints to make the baton move as far and wide as possible: try making large circles with the wrist held still.

2, 3 & 4-time patterns

Here are the three basic patterns, the click of each beat marked with a point. To repeat, you may prefer not to place the upbeat higher than the down-beat, or hardly so; but don't let it become too heavy in feeling.



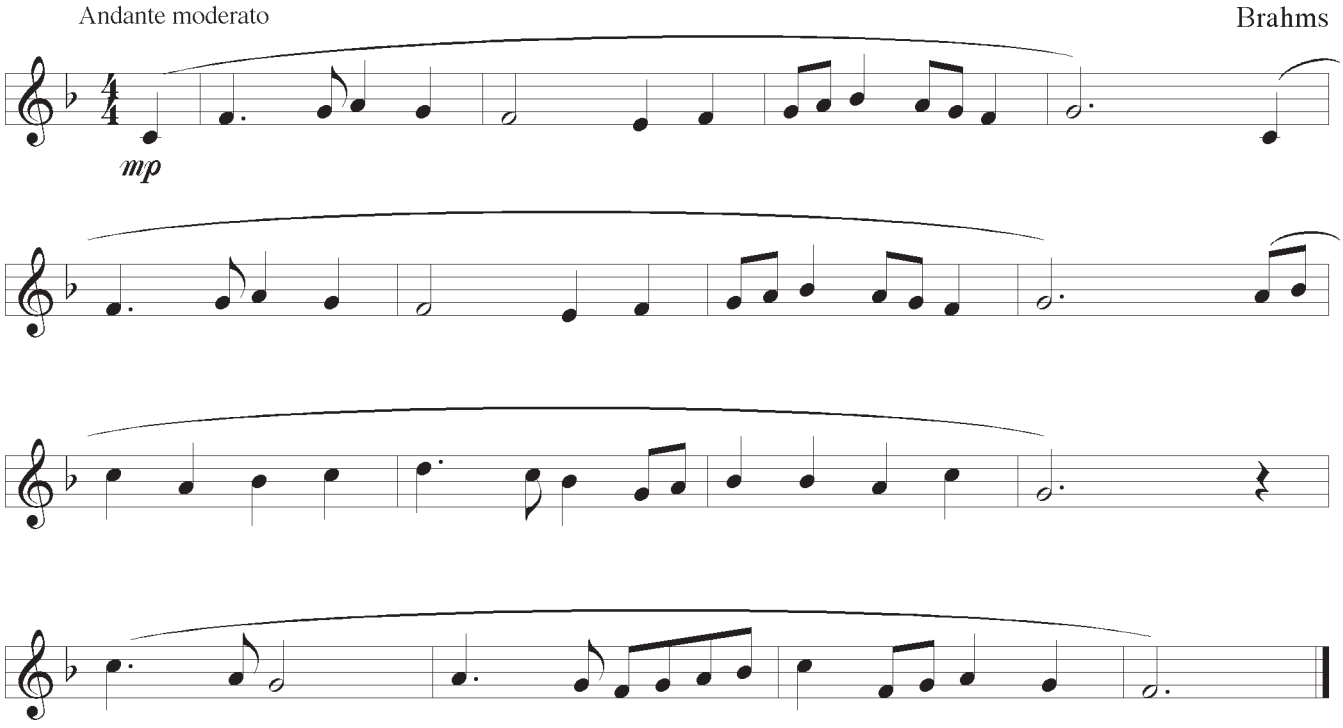




Flowing Melodies

It is a good idea always to practise the beat with music in mind. The flow of the music will 'teach' a corresponding flow to the hand. Here are three legato melodies to have in mind as you practise beating.

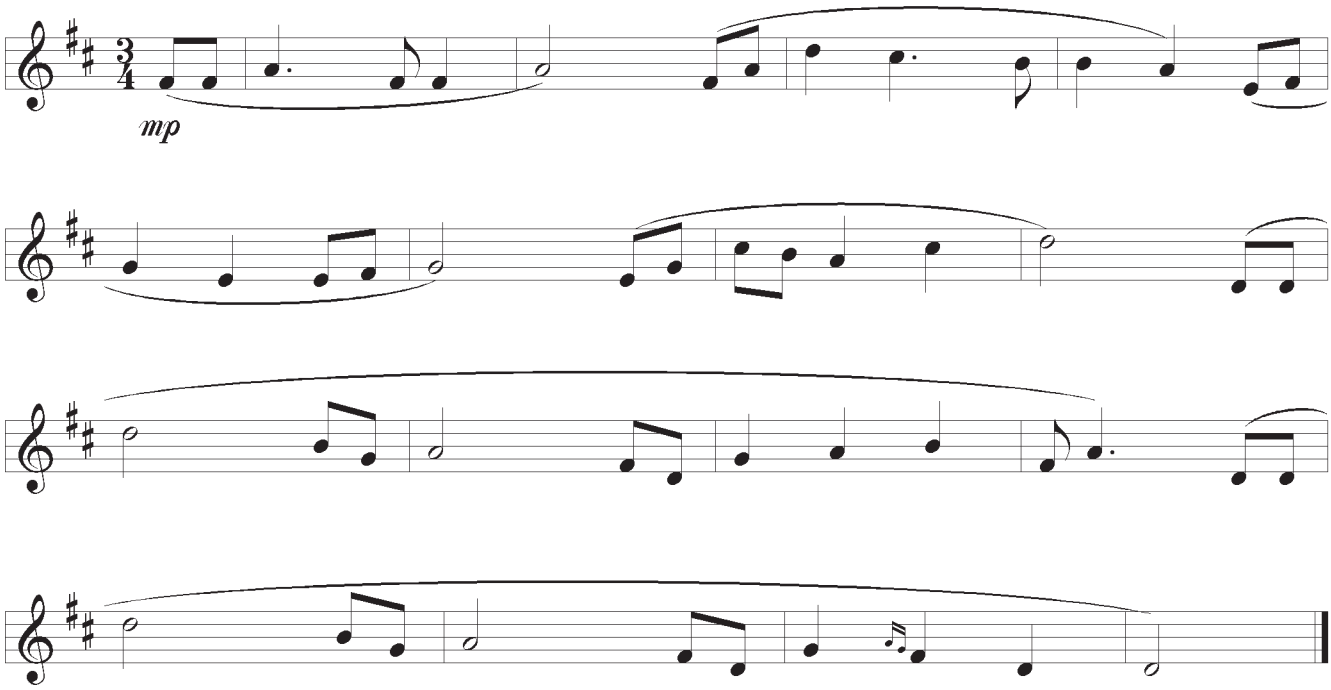
The Little Sandman



Lullaby

Andante moderato

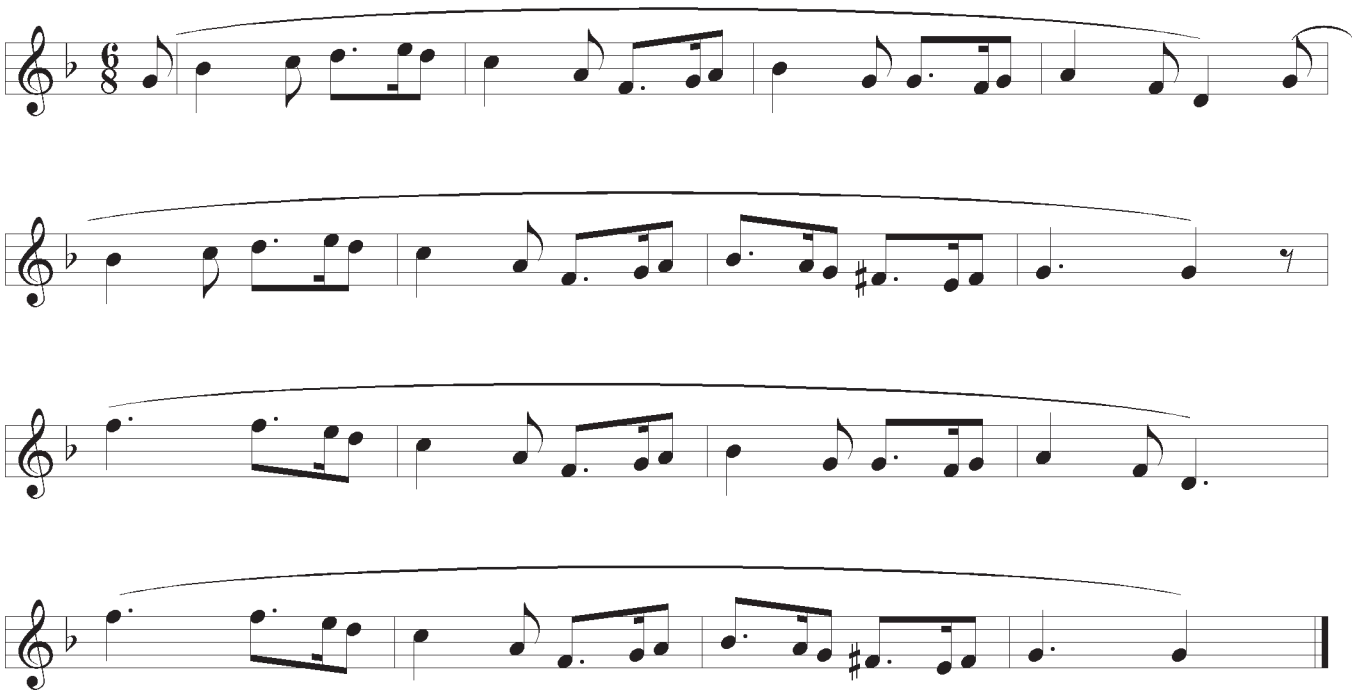
Brahms



Greensleeves

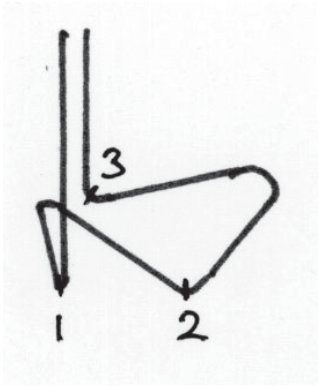
Andante

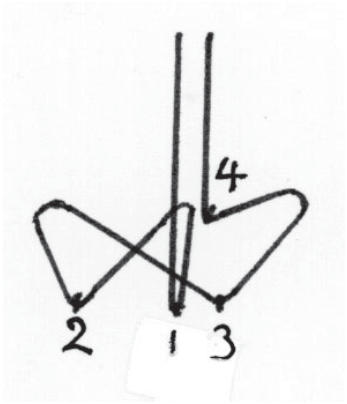
Anon.



Rhythmic Melodies

When beating the following three tunes, you will discover the need to mark the beat more crisply and clearly. Do this lightly however, feeling the crisp click with the tip of the baton rather than the whole arm. As a general rule, the more staccato the music, the more important the click of the beat. These melodies are not all staccato, but they do use a crisper rhythmic feel than the previous three. The patterns now use the vertical plane more and the horizontal plane less and would look more like this:



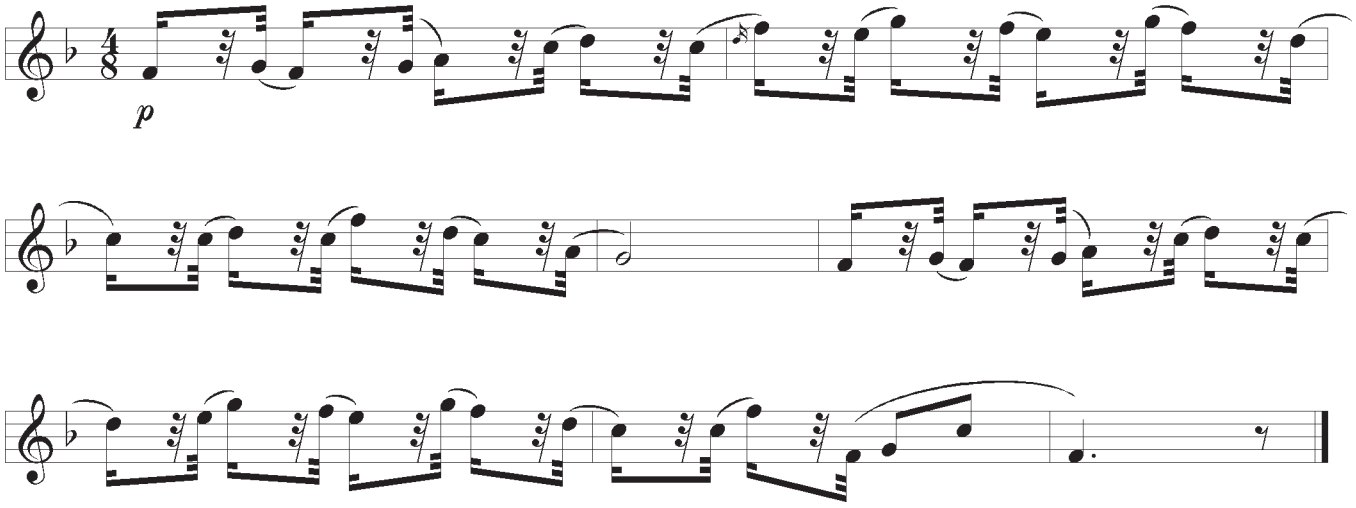


However, still keep some flow in the beat - never become too dry or let the beat stop altogether. Tap the beat lightly with the tip of the baton, rather than becoming heavy and working too much with the arm. Try alternating this rhythmic style with the legato style on page 9 to feel the difference clearly, and then try out the melodies below.

Humoureske

Andante moderato

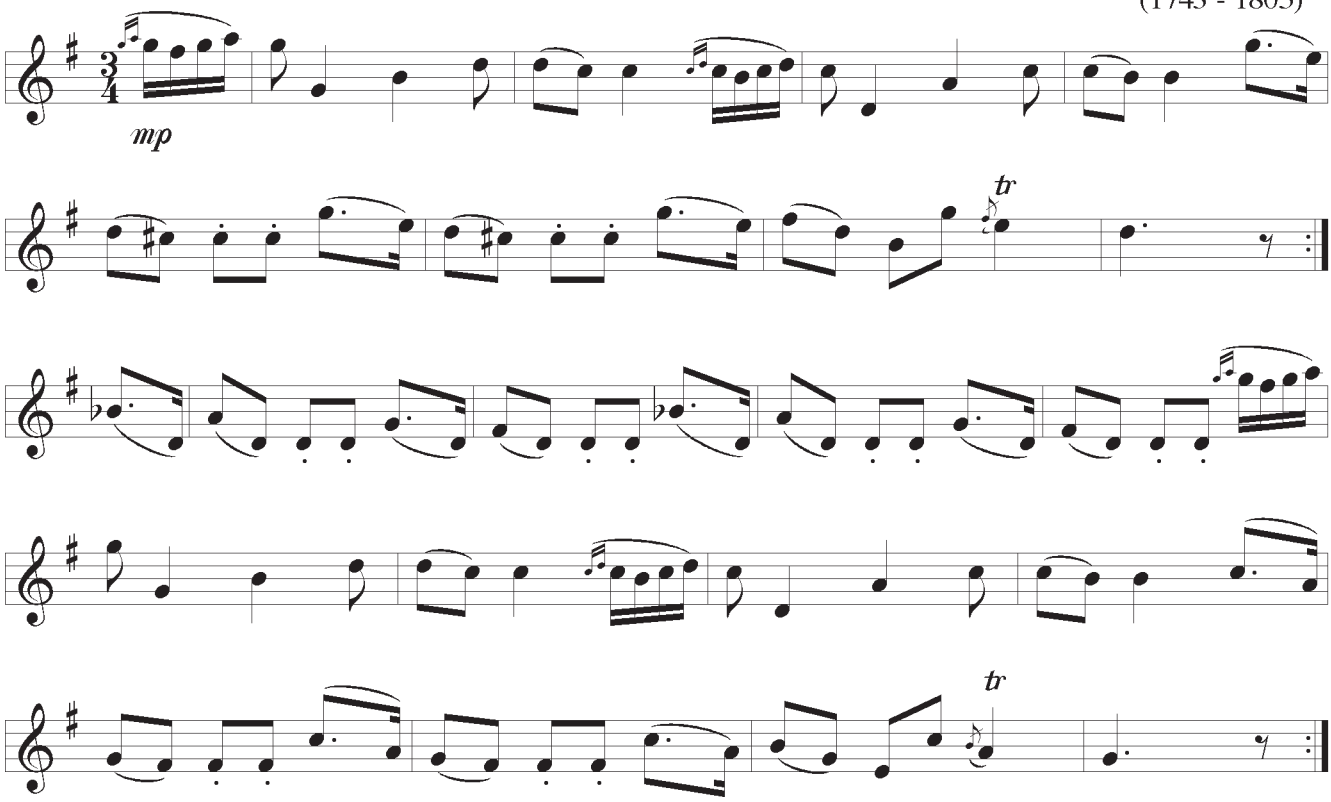
Dvorak



Minuet

Tempo do Minuetto

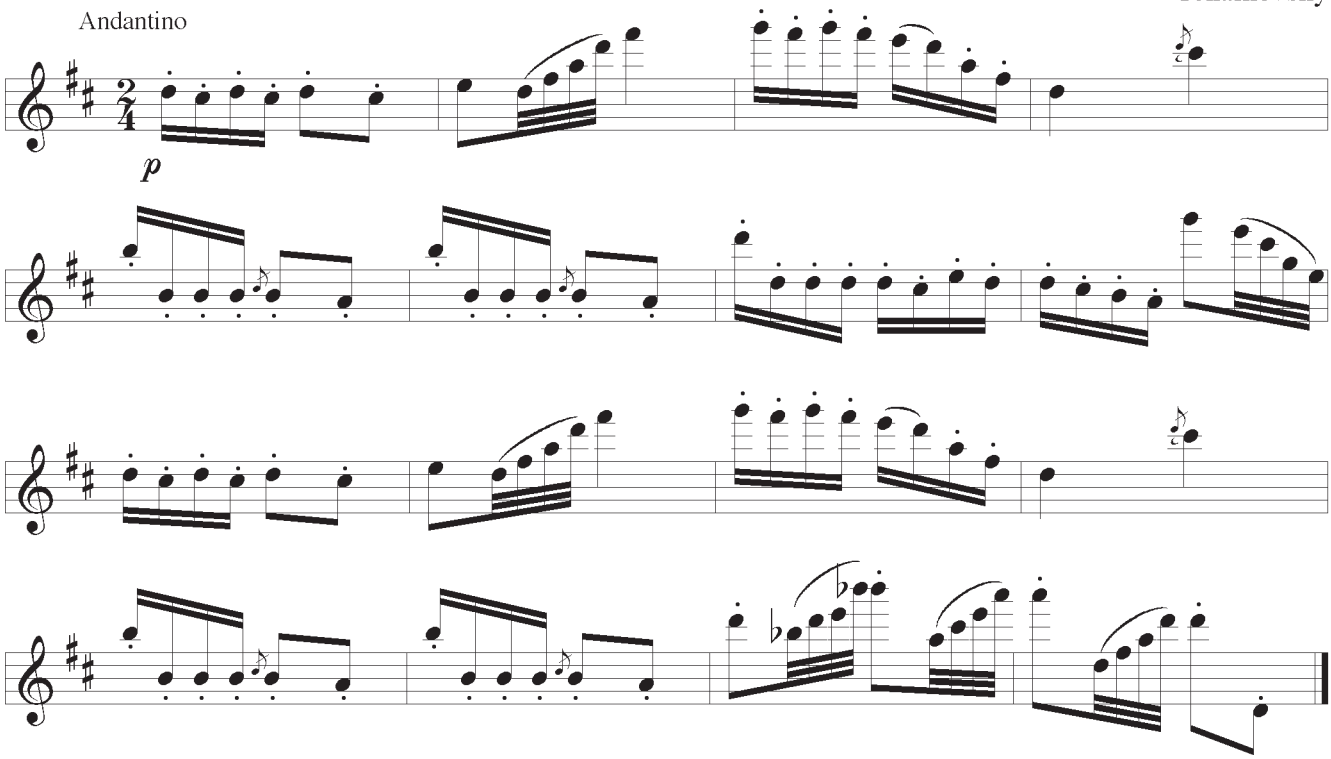
Luigi Boccherini
(1743 - 1805)



Dance of the Reed Pipes

Andantino

Tchaikovsky



Dynamics and the base-line

As already said, the general rule about dynamics is that one beats larger for a louder dynamic and smaller for a softer one. At this stage we are really only concerned with a medium-sized beat whose 'clicks' fall at approximately the height of the lower ribs - just below the bottom of the sternum (breast bone). You can get larger or smaller if you wish at any time, but never so large as to be flailing around. The other point about changing the size of the beat is that the base-line of the beat, the height at which the click of the beats occurs, will probably fall a little for larger beats and rise a little for smaller ones. The base-line for a full fortissimo may even lie as low as the waist and for a pianissimo as high as the face. There are no strict rules for this and instinct will guide you. But when trying this out, the point to remember is that we want to avoid fortes becoming harsh or hysterical, and pianos from becoming indifferent. Sinking the base-line a little for a forte keeps the tone round and relaxed, while raising it for a piano keeps the mood alive.

A Few Pointers

1 - Just as the tone is produced on a violin by the point at which the bow contacts the string, and not where the player's hand holds the bow, so it is the tip of the baton that is the 'live' point, not the hand.

2 - For the players to feel comfortable playing as you conduct, it is most important to learn to use an easy, smooth flow from beat to beat, with something of the same quality of movement one sees in a pendulum. This applies still to some degree (indeed, particularly) when using a rhythmic beat.

As well as an easy relationship between conmductor and plyers, such a sense of 'inevitability' to the succession the beats will enable the tempo to be established with ease. But a certain sense of 'allowing the players to play', giving them a degree of 'free rein', is involved here and the conductor has to be able to allow it, whilst never letting the players decide the tempo rather than himself.

3 - Many poeple starting out fail to use the horizontal dimension adequately. In particular, the 3rd beat in four-time should flow through freely. There is no pronounced change of direction at the click of this beat and this leads beginners - particularly those who have undertaken conducting responsibilities without prior training - to create such a change of direction, to feel a strong click and bounce, describing, as it were, the first part of an omega sign in the air. But very little music requires such strong pointing; it is much better to cultivate a legato and a sense of freedom of tone. For this, learn to flow out through the 3rd beat with a feeling of openness.

4 - Don't be shy to use a mirror at this stage (or any other). Look for a flowing whole, neither detachedly coming from the wrist, nor heavily involving too much of the upper arm. Let your own instinct guide you.

Stage 2:
Getting Started!

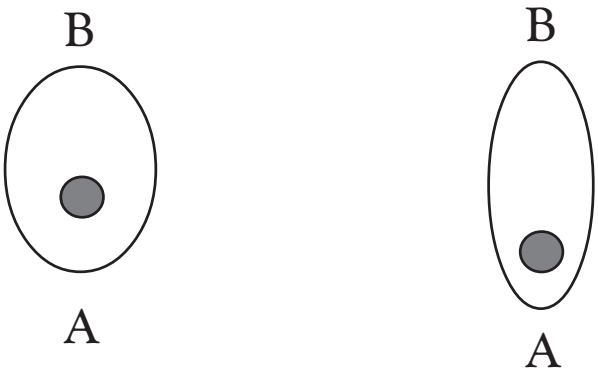
'empty' and 'full'
the 'IN' and 'OUT' of the beat
preparatory beats
gaining the correct tempo
a proper starting focus
the left hand
giving less
giving more
indicating the entry
half-beat entries
unnecessary movements
getting stopped
music visible

One of the most awkward moments for the beginner is simply starting a piece - not as simple with a group of players as alone in one's study. Not the least part of this difficulty lies in gaining the correct tempo. Although straightforward musical instinct must play a large part in succeeding here, a certain amount of analysis can help, beginning with the internal structure of the beat. On the way, we will take in further discussion on the difference between an accented or staccato beat and a legato one.

If you find this analysis over-detailed and counterproductive, don't dwell on it; but we will be returning to some of its ideas in talking about accents and pauses in later chapters, so it may be worth a glance. Remember that the whole matter is much simpler in action than when spelled out on paper; simple instinct will carry many of you through.

Empty and Full

When a moon or other satellite orbits a planet, it generally does so not in a circle but in an ellipse. This means that its speed will vary according to how close to the planet any particular part of its orbit may be, and this variation will be greater, the greater the elliptical nature of the orbit:

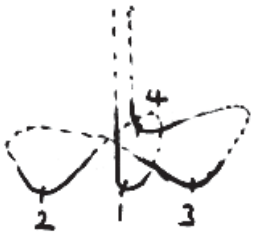


Point A is that of greatest speed and also of the change of direction from acceleration towards the planet to decelleration away from it. In this analogy it corresponds to the click of the beat, the moment most 'full' of energy.

Point B is that of least speed and also of the change of direction from decelleration away from the planet to acceleration towards it. In this analogy, it corresponds to the 'empty' point mid-way between two beats.

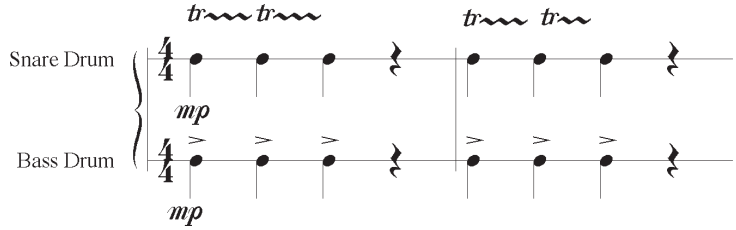
Imagine four such ellipses, each cut open at their 'empty' point and strung together to make the four-time pattern. The sequence of fullness and emptiness will look like this:

four broken ellipses…

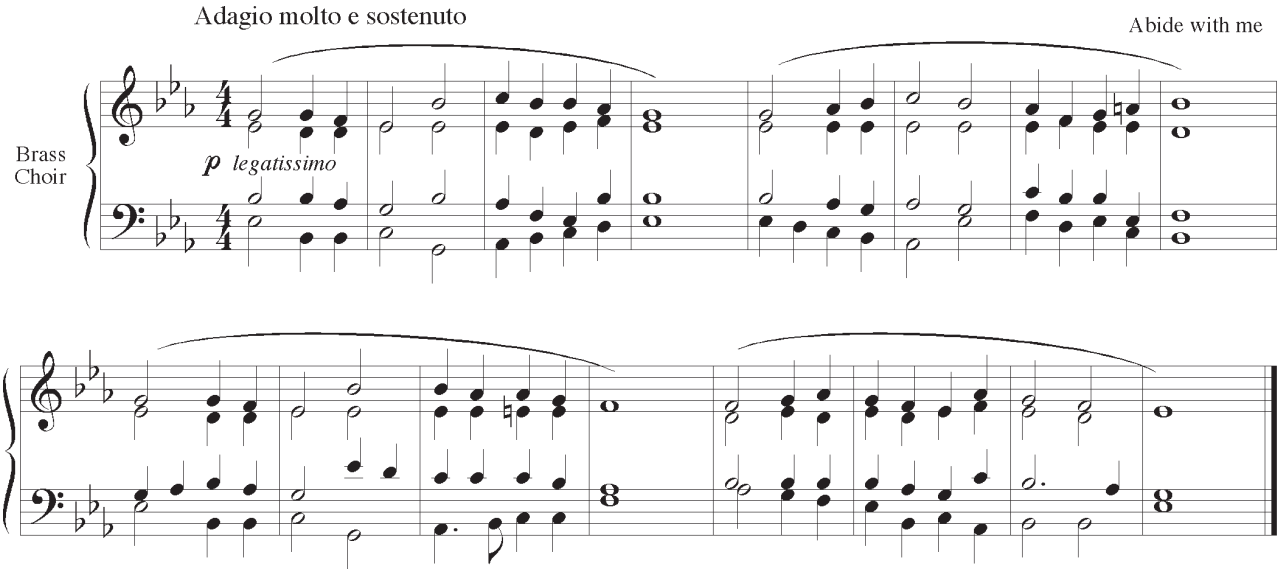


…joined.

Try conducting in a slow and heavily accented funeral march style to become aware of this. (Use a firm grip on the baton for a strengthened position 2 - see page 7.)

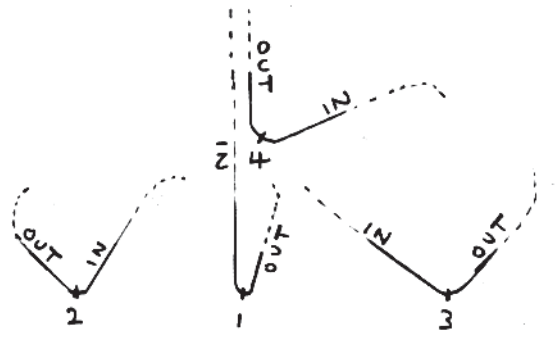


Obviously, the heavily accented nature of the beat in this manner of conducting is the exact reverse of a legato where, on the contrary, the continuity of tone is expressed by the absence of any strong distinction between the beats themselves and the areas in-between - all of the beat is 'full'.

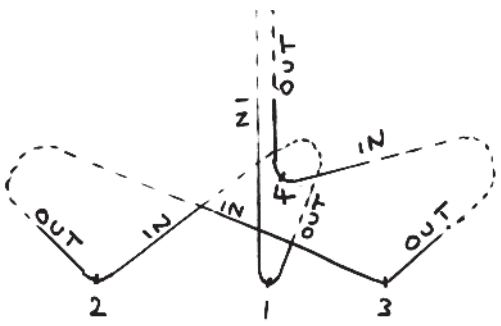


The 'IN' and 'OUT' of the beat

The next step in this analysis is to see that each beat can be seen as having a movement in to the click and a movement out from it. This will be important for discussing subdivisions and accents, but it is also useful for understanding different ways of starting a piece. The moment of change from the 'out' of one beat to the 'in' of the next is that 'empty' point just discussed.



broken



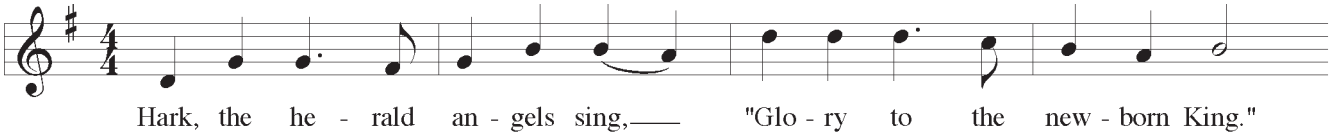
joined

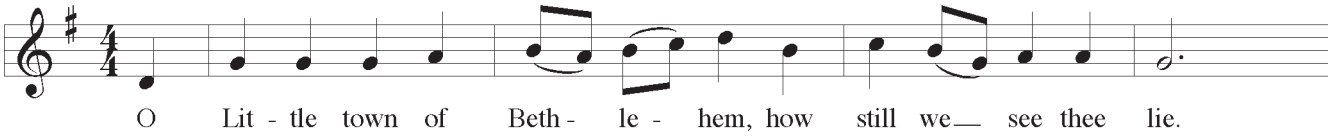
Preparatory Beats

The simplest way to start a slow or moderate speed piece is to give the beat before. For instance, if the piece begins on a downbeat in 4-time, give a fourth beat. If it starts on the up-beat, give a third beat.

In order to give this preparatory beat, begin with the baton set at the empty point that follows the beat immediately before it. For instance, for a piece in 4-time beginning on the down-beat, position the baton at 'empty after 3', then give the fourth beat. To start a piece on the upbeat, position the baton at 'empty after 2' and give the third beat.

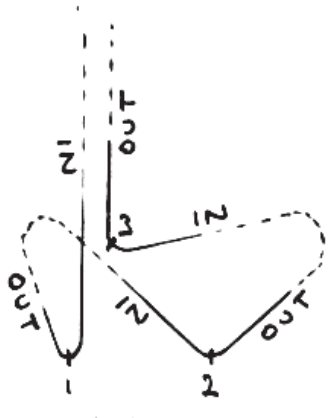
Try this in the abstract a few times, and then with music in mind:



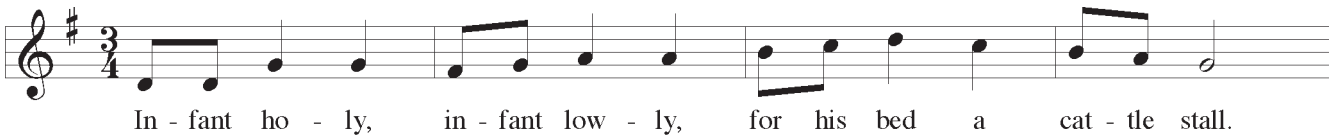


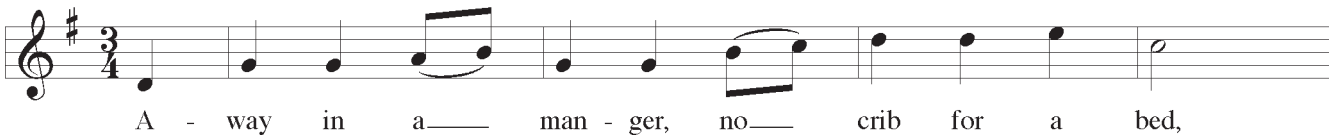
'See' your choir, and try taking abreath with your preparatory upbeat to create a stronger message. Have a friend sing the first bar or two to make the process 'real'.

When applying these guidelines to 3-time, remember that because the second beat is to the right, the 'out' of the first beat will be slightly to the left:

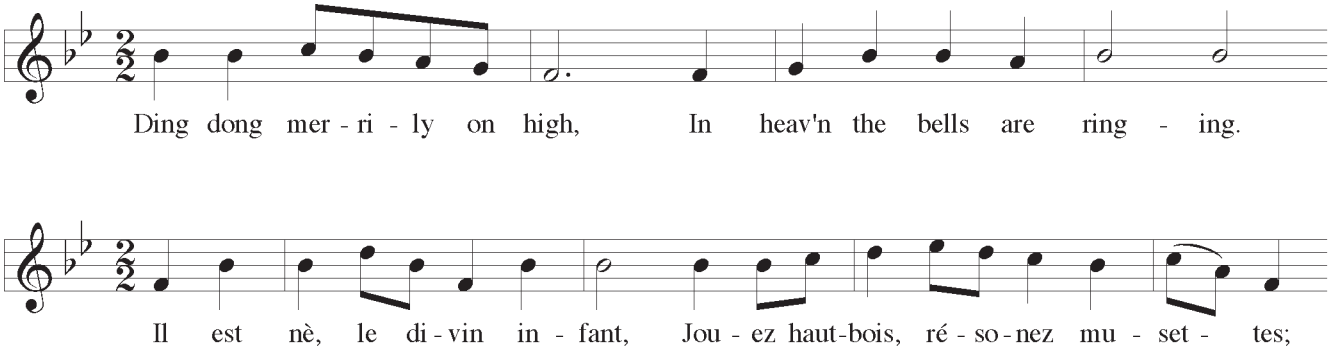


So, when starting a piece on an upbeat, even though you are positioning the baton at 'empty after 1' rather than 'empty after 2', the hand is placed in much the same position as in a 4-time upbeat start.





Finally, apply the principle to 2-time:



Gaining the correct tempo

In all these examples, the way to ensure the ensemble begins at the tempo you want is to be sure to give the preparatory beat in exactly that tempo. That may seem obvious, but it is one of the commonest faults in beginners that, out of anxiety as to whether the players or singers will actually enter and through misguided and exaggerated gestures intended to try and persuade them to do so, the preparatory beat is unwittingly lengthened, with the result that the performers are led to expect a slower tempo than that intended.

Simplicity of gesture is vital to being correctly understood and momentary misunderstandings should never induce one to abandon the principles of good conducting. For instance, one of the commonest reactions to insecure coordination with ones players is tension, first in the arm, the baton-hold and the breathing, then in the click of the beat, springing sharply off each beat in an effort to emphasise it. What this does is to destroy the flow between the beats, the very thing that, subliminally, assures the players of the timing of the next beat. The correct reaction to poor coordination between conductor and players is to simplify and focus the beat, at all costs keeping the flow from beat to beat. And this applies equally to the preparatory beat at the commencement of a piece of music.

A Proper Starting Focus

There is, of course, one other aspect to starting a piece successfully, and that is a proper gathering of the players' attention. Again, tension should be avoided in doing this. Make sure that your stance is balanced and natural. When you raise the baton to its starting point, look out to your ensemble and gather them with your eyes. (Richard Strauss told Jascha Horenstein, "Never conduct below the eyes", leaving him very puzzled for a number of years, till Horenstein realised that what he meant was not that the base-line of the beat should be at eye-level, but that the baton should generally be high enough for the beat and the eyes to make a unity.) Be very aware of every individual's state of readiness or lack of it, and don't start until everyone is focused sufficiently to respond to your preparatory beat, playing well at once and as a coordinated ensemble. Any conductor too self-apologetic to assert this authority is failing in one of his most fundamental and critical responsibilities, and such a person should make up their mind at once to demand more of themselves. They owe it to their players.

The Left Hand

This is perhaps the place to suggest that, although we are not yet using the left hand but learning to focus a clear baton technique, leaving the left arm entirely loose at one's side gives really too casual an impression, actually contradicting the message of the baton-focus, rather than supporting it. It may be better to put just a little life into the arm, fractionally raising it, without however distracting from the focus on the baton and face.

Giving Less

There are, of course, many ways of starting a piece, appropriate to the different natures of different openings, as well as the size of the forces involved. But the basic variations on what has been so far explained are either to give less preparation or to give more.

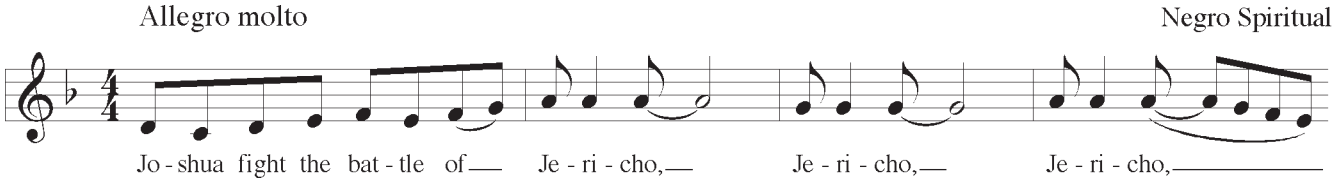
Giving less preparation will create a rather more abrupt start. Instead of positioning the baton on the 'empty' point that follows the beat before the preparatory beat, position it directly on the centre of the preparatory beat itself. Thus, in 4-time, if the piece starts on the down-beat, position the baton stationary on the click point of the fourth beat (4), then, in exact rhythm, simply move out of 4 and into 1. If the piece starts on the upbeat, position the baton on the click point of 3 and, again in strict tempo, flow out of 3 to bring the players in on 4.

Go back over the six carols again with this different approach to starting. In many cases, where the tempi are quite slow, you may feel there is little to choose between this way of starting and the original one. But in one case, if you are using the correct tempo and visualising your forces imaginatively, it should feel too abrupt.

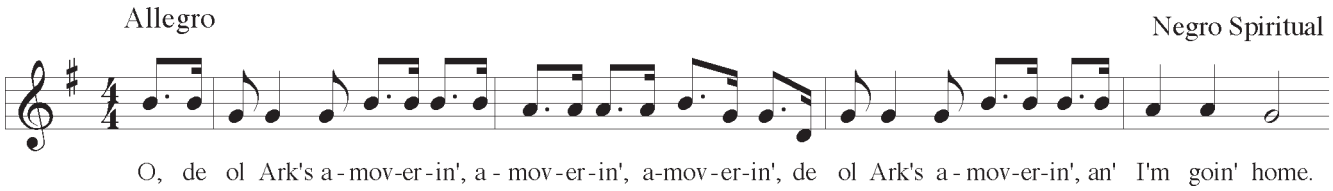
Giving More

The carol that in particular should feel too abrupt using so minimal a preparatory beat is "Hark the herald angels sing", particularly if you use the reasonably brisk tempo that the carol requires. When the tempo is at all fast, more preparatory movement is necessary. This can mean giving not just a single preparatory beat, but two:

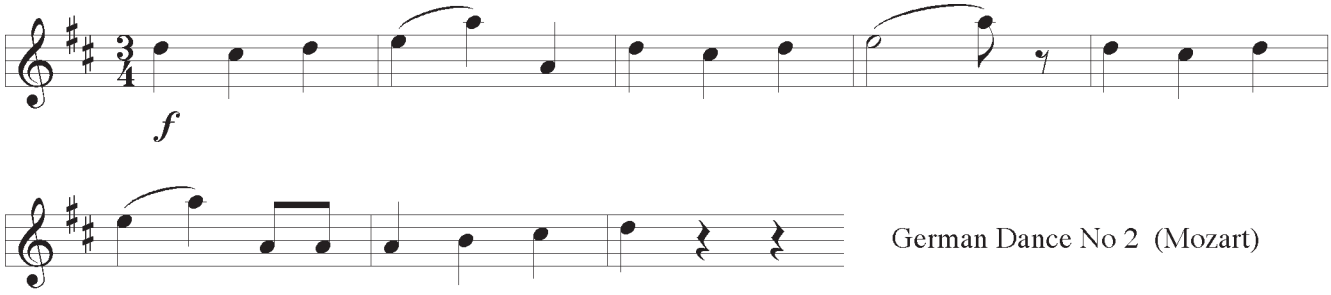
4-time, commencing downbeat - position the baton on 'empty after 2' as you gather your players. Then give the 3rd and 4th beats:



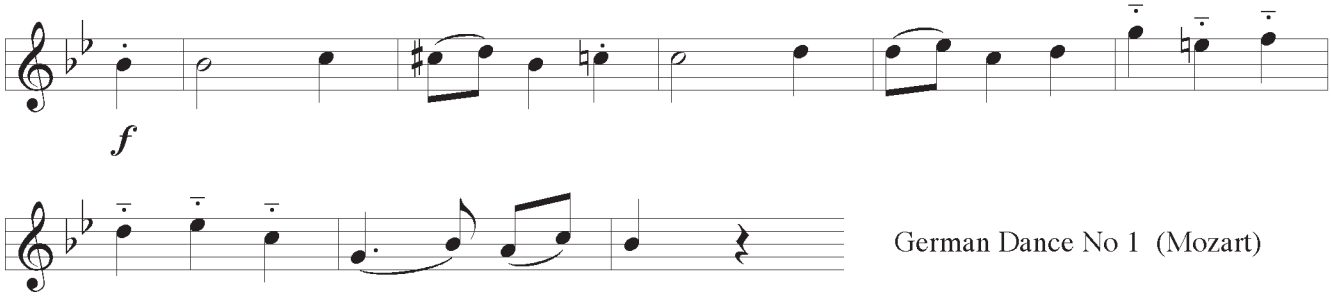
4-time, commencing upbeat - position the baton on 'empty after 1', and give the 2nd and 3rd beats:



You can work out for yourself how to start the following tunes with two preparatory beats:

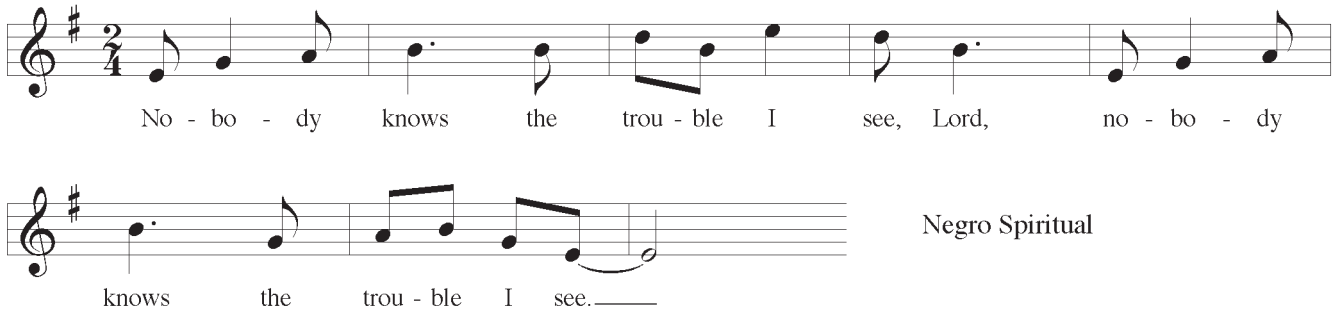


German Dance No 2 (Mozart)



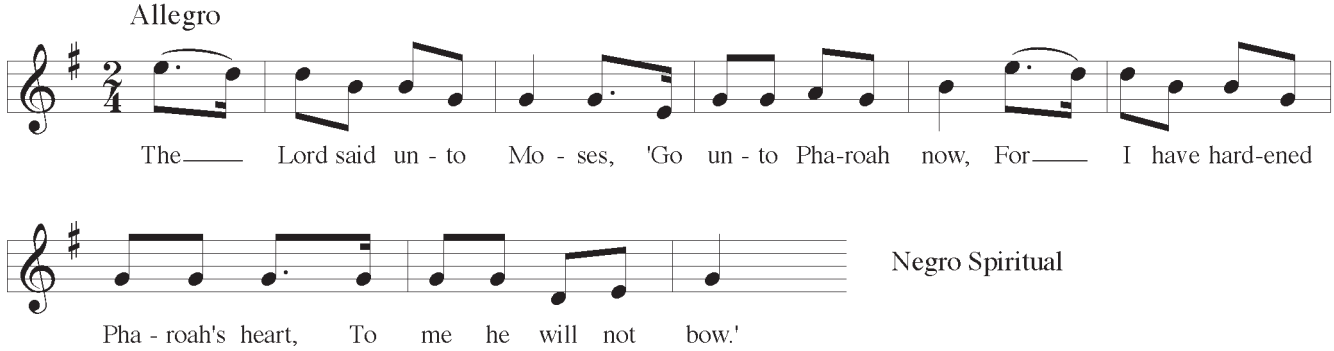
German Dance No 1 (Mozart)

Vivace



Negro Spiritual

Allegro

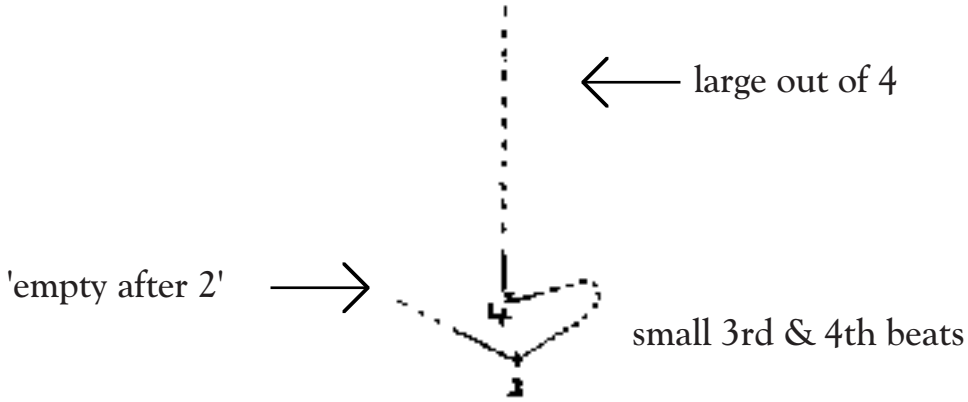


Negro Spiritual

Indicating the entry

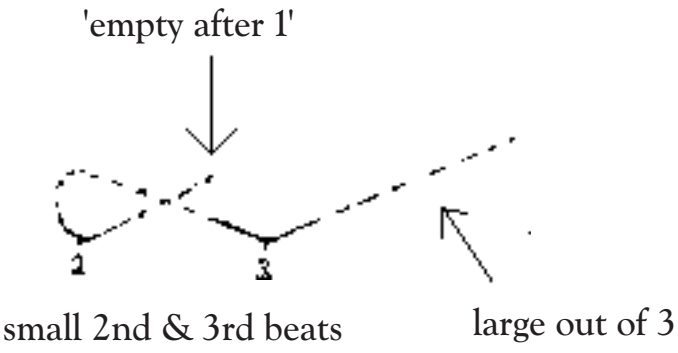
At least by the time of the last two examples, if not earlier, you will have sensed something missing in this method of starting, unless of course you have been instinctively supplying it anyway. This is that, in a row of similar beats like those used here, what is there to let the players really know when to start? Simply waving your baton up and down in a 2-pattern is not enough.

The answer is to let the two preparatory beats be small (maybe even tiny), but to come out of the last of them slightly larger, creating an anticipation that something is about to happen. We are, to a degree, running ahead of ourselves towards a discussion of accents that will come in a later chapter. But some understanding of this is necessary now if you are to have confidence during your first efforts with an actual ensemble. Starting on a downbeat in 4-time will look like this:



i) position on 'empty after 2'
ii) give the 3rd and 4th beats small
iii) let the 'out of 4' be twice the size of the rest
iv) continue beating at a normal size

Starting a piece on the upbeat in 4-time will look like this:



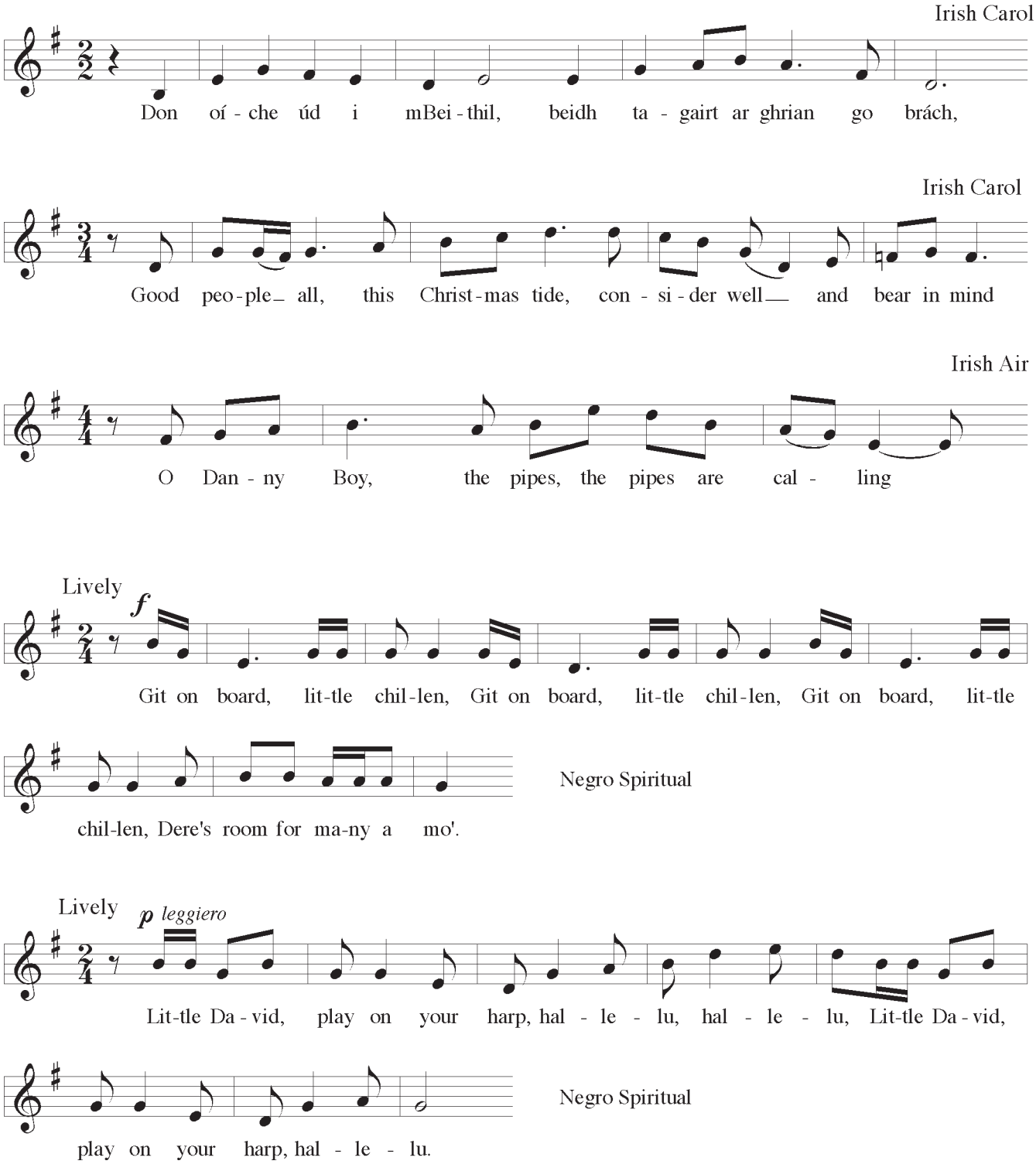
i) position the baton at 'empty after 1'
ii) give the 2nd and 3rd beats small
iii) come out of the 3rd beat twice the size
iv) continue beating at a normal size

Go back over the last six up-tempo examples, and you should find the result much more convincing, especially in the 2-time examples.

Half-beat entries

At this point, instinct really does have to lead the way. But it may be worth pointing out that not only is there a difference between starting a slow or a fast piece in regard to how many preparatory beats are given, there is also a difference between re-starting (e.g. after a pause in the music, or a short break to pass a comment during rehearsal) when the tempo is 'in the air', so-to-speak, and starting 'cold', for instance at the very beginning of a piece in performance, when the tempo must be set very clearly.

The slow Irish melodies below would probably need just a beat and a half in performance, while the faster spirituals might need two and a half beats. And yet it might sometimes be clearest to begin preparatory beats for such fast 2-time items with a downbeat regardless of the entry, giving just one and a half beats preparation for 'Git on board'. The choice could vary from moment to moment, and only instinct can guide. But if your instinct becomes sound, you won't need to know what you're doing, nor will your players or singers. It'll just happen.



Unnecessary Movements

Something of the quality of creating an anticipation by coming out of the last preparatory beat a little larger can be present in the slower examples (the carols) with their single preparatory beats, and really constitutes the essence of bringing in an ensemble. A natural fluency with the technique will help avoid all sorts of compensatory ungainlinesses that sometimes creep in where inexperienced conductors find it hard to start an ensemble: tightening the arm, rising on the feet, tightening the mouth or opening it wide, locking the breathing and so on. These things have the most adverse effects on the players or singers, even though they may not always be aware of it. And conversely, a natural, balanced, coordinated use of the body will have a good effect.

And here, I should like to cite my own experience when young, as a very poor viola player who had not yet learnt a relaxed and sound basic technique, and whose playing always sounded scratchy and unpleasant, so that playing for more than a few minutes was unpleasant for me, let alone anyone else. Various bits of advice about technique from different quarters had failed to solve my problems. Then I had the good fortune to play for a week at summer school in a chamber orchestra under a truly outstanding conductor. During that week, my playing blossomed. Towards the end of the week, however, I was invited to spend an afternoon playing chamber music. Within half an hour, my playing was in bits again. Returning to the orchestra later that day, it blossomed once more. If this is the effect on a young viola player, imagine what a difference good or bad conducting can have on amateur or child singers, one of the most likely situations the reader of this text is likely to face. You owe it to them to ensure that unnecessary tensions, grimaces, risings on the feet, etc. are not a part of your conducting. You may never expect to advance further in the field than a junior school choir; this makes no difference. Do the right thing and free yourself of unnecessary tensions and movements. (Stage 4 will return to this matter in greater depth.)

Practise the examples yet again, but this time concentrating on these issues. The body can flow, the face be mobile, the breathing perhaps involved, but only in a natural way that belongs to good music-making and the character of the particular piece.

Getting Stopped

A full discussion of pauses and cut-offs will also take place in later chapters. But in order to be set up for a first experience of conducting an ensemble in a complete item, a brief mention is necessary here.

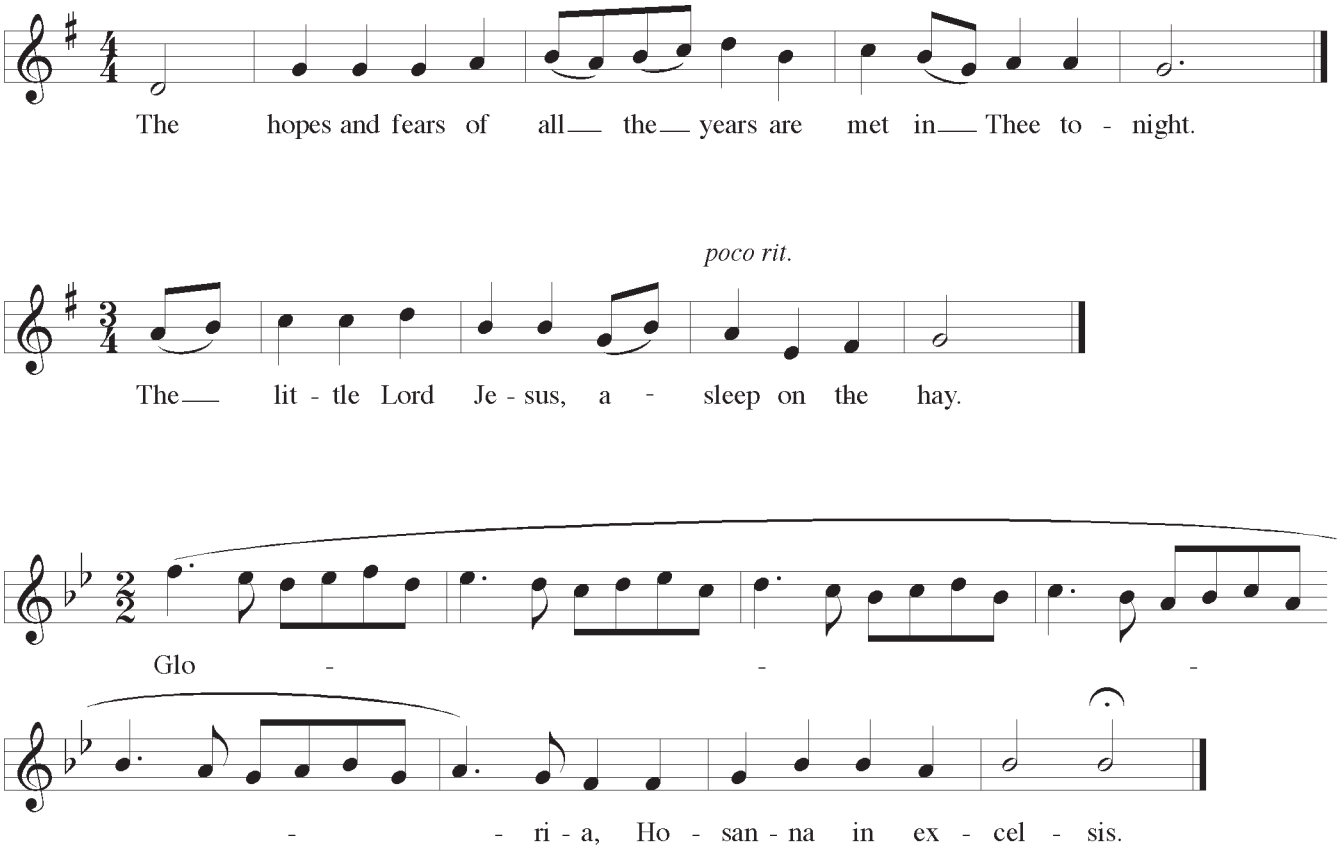
If the piece ends with a pause, stop the baton at the centre of the beat on which the last chord begins, wait the desired length of time and then describe an inward-turning circle (anti-clockwise if you are right-handed), touching the beat again lightly but clearly as you pass through the point you first left, in order to bring the chord off. The circle should be a reasonably generous size, large enough to bring the players confidently with you.

If the piece does not end with a pause but nevertheless with a held chord, you can either:

i) beat through and mark clearly the beat when the chord should release (again, mark it by coming out of the previous beat slightly larger in anticipation), or

ii) you can treat the last chord outwardly (i.e. with your gestures) the same way as if it had a pause, but mentally keeping the time so that you complete the circular cut-off at the correct moment for the chord to release.

Here are a few endings to try. The second of them involves a ritenuto - use the space freely and keep the beat flowing from point to point as you make this.



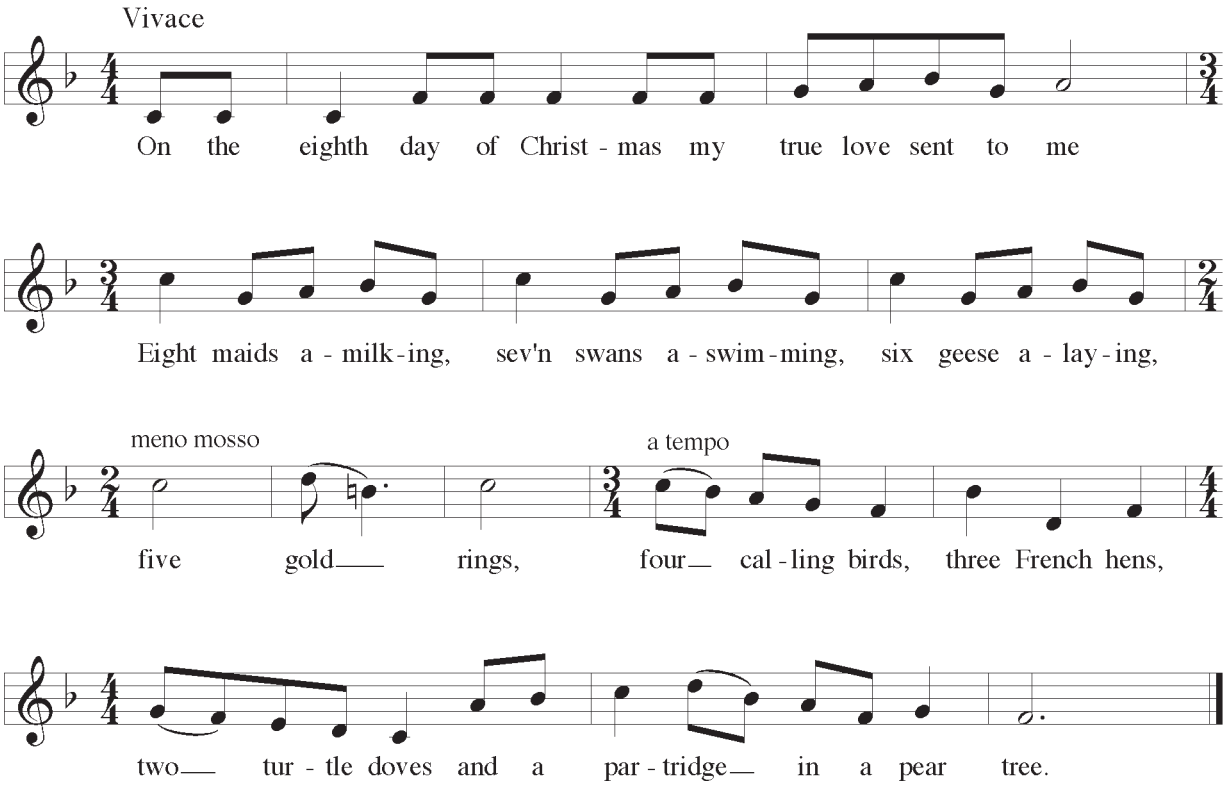
Beware of becoming merely technical as you practise these snippets - never allow your musical thinking to become turgid. Be aware of your body-language and give the music some lift and bouyancy.

Music Visible

Take any of the items practised in this chapter (except the half-beat entries on page 21) and silently conduct its opening while a friend - who is either also studying the course or who at least knows what the selection of possible melodies is - observes. Narrow the selection down to just a few, if you wish. Can the friend recognise which tune it is that you are conducting? If so, you have taken the first step in successfully turning the purely aural art of music into a corresponding visual representation, which is the essence of conducting.

Pattern Security

Before proceeding to do your first work in front of actual players, you may like to work in the three basic patterns really safely. It is surprising how easy it is, till the patterns become thoroughly ingrained, to be distracted by something and lose the pattern. One way to guard against this is to sing aloud the music you will be conducting - for instance the items in the following chapter - while beating time. Another is to practise a piece that changes metre a lot. A verse of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' fits the bill well enough. Get it fast…



Stage 3:
In front of an ensemble

five golden rules
four junior string carols
the paradox of conducting

Five Golden Rules

There are only five things to say about this stage, and I shall not distract from them by writing at length. They are:

1 - Know the score! At all events, be able to conduct the first few bars and the last few bars while looking at the players and not at the score, as well as being able to look up at them at regular intervals during the piece. This much at least is vital. But the better you know the score and can conduct without looking at it, the better your conducting will be in all sorts of ways. Know the music!

2 - Be aware of the players, their state of readiness, their focus of attention, etc.

3 - When you talk, use a clear voice, appropriate to the size of the room and the ensemble, and with just a touch of authority. Never talk to a person who is evidently not listening to you - other than to ask them to listen to you!

4 - As you raise your baton, remain relaxed in body-weight and breathing. Likewise when you actually begin the piece. Keep your eyes to the players before, as and after you start!

5 - Let the players play! You can't play for them. Accept that this is a two-way process and you can't just make others do what you want. You have to develop a two-way, responsive relationship, and if they are too busy reading the notes, grappling with their instruments, etc. etc. it is pointless to struggle for what cannot yet be forthcoming. (But do everything appropriate to encourage this two-way responsiveness to develop; be aware that it is the desired aim.) Above all, do not lean forward, either to begin or as they play. Such a stance is reserved for very special musical moments and should never happen merely out of an attempt to 'make them play". What you want above all is for a sense of pulse to develop internally within the group, that you somehow merely 'tap into', become a part of. Then you can influence it as required. But if that internal 'ensemble' isn't present, you will find yourself helpless.

Most of these things are really obvious, and yet to practise them successfully is not so easy for a beginner. If practised, though, they provide the perfect basis for the music-making to proceed. Memorise them as a little list that you can hold in mind as you stand for the first time in front of the group:

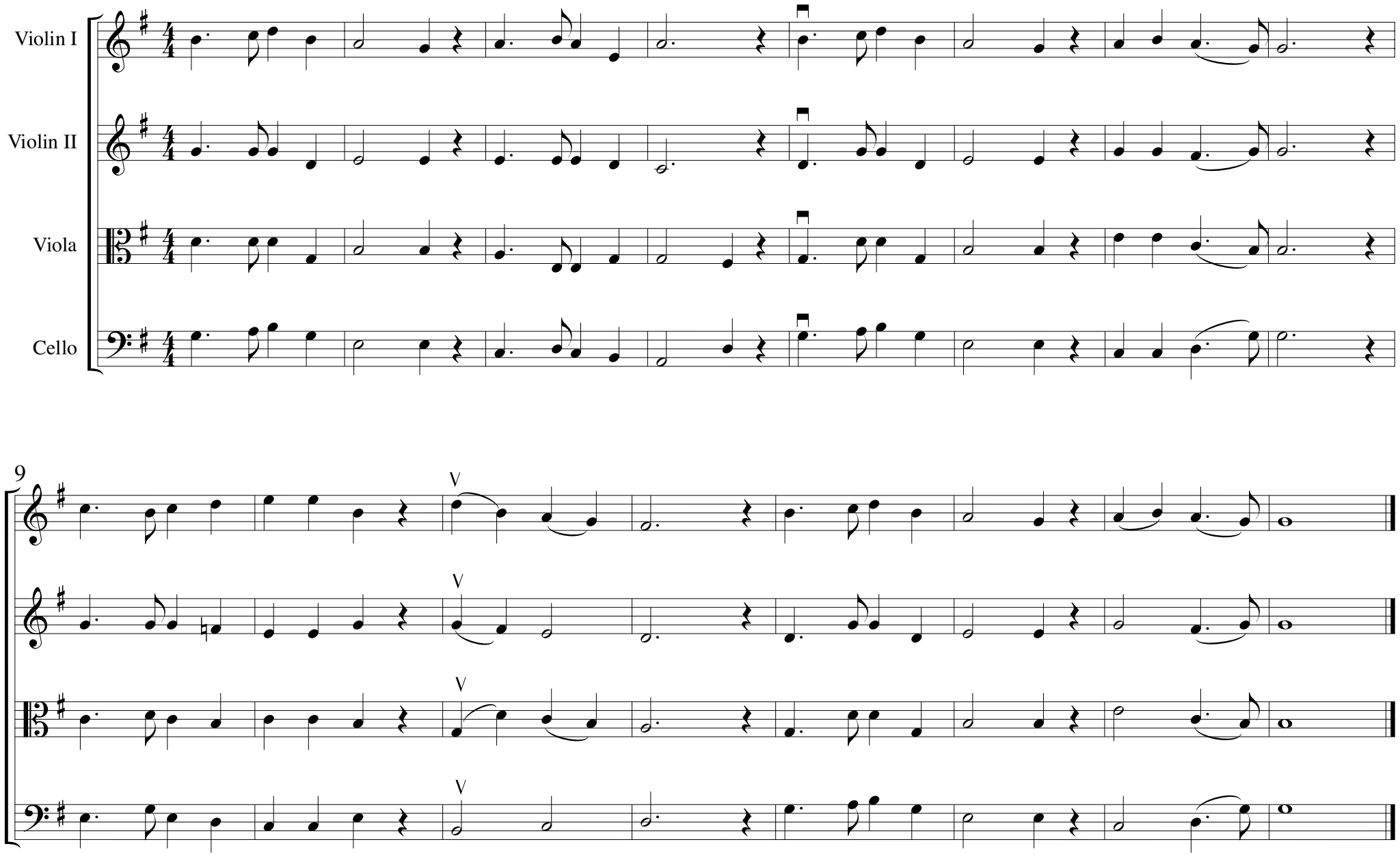
1 - Know the score.
2 - Be aware.
3 - Speak clearly, and with a gentle authority.
4 - Remain balanced and relaxed as you gather the players and start the piece & don't look down.
5 - Let them play; sense their sense of pulse and link to it.

Of course, when you are in front of the group, it is too late to consider item 1. If you haven't learnt the score, you shouldn't be in front of the group at all.

Here are some pieces that might be suitable for a class of beginners to try, playing for each other to conduct. They are the sort of repertoire you may well find yourself conducting with a school or other junior orchestra.

In the bleak mid-winter

Gustav Holst

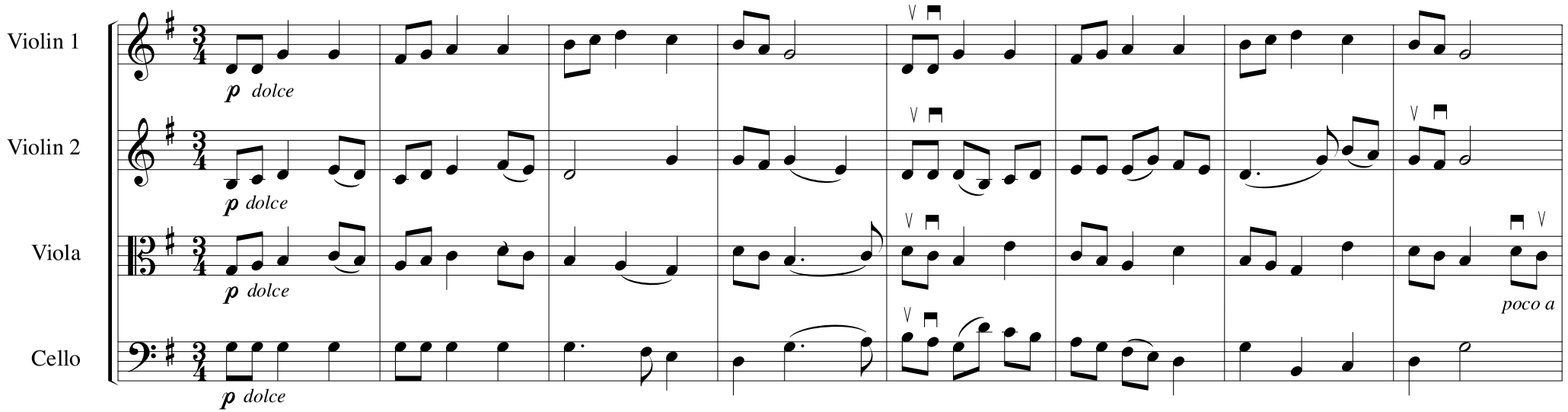


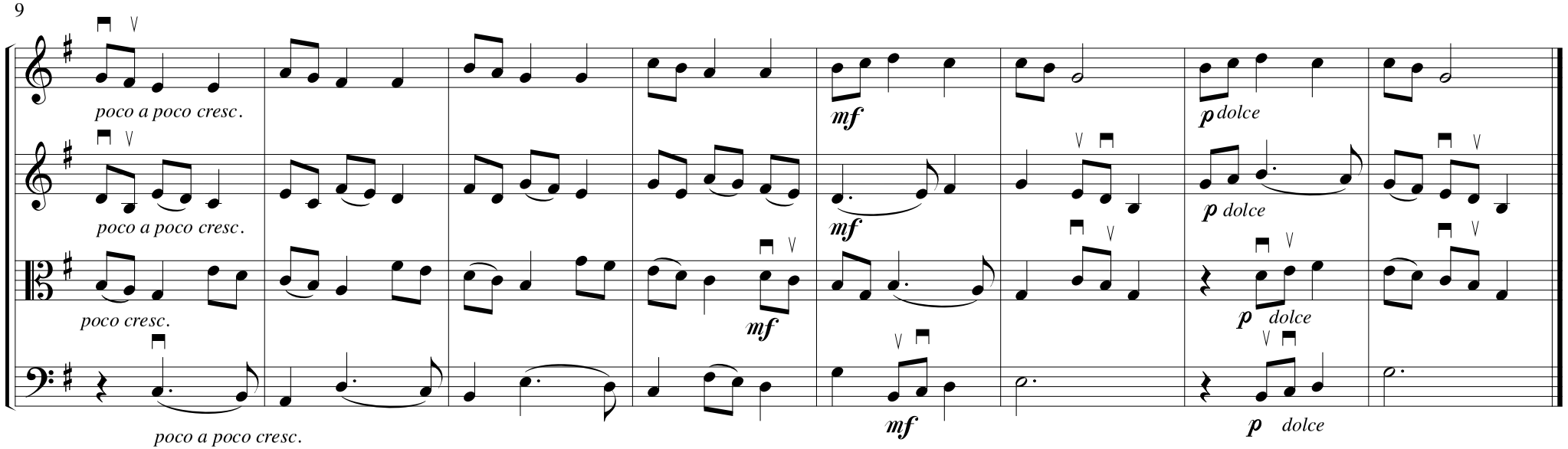
Melody by Gustav Holst (1874-1934) from The English Hymnal by permission of Oxford University Press

Infant Holy

Polish Carol, arr. A.C.

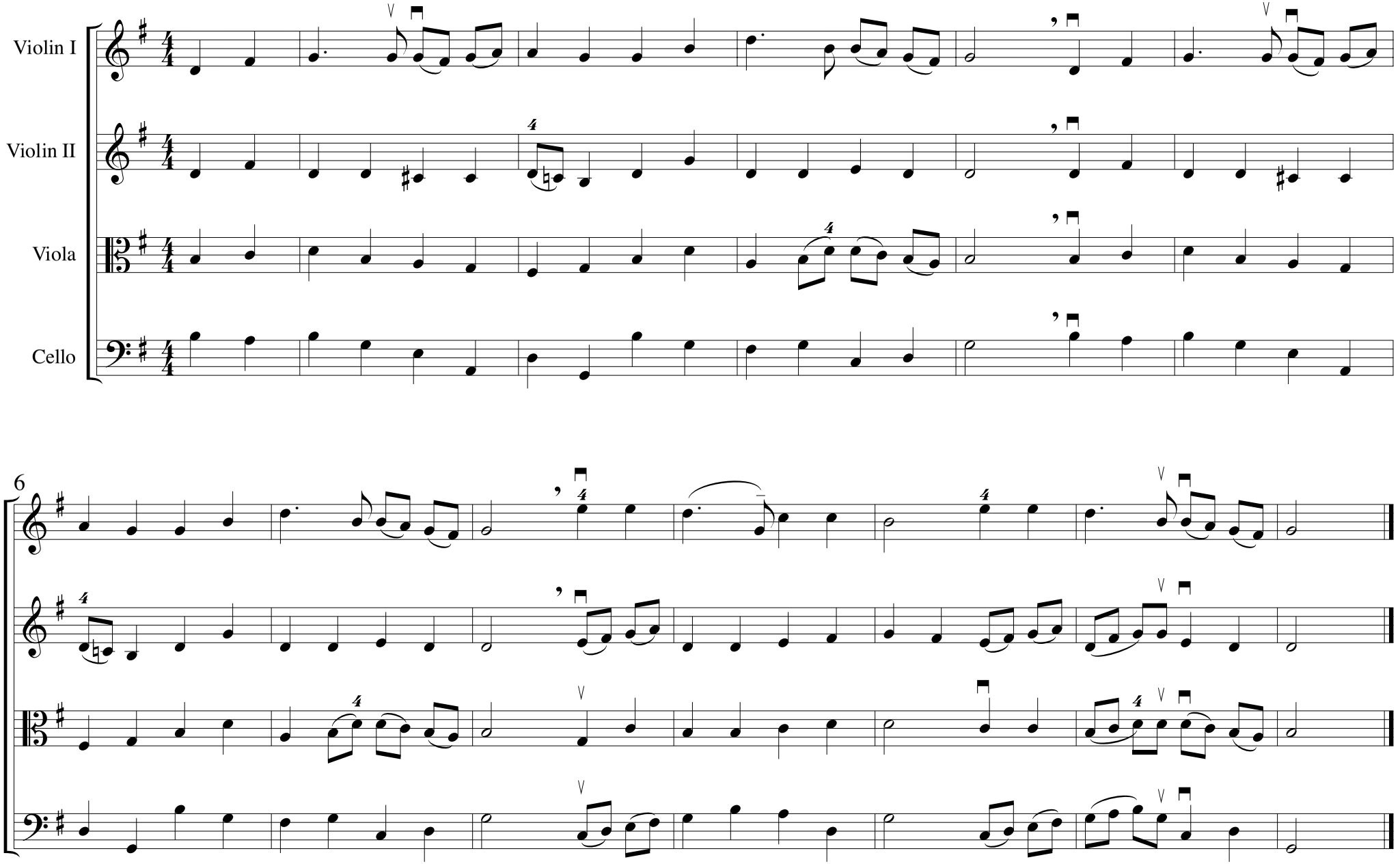
con sordine ad lib.





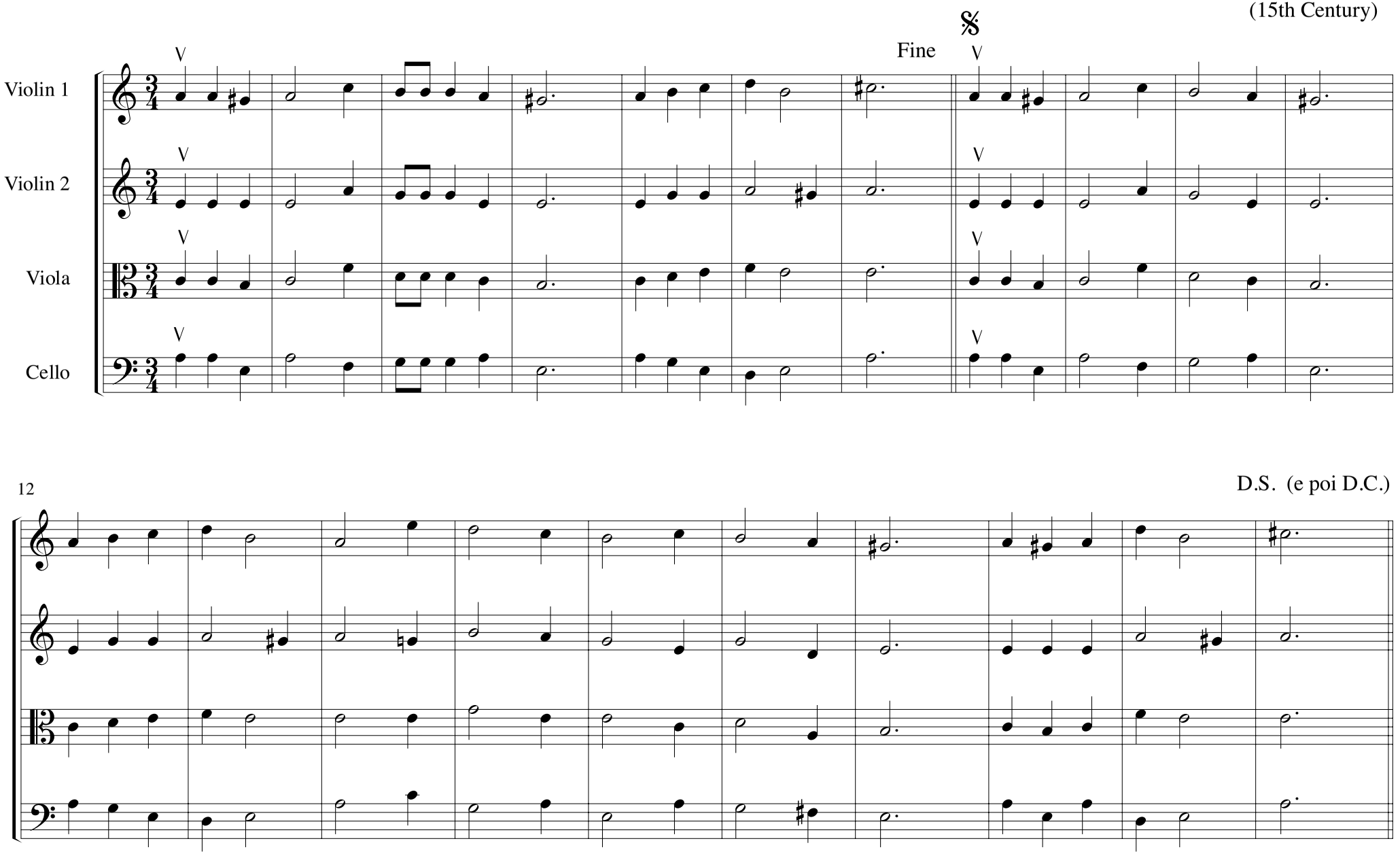
Once in Royal David's City

Gauntlett (harm. Mann)



Coventry Carol

from the Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors
(15th Century)



The Paradox of Conducting

Any musician has to discover the art of combining the expression of what he feels within and hearing with the greatest acuteness the outward results in sound of his efforts. But because the conductor has to work at one remove from the musical instruments producing the sound, this difficult requirement becomes more pronounced, even to the point almost of a paradox. He has to communicate what he wants and inspire the players towards it, yet allow them to do the actual playing, being fully aware of the quality of that playing, of their contribution.

Ideally, this process will happen so naturally that the result will feel hardly different to playing chamber music. But a beginner's first experiences of conducting can feel very strange. He has great aspirations immediately to create high and wonderful musical experiences, and then meets with the necessity of 'letting the players play'. (At least, one hopes he does; if he does not, so much the worse for him - and his players…) At this point, he does well to remember how long a pianist or a violinist must play their instrument before being able to expect to create fire and brimstone, and how gently a good teacher will take them through the early stages of technique and tone production in order to build up a foundation and an approach capable of effectively and securely producing fire. When he then realises that his 'instrument' is not a wooden box or a set of stretched wires but a group of living human beings, he may begin to see why this book repeatedly lays stress on the importance of awareness. Of course, a conductor must know what he wants, but it is the players who must produce it. And the very best conducting hopes to go far beyond the mere wishes of the mere conductor, to become a channel for something greater - the spirit of the music, shared by conductor and players alike in a free and living unity. This can only happen when the players are as active in contributing to the music as the conductor.

Such a relationship can only be founded on awareness. Whether one is conducting a school choir or aspiring to the heights of professional music-making, this matter of awareness is so fundamental that I make it the subject of my next chapter, ahead of several technical issues that might seem more immediate. They are not.

Stage Four: Awareness and Whole Body Flow

awareness
whole body flow
T'ai-Chi Chuan
principles
drama v. tone-quality
first exercises
stance
waist-turning
arm-swinging
pushing
waving hands in the clouds

Awareness

The fifth of the golden rules in the previous stage was to do everything you can to allow the development of sensitivity and awareness between yourself and the players, in both directions, in order to allow a healthy, responsive flow of music-making to grow. This can be a slow process for inexperienced conductors or players to acquire, but is really the 'sine qua non' of conducting and explains why it is possible, as mentioned in the introduction, for certain choral conductors or even famous orchestral conductors to break all the rules and yet obtain outstanding results - they have this two-way partnership with their singers and players.

However, if one is unaware, how is one to become aware? And if already partially aware, how does one become more aware?

Whole Body Flow

Indirectly, a conductor's instrument is the choir or orchestra he is conducting. Directly, it is his body. And though the focus in conducting is primarily on the arms and face, no part of the body is separate from the rest. The body is a unity.

Businessmen commonly study body language in order to improve their work. The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, for years while it had the money, paid for its players to receive lessons in Alexander Technique. Countless instrumental musicians in London found it of immense value to receive regular advice and help from Jean Gibson, a woman who knew comparatively little about music but a great deal about the use of the body. Is it not appropriate, therefore, for a conductor, whose body movements constitute the essence of his art, to study the use of the body?

T'ai-Chi Chuan

About 500 years before Christ, a Chinaman called Lao-Tsu, disillusioned with society, rode towards the Tibetan desert. A border guard, however, persuaded him to write down his spiritual philosophy, as best he could, before leaving the country. The result was a set of short, pithy verses known as the Tao Te Ching (or Dao De Jing) - 'The Book of the Way' - that has survived as one of the most beautiful treasures of the civilised world and that became the seed of Taoism, that approach to life that is neither a philosophy nor a religion, and yet somehow incorporates much of the essence of both.

Around 1300 A.D., a successful Chinese boxer called Chang San-Feng, attracted by Taoism, decided to retire to a life of meditation in the country. He continued, however, to practise his martial art each morning for its beneficial effects on his body and mind. During his practice one day he happened to witness the nearby fight of a crane and a snake. The crane knew only how to stab and attack the snake. The snake, however, responded to the crane, flowed with its movements, yielded to the stabs so that they lost their effect, became aware of the bird's strengths and weaknesses, and so was able to overcome it.

The boxer realised that in the flexibilty and awareness of the snake he had witnessed a physical demonstration of the principles of Taoism and that if he applied those principles to his own martial art he would achieve a 'Supreme Ultimate Boxing' or 'T'ai-Chi Chuan'. In outlaw-ridden China, this extraordinarily effective form of self-defence became very popular. But more than that, the monk had found a way of putting the principles of Taoism into the whole of physical life. Though the outer format was that of a martial art, what the practitioner was actually learning was the physical use of the body and its energy, and the harmonious unity of the body and mind in a simple and clear awareness; in brief, how to live effectively - and for our purposes here in this book, how to develop both awareness and whole body flow.

Principles

In recent decades, T'ai-Chi has become quite popular in Europe and America. However, if a class is being sought, it is important to find one that places importance not simply on the external movements of the 'form' but, even more, on the principles for which the form is merely a practice vehicle. Some of the most basic of these are:

- Using a natural, relaxed contact of the body with the ground - 'making friends with the earth'.
- Breathing low with the diaphragm, rather than just with the top of the lungs.
- Keeping the knees gently unlocked to allow a 'link' between the lower spine and the soles of the feet.
- Generating movement from the feet and the ground and directing it by means of the waist towards the upper body and arms.
- To remain yielding and flexible in ones thinking and in ones movements and to develop a unified flow of mind and body.

Drama v. tone-quality

Many readers may object, after reading this list of priciples, that music expresses the whole gamut of human emotions, often including much tension and drama. The conductor's body must likewise be free to adopt all manner of tensions, otherwise the musical expression becomes entirely bland.

This is, of course, true. But one needs to consider the way a beginner instrumentalist must begin with tone-production, not dramatic expression. A beginner conductor should build his art from the ground up in the same way. The final result must incorporate beautiful tone-quality, even in the midst of expressing some quite extreme and even tormented emotions. This is the miracle of classical music, that it attempts to do this.

First Exercises

This is not an introduction to T'ai-Chi, still less any sort of a course in it. I will simply take a few very simple 'warm-up' exercises that can help to give a taste of its principles. Just because a mere half-year of weekly classes and daily practice transformed my own conducting and rehearsing*, I do not suggest that everyone would benefit quite as I did. But all young conductors owe it to themselves to give themselves a small taste of these exercises, both in case they should wish to take it further and to ensure that their basic stance and use of the body aids the playing and singing rather than interfering with it.

The exercises may on the surface seem absurdly simple and undemanding; but they are the perfect vehicle for first attempting to practise the principles listed earlier. It is those principles that you should be practising, and cannot if you are having to focus too much on the outer format, on complex exterior movements.

Stance

Stand with the feet a shoulder-width apart, the arms loose and the shoulders dropped. Let the breathing relax downwards so that you are using the diaphragm muscle (that lies underneath the lungs) rather than the top of the lungs.

The natural curve of the spine at the small of the back can tend to get lost when sitting, but exaggerated when standing. Therefore when sitting (especially when singing or playing an instrument) care should be taken to maintain this curve. When standing, however, it should if anything be lessened. Both T'ai-Chi and Alexander Technique specialists actually recommend straightening it entirely, so that the lower spine is vertical. This greatly increases the 'connection' between the lower spine and the soles of the feet, between the sitting bones and the heels, as long as the knees are not locked.

This position could at first seem the very antithesis of lively, dramatic music-making. But try it out anyway. With time, you will discover more and more the conflict between dramatically tense gestures and a rounded, free tonal quality. When you are fully aware of this problem that lies so much at the heart of conducting, you may also discover that this posture attribute - a nearly vertical lower spine connected to the feet with the knees not locked - is the solution to it. A full sweep and range of dramatic expression and power can be given full rein without ever interfering with tone-quality. In discovering this, you will have done your players and singers an inestimable service.

Hip-turning - 1

Leaving the feet still and the weight sunk (lower spine to soles of feet), turn the hips gently from side to side. As you turn to the right, let 70% of the weight go into the right foot, and vice versa. Leaving the arms quite ‘empty’ and relaxed, let them swing a little as a result of the waist movement. Should the arm movement feel unnatural, as if you have to do it artificially, don’t make it but just leave the arms loose at your side, or make only the tiniest movements.

*The mental change that came with T'ai-Chi altered my rehearsing dramatically. Instead of struggling to get what I wanted from the players and singers (they were amateurs), I relaxed and allowed myself to make contact with where they were. Having once done this, I was then able to lead them on in the direction I wanted without ever losing that contact. The progress and results were hugely better.

Hip-turning - 2

footwork:

Putting the weight fully into the left foot, turn the hips to the right and let the toe of the right foot turn out, that foot turning on the heel with the toe just free of the ground. Return the hips, weight and right foot to their original positions and continue the flow in the other direction, so that the weight goes into the right foot, the hips turn to the left and the left toe turns out.

Return again to the original position and continue alternating either direction. Create a smooth flow of movement. Keep the relation between the lower spine and the soles of the feet and pass the weight smoothly between the feet as if at floor level; do not let the weight rise as it is passed from foot to foot.

arms:

Leave the arms hanging empty and loose. As you move into a good flow with the hip movements, allow the arms to swing gently around the body. When a certain momentum is achieved with the hips and feet, this can result in the arm-swing opening out just a little, but take care that this does not become an independent movement of the arms. If it becomes at all artificial in this way, leave the arms hanging loose again. Allow the arms to bump against the body freely.

Hip-turning - 3

footwork:

This is much the same as the second exercise except that, instead of the toe turning out, the heel turns in, the foot swivelling lightly on the ball and the heel just free of the ground. Be sure to remain sunk (lower spine to soles of feet) on the foot that is taking the weight, and to pass the weight from foot to foot without rising in any way.

arms:

Do not add any arm-movement till the footwork is safe and fluent.

Then, begin with the arms gently lifted in a suggestion of a T-shape. As you turn the hips to the right and the right heel comes in, let the arms fall in a swing, with the left arm passing in front of the body and the right behind.

As the hips turn back to face the centre, their movement should produce a swing that lifts the arms back to their open position. Then, when the hips turn left, let the arms fall the other way, with the right arm in front and the left behind.

Continue these movements, the arms never splaying out in front or behind, but remaining as if in a narrow corridor running from ones left to ones right. At no time lift the arms with their own muscles, but only ever by means of the swing from the hips. If this does not come right, return to doing the footwork only, leaving the arms limp to swing loosely and bump against the body as they will.

Arm-swinging - 1

Check that your heels are shoulder-width apart, then place your right foot directly forward a small step, thus maintaining the same left to right distance between the heels, regardless of the now larger diagonal distance between them. (If the floor has tiles or other similar markings, these can be useful for checking this.) The forward foot should face directly forwards, while the back foot is turned out at 45°. The weight rests 70% on the backward foot. The shoulders are directly above the hips and the arms are loose and empty. The knees are unlocked, producing a certain feeling of 'sitting down' about the posture.

Keeping the shoulders over the hips, move forward to bring 70% of the weight into the forward foot. Return to the back foot and continue alternating. The passing of the weight remains 'inside' the two feet, never going past the front foot or behind the back one. The weight remains 'sunk' throughout, never rising as you move from foot to foot.

At the same time, the arms are allowed to swing gently back and forth in a rhythm twice that of the movement of the body. (The body movement should not be too fast.)

After a while, reverse the position of the feet, checking carefully for shoulder-width, for feet-angles and for a proper 'sunk' feeling before beginning to swing.

Arm-swinging - 2

footwork:

Begin from the same position as the previous exercise, the right foot one pace in front of the left, and a shoulder-width apart from it, the weight 70% on the back foot. Transfer the weight 100% to the right foot, place the left foot one step in front of the right - keeping shoulder-width - and transfer 70% of the weight into it. Then, again passing the weight via the right foot, bring the left foot back to its original position and weight.

Continue stepping forwards and backwards with the left foot, passing the weight low always, keeping the shoulders directly above the hips, and keeping also the relation of the lower spine to the soles of the feet. Set up a steady, even rhythm.

arms:

The arms, hanging loose and empty, again swing at a rhythm twice that at which the weight is passed between the feet - one full swing of the arms, forwards and backwards, for each single transfer of weight from one foot to the another, four swings for an entire cycle of the footwork.

Repeat the exercise, stepping with the right foot instead of the left.

Pushing

Adopt the same opening position as for 'Arm-swinging - 1', with the right foot pointing ahead and the left foot at 45%. Place 70% of the weight in the left foot and 'sit down' with the spine. Now place the left hand, palm up, close to the left hip and the right hand, palm forward, about a foot in front of the body. The waist is facing a little left of centre.

As you turn the waist to face slightly right of centre, transfer the weight 70% to the right foot. At the same time, the left hand turns palm forwards and comes to a position in front of the body, while the right hand turns palm up and comes back beside the right hip. Then, as you return 70% of the weight to the left foot, the hands return to their first position. Continue the movements in a flowing manner, neither rushing through nor stopping at the forward and backward turn-around points.

The forward hand never goes beyond the forward knee and the knee never goes beyond the toes. At the end of each forward movement, the hand, knee and toes are more or less in line.

Repeat the exercise in mirror form, beginning with the left foot and hand forward, weight 70% in the right foot and right hand by the right hip.

Cross-energy

It is a principle of T'ai-Chi that the energy produced by either leg from its contact with the ground is passed to the opposite side of the body for applied use. The arm movements in the above exercise represent a push in the forward movement and a twist and pull (for instance, of an opponent's arm) in the backward movement. But since both actions are taking place simultaneously, one with either arm, which is the active arm at any one moment depends on which leg the weight is in. In fact, for a full push or a full pull, the weight would need to be on the opposite leg for all of the action, the energy being directed purely by the turning of the waist. Since the present exercise transfers the weight between the legs, it actually represents first the turning and drawing down of an opponent's arm with one hand and then the applying of pressure to the opponent's over-turned elbow with the other: an arm-lock.

Waving hands in the clouds

Stand with the feet parallel and shoulder-width apart, the weight 70% in the left foot. Hold both arms at shoulder height in front of the chest, palms in. (Do not raise the shoulders in doing this.) Leave the knees unlocked, sensing the connection between the lower spine and the soles of the feet.

As you turn the waist to the right (with the weight 70% on the left leg) let the left arm fall to waist level and turn palm up, while the right arm turns palm down. The palms are now looking at each other, as if holding a large ball.

Return the waist to the centre and the arms to their original position. Then continue the movement of the waist to the left, passing the weight 70% to the right foot and allowing the right arm to fall, palm up, while the left turns palm down.

Return to the right, reversing the arms, then again to the left and so on, flowing directly through the centre point each time.

The raised arm represents an elbow-strike and the lowered one a shoulder-strike or push. Because of cross-energy, the above version of the exercise would represent elbow-strikes, but it could be tried with the weight going to the same foot as the direction in which the waist is turned, to sense how it works as shoulder-strikes.

Recommended Centres

For centres throughout the UK, contact:

John Ding International Academy of T'ai-Chi Chuan
Maybank House,
208 Maybank Rd.
South Woodford,
London E18 1ET

tel. (+44) 208 - 502 9307

e-mail: jdiatcc@taichiwl.demon.co.uk

Centres in Ireland:

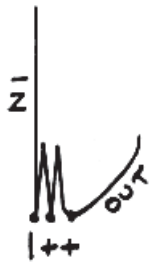
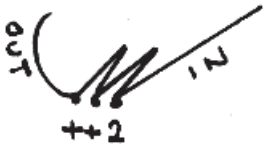
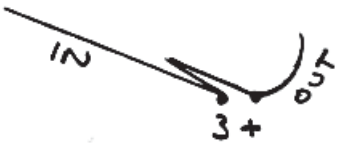
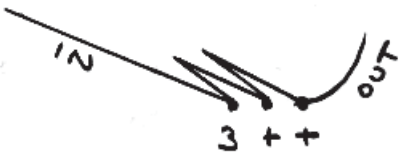
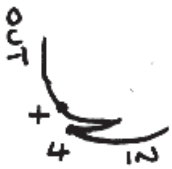
Cork:	Peter O'Donoghue - 021 450 1600 (The Natural Healing Centre, Thompson House, MacCurtain St., Cork)
Dublin:	Neil Drew - 012 810 722
	Louise Meade - 012 858 152
	Chris Davala - 012 801 740
Ennis:	Caroline Roden - 065 682 2591
Galway:	Niall O'Florinn - 091 584 100
	Kevin Dudley - 061 921 478
Limerick:	Nick Gudge - 061 923 023

Stage 5:
Subdivisions

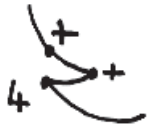
subdivided patterns
musical examples
'French' v. 'German'

Subdivided Patterns

When the tempo is slow, it becomes necessary to divide the beat, either in two for simple time (2/4, 3/4, 4/4) or into three for compound time (6/8, 9/8, 12/8). To do this, make the 'IN' of the beat bounce back from the click of the beat the way you came; in compound time, do this a second time. Then repeat the click, this time flowing on through the 'OUT' of the beat.

	simple time	compound time
downbeat		
2nd beat		
3rd beat		
up-beat		

The only modification to this comes for upbeats in compound time. The upbeat has the least natural feel of all the beats - the click of any beat generally wants to go down (using gravity), yet the direction of this beat is in and up - and a certain amount of practice may be needed before it feels right. But to repeat a beat three times in that direction is almost inevitably ungainly, and so the pattern is softened into a Christmas-tree-like shape:



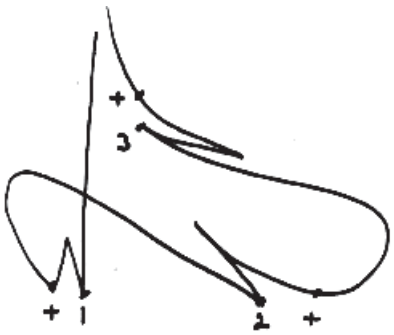
Thus the divided 2, 3 and 4-time patterns look like this:

Simple Time:

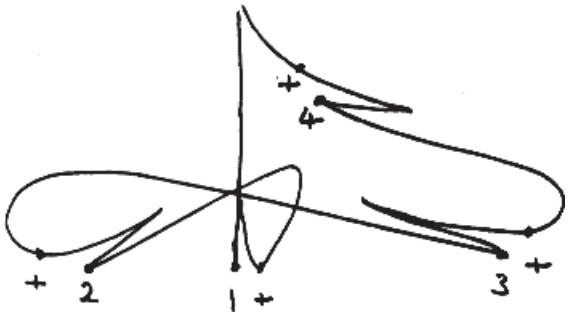
(also 2/2, 3/2, 4/2 etc.)

2
4

3
4



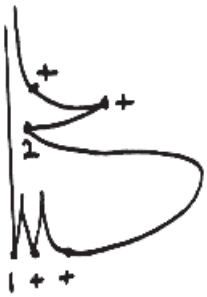
4
4



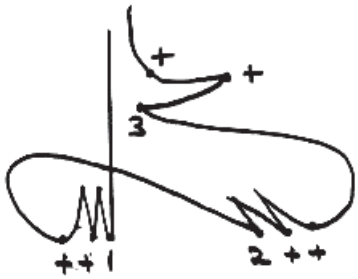
Compound Time:

(also 6/4, 9/4, 12/4 etc.)

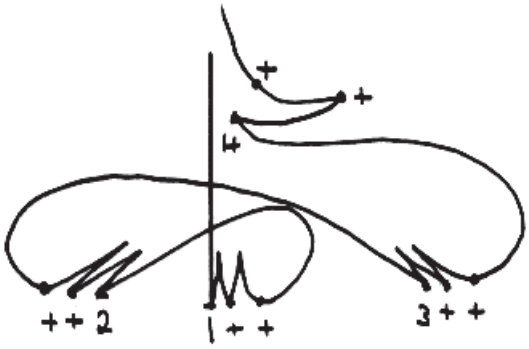
6
8



9
8

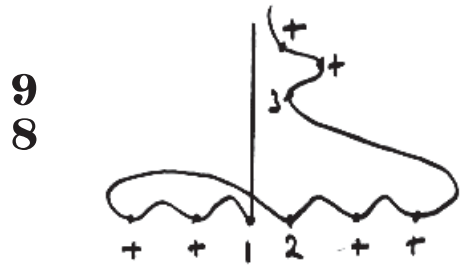


12
8



The retraces should be small, but come out of the last sub-divsiion of each beat full size again.

The important rule to remember in all this is not to stress the subdivision more than you need. In the above diagrams, the repetitions of the beat have been shown taking place alongside each other, since to draw them taking place on the exact same spot would not show on the page. But equally, they could be drawn in a more directional flow for a more fluid effect:



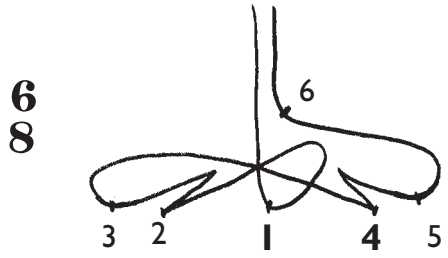
The other variable besides the placing of the subdivisions is their size, how far back you retrace the beat for its repetition. Naturally this is a larger distance the more emphasis you want. The main problem with subdivisions is avoiding an unnatural stress on them, and in a flowing tempo (e.g. 'Morning Has Broken', see below), it becomes important to retrace the beat only the most minimal amount so that the subdivisions almost melt away. If one adds to this the flowing, wavy motion just drawn, the instruction becomes not to retrace the beat minimally, but to rise on the wave only minimally.

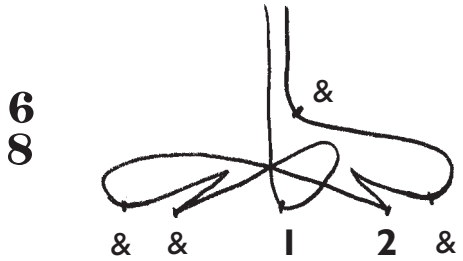
Musical Examples

Here are some examples for practice, beginning with some simple melodies in compound time. 'Silent Night' is only one of many that could be found in 6/8 time. (The rhythm is bars 5 & 7 is Grüber's original, much less turgid than that usually heard.) It is rare for pieces in 9/8 or 12/8 to be slow enough to merit subdivision; the pattern is required normally only in order to control rallentandi. However, 'Morning has broken' can live roughly on the dividing line when used as a hymn (though it should go faster as a song with Eleanor Farjeon's words), while 'Ardaigh Cuain' I have written in 12/8 instead of 6/8 in order to provide practice material. The carol, 'A great and mighty wonder', gives a little practice in pattern security. Then follow some more advanced examples taken from the classical repertoire.

'French' v. 'German'

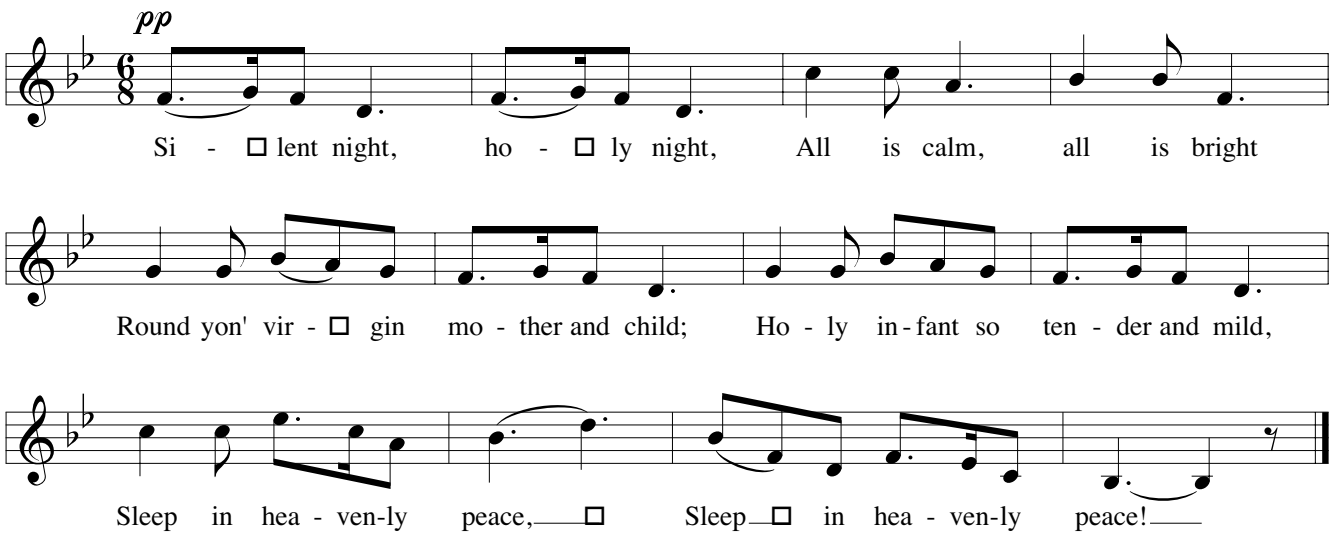
There is another way of conducting six, based on the four pattern and repeating the second and third beats. It is known as the 'German' six, whereas what has been taught above is known as the 'French' six. The German pattern has no equivalent for 9/8 or 12/8 when it must revert to the 'French' approach, and is therefore inconsistent. But much worse, it is unable to cope with a borderline tempo where one wishes only to hint at the subdivisions, a situation arising not just in pieces at a certain tempo, but also with any rallentando requiring a change from two to six beats. Only at much slower speeds does it become possible to argue in favour of the 'German' six - that it 'fills out' the bar with its movements in four different directions, and that it is possibly slightly clearer to the players since it involves less repetition of the beats. You must make up your own mind which you prefer, but do so on the basis of reasonable fluency and experience with both patterns, not just a casual quick try or what feels immediately easier. Every musical occasion is different, so have both up your sleeve for use as seems best. The two Brahms excerpts (pages 50 & 51) provide examples of, first, a slow, filled-out six tempo, and second, a lilting two-in-a-bar that just needs a hint of the subdivisions.





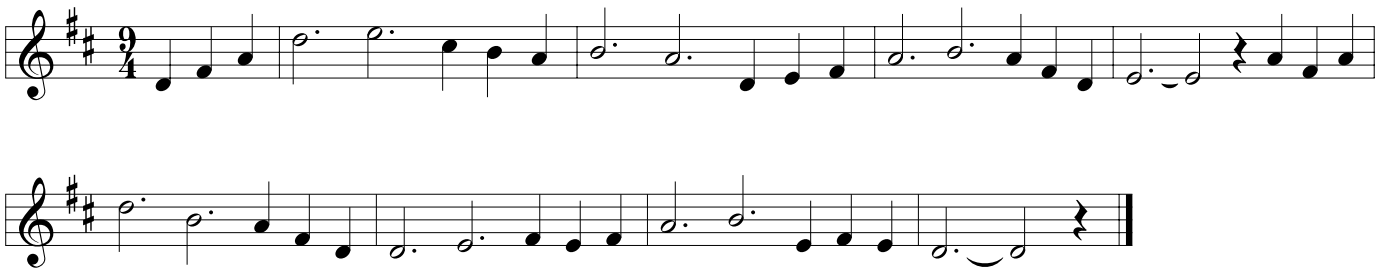
Silent Night

Franz Grüber
(1787-1863)



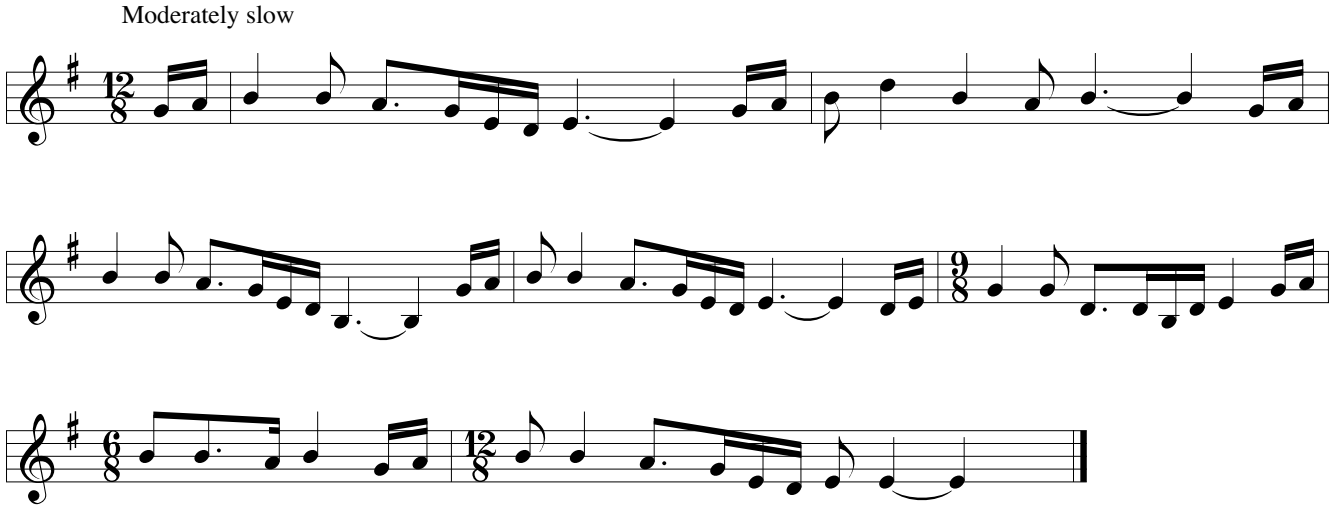
(Morning has broken)

Old Irish melody



Ardaigh Cuain

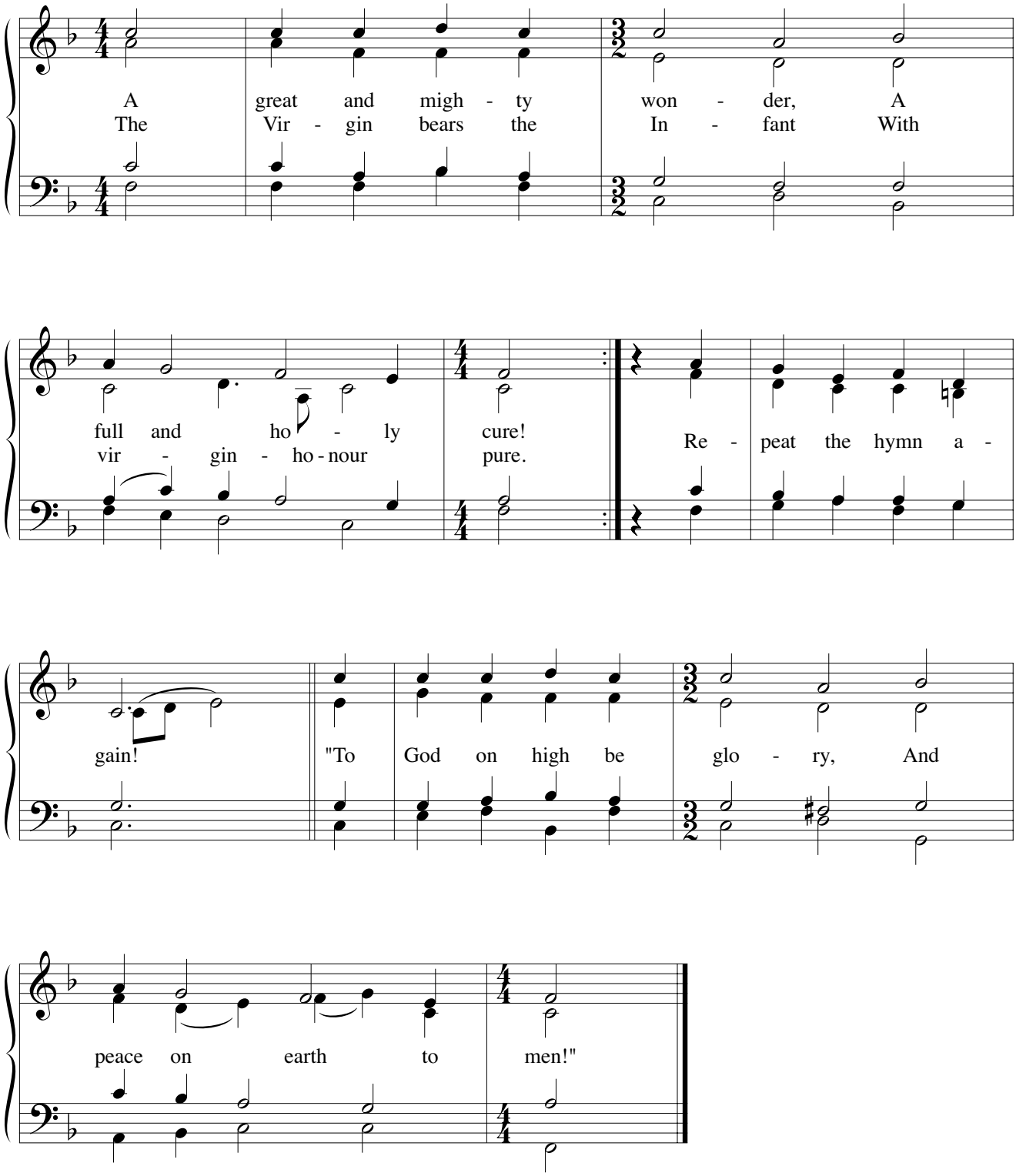
trad. Irish



A great and mighty wonder

14th century German melody
harmonised by Michael Praetorius (1571-1621)

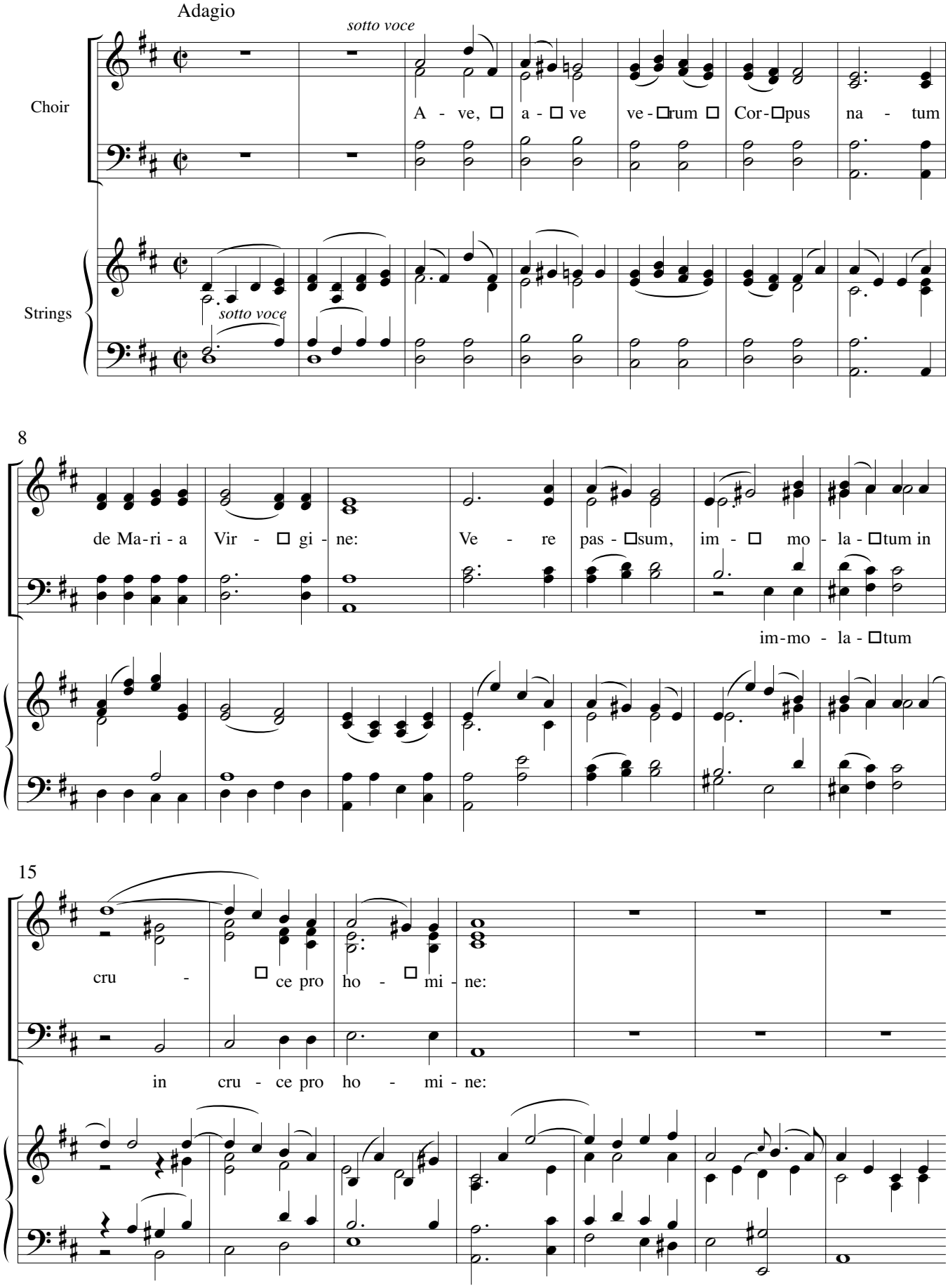
The melody in the third full bar might seem to invite a six-four subdivision (compound duple), rather than a three-two (simple triple), and it might be worth practising it that way simply for pratice. However, the bass line does establish the bar as firmly in three-two.



Ave Verum Corpus (1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(Austrian, 1756 - 1791)

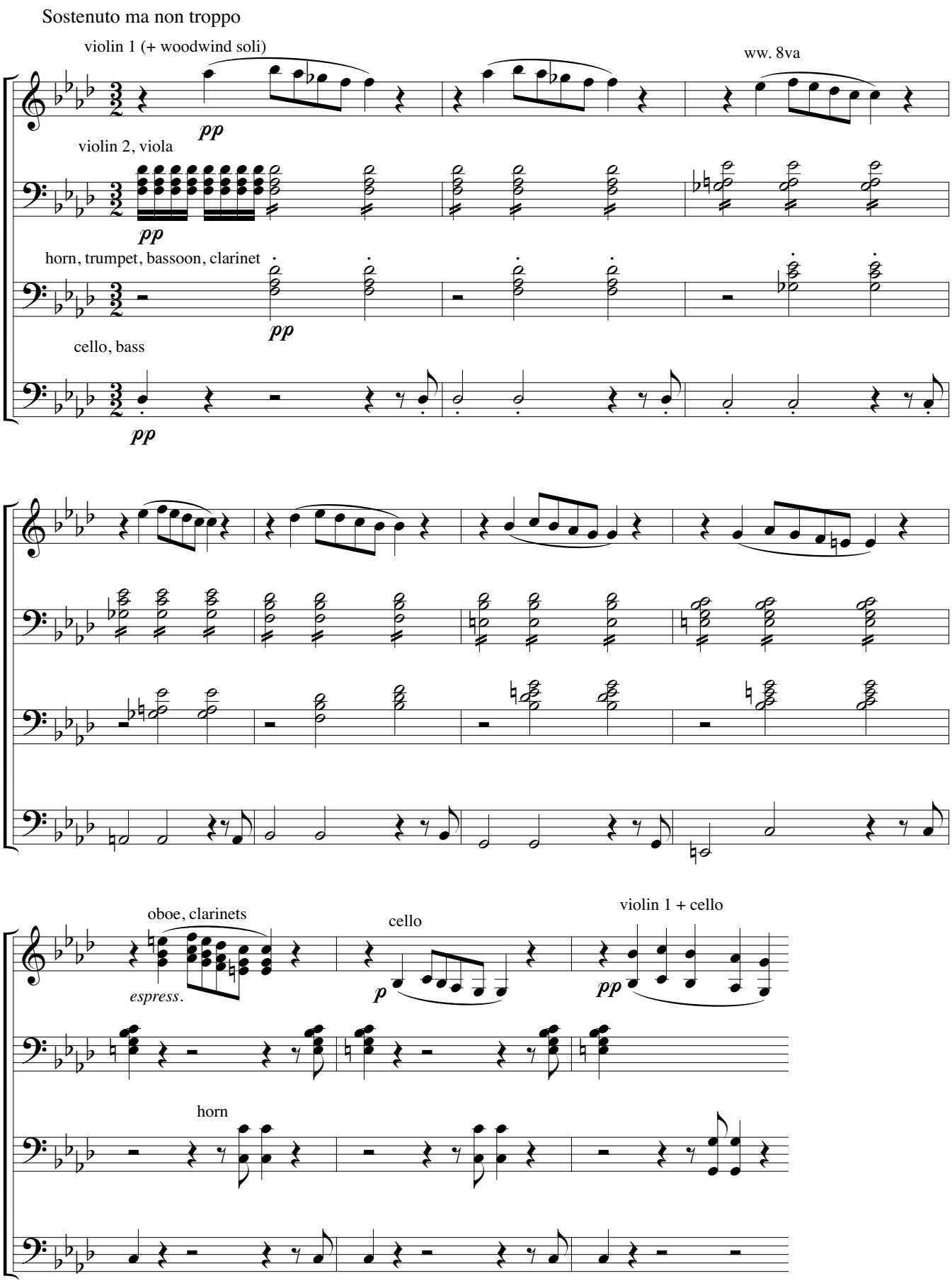
This piece is often conducted in four, but Mozart gave it an alla breve time-signature. Try it both ways for yourself - in four, and in a divided two - and see whether feeling a minim pulse as opposed to a crotchet one doesn't help the music float six inches above the ground as it should. Never be cavalier about a composer's markings. Indeed, try the piecewith actual minim beats; you may find you like it best.



Overture to 'Egmont' (1810) (bars 15 - 24)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(German, 1770 - 1827)

This passage combines plaintively lyrical phrases with the urgent rhythmic motive from the overture's opening in the bass, held together with a staccato quaver accompaniment. The conductor's first duty is to secure the ensemble of the semiquavers, which means a clear beat. This can be done discreetly enough not to interfere with the lyrical phrases, but the urgency of the bass motive has to be acknowledged also. Try comparing the beat you might give for the 2nd violins with that for the 1sts, and then find something that incorporates both. Do this also with the 2nd violins and the cello/bass. Then try something to include all three, the needs of the 2nd violins always accounted for.

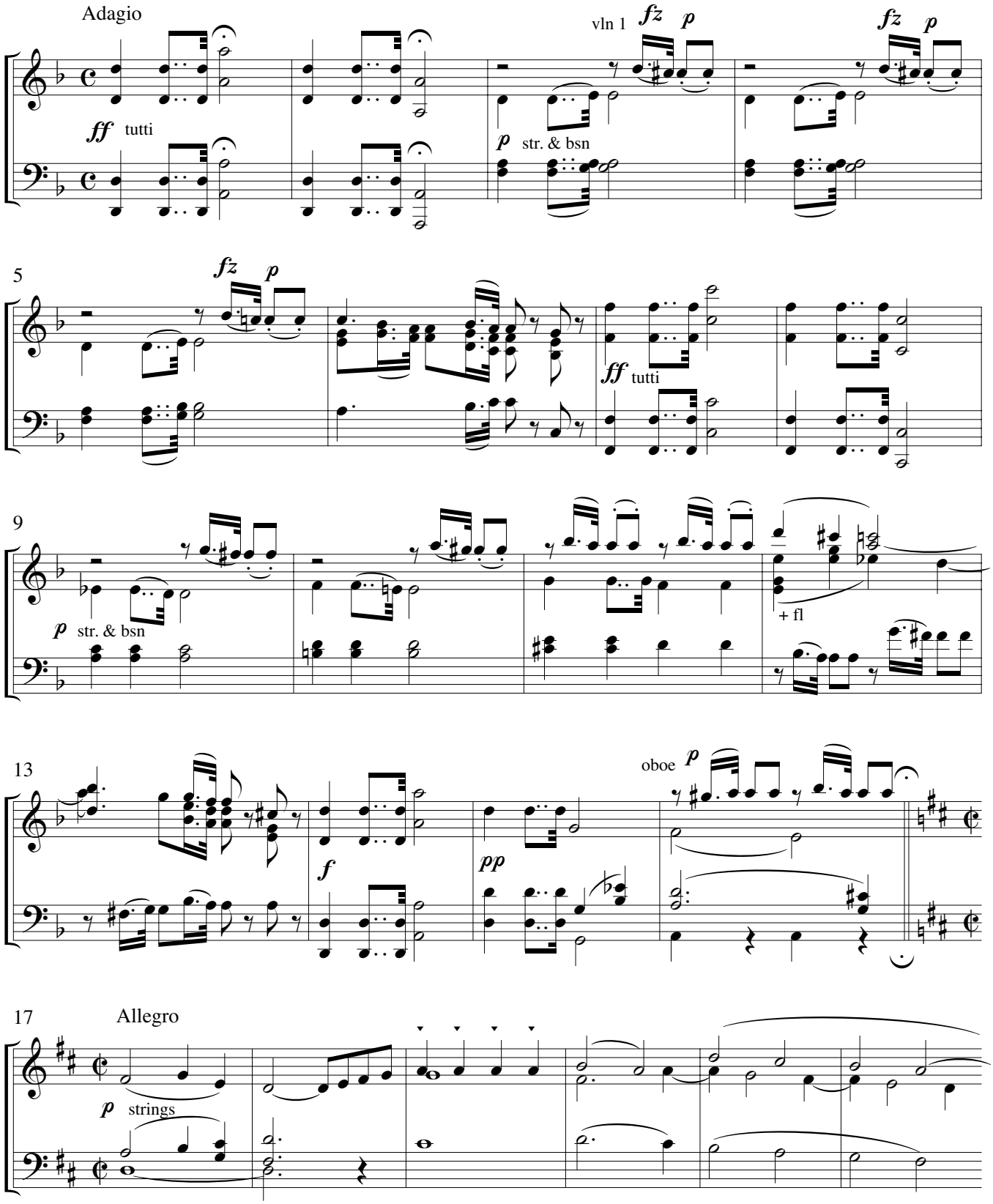


Symphony No. 104 (1794), 1st mvt. (opening)

Joseph Haydn
(Austrian, 1732 - 1809)

A full discussion of pauses in the middle of a piece of music will take place in chapter 9. For the time being, treat the pauses here like final ones, taking them off with an anti-clockwise circle, but let the moment of cut-off from the first pause become a quaver upbeat to the second bar. You may prefer to wait with the hand still a short moment after the second pause before giving a gentle quaver upbeat to the third bar.

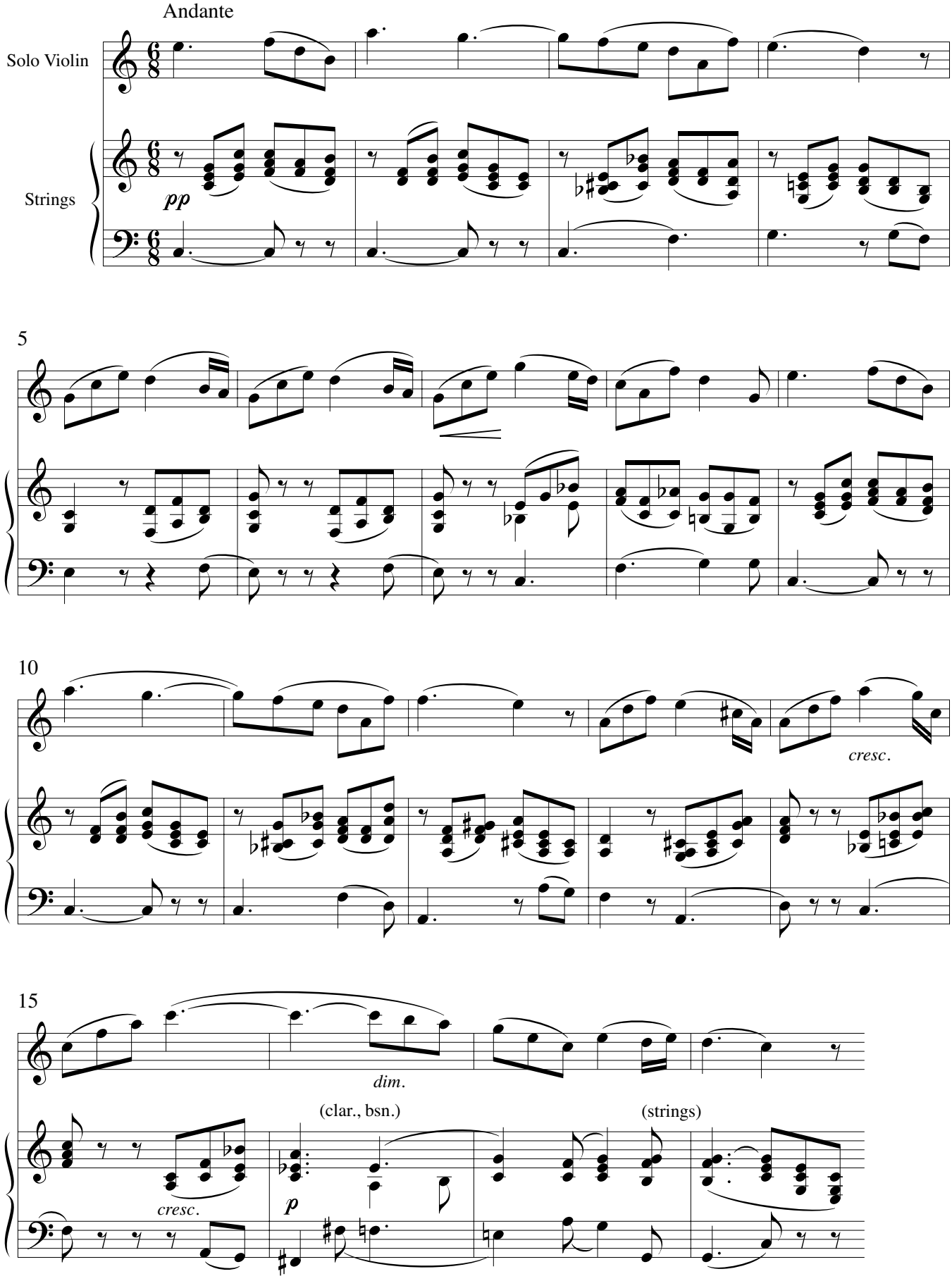
The important thing to remember when subdividing symphonic slow introductions is that though they may be marked Adagio, that 'Adagio' refers to the crotchet pulse, not the quaver one! You must be able to give a flowing eight-in-a-bar that feels like a 'leisurely' (Adagio) four.



Violin Concerto (1844) - 2nd mvt. (theme)

Felix Mendelssohn
(German, 1809-1847)

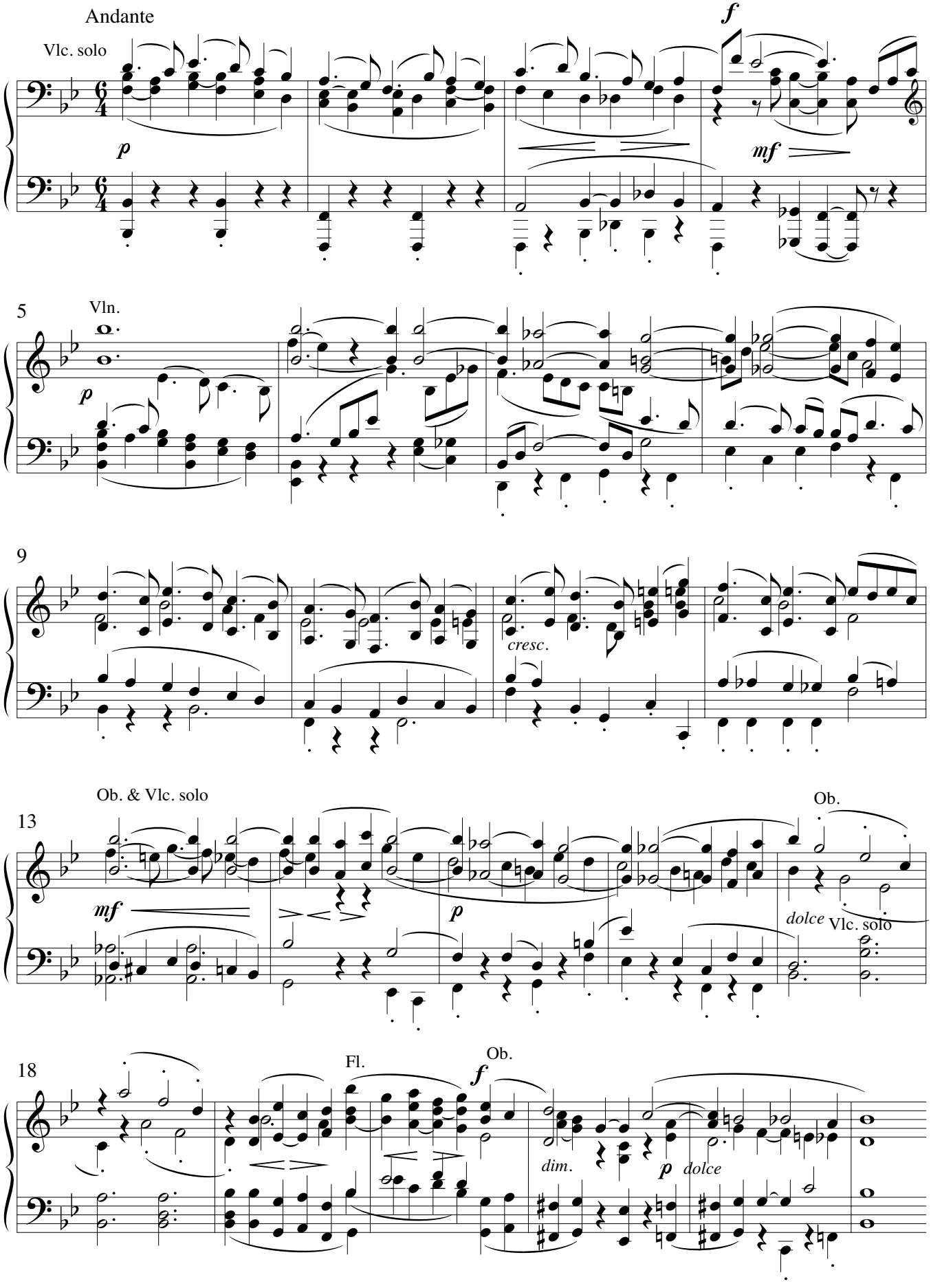
A fine example of the need for a flowing legato beat, neither pedestrian nor hurrying. Accompaniments, though usually light, must never be dull, but sing in their own way, aiding and supporting the soloist in perfect unity and identification.



Piano Concerto No 2 in B flat (1881) - 3rd mvt. (opening)

Johannes Brahms
(German, 1833-1897)

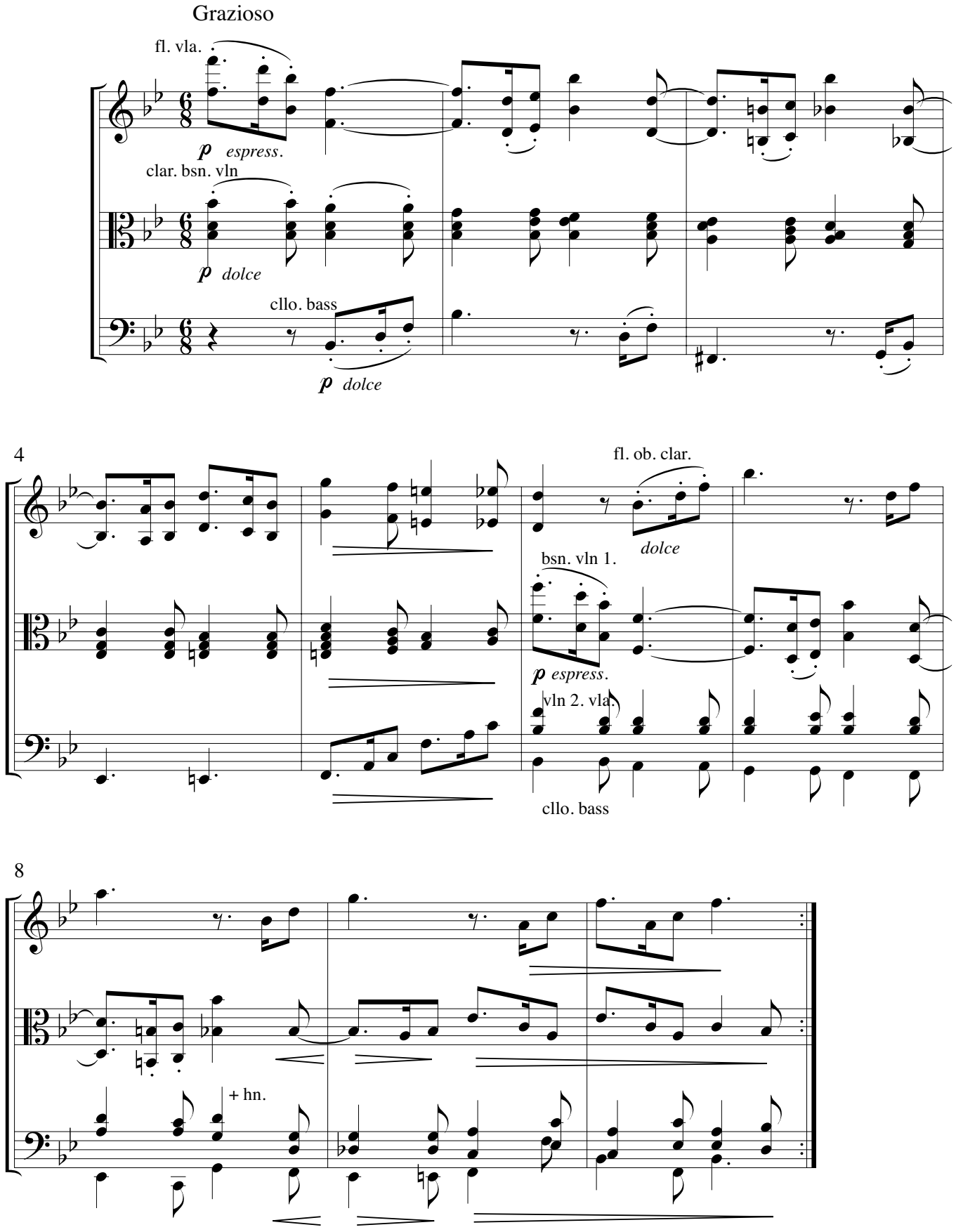
It was an obsession of Brahms to explore the expressive effect of placing two-beat phrases against a three-beat pulse. For this, again, a legato beat is necessary, but with an even firmer line - with a corresponding firmer grip of the baton.



Variation 7, from Variations on a theme of Joseph Haydn (1873)

Johannes Brahms
(German, 1833-1897)

The 'German' pattern, based on four and repeating the second and third beats, cannot achieve the limpid, lilting quality of this movement as successfully as that based on dividing the two pattern. That 'French' pattern enables one to beat basically in two but to hint at six, a perfect reflection of this music's nature.



Stage 6:
Pauses & Rallentandi

pauses
pausing in the middle of a piece
pausing at the end of a piece
rallentandi

Pauses

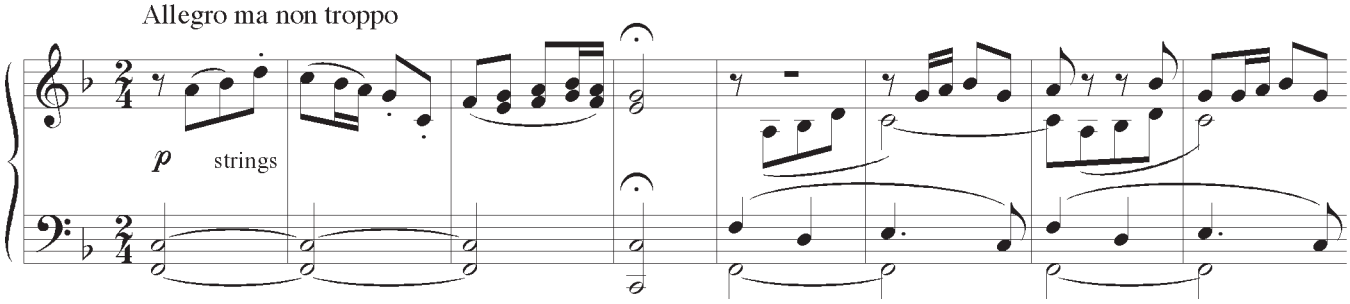
What is a pause? It is a suspension of the pulse, either at the end or in the middle of a piece. (There are a few conductors who continue to feel the pulse during a pause, for whatever number of beats, but this is very individual.) But, like accents, this suspension of the pulse can take a great many characters. It can be a sudden halt or a gradual one; it can ease gently into the flow again or restart abruptly; it can be followed by a complete break, a hint of a break or none at all; it can be followed by a breath or by none; it can mean the end of a piece, or it can be no more than a stretching of an expressive phrase, never really halting the flow of the music. For the time being, we will mostly be considering the different characters that a pause can take when it comes at the end of a piece. But first, just a brief mention of mid-piece pauses.

Pausing in the middle of a piece

As was mentioned with the Haydn example earlier in this chapter, the simplest way to deal with a pause in the middle of a piece, provided the music continues then on a downbeat, is to take it off with an anti-clockwise circle like any final pause, but to treat the moment of cut-off as the upbeat for what continues. The circle can be any speed, but the cut-off becomes the upbeat in tempo. (In this passage from Beethoven, do not let the third bar rush into the pause; fill out the beat by using more space, but do so lightly; lightness can be kept by using the space horizontally.)

Symphony No 6, 'Pastorale' - 1st mvt. (opening)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(German, 1770-1827)



The other more complex situations mentioned above will be dealt with in volume two.

Pausing at the end of a piece

Begin by practising a few of the theoretical possibilities. As explained in Stage Two, the pause is made by stopping the baton at the centre of the beat on which the paused note begins. If it is the final note of a piece, take it off with an inward-turning circle, releasing the note by a (probably gentle) click at the point where the circle began. If the note is loud, the circle will be (fairly) large; if it is soft, it will be small. If the cut-off is abrupt and pointed, the circle will be made reasonably fast and the cut-off click will be emphasised (though not too heavily); if the cut-off is at the end of a gentle dying-away, the circle will be slower and the cut-off much gentler. Try the four basic combinations of these two pairs of possibilities:

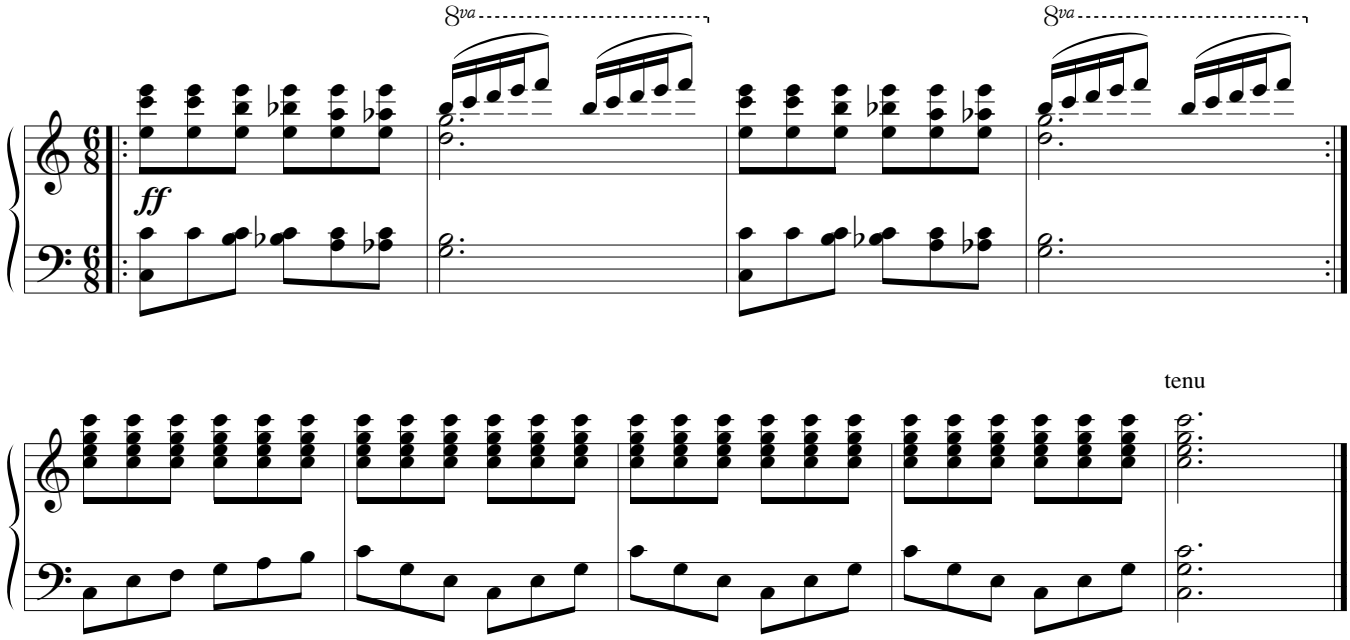
loud note, quick cut-off	(a flourish of a finish)
soft note, quick cut-off	(a cheeky finish)
loud note, slow cut-off	(a grand, mellow finish)
soft note, slow cut-off	(a dying away into the distance, usually followed by a special silence.)

Notice that the loud cut-offs can be neither as fast nor as slow as the soft ones. Now here, in the same order, are the four types in examples from the classical repertoire. None has exactly the character just described; every case in music is individual.

Symphonie Fantastique (end)

Hector Berlioz
(French. 1803-69)

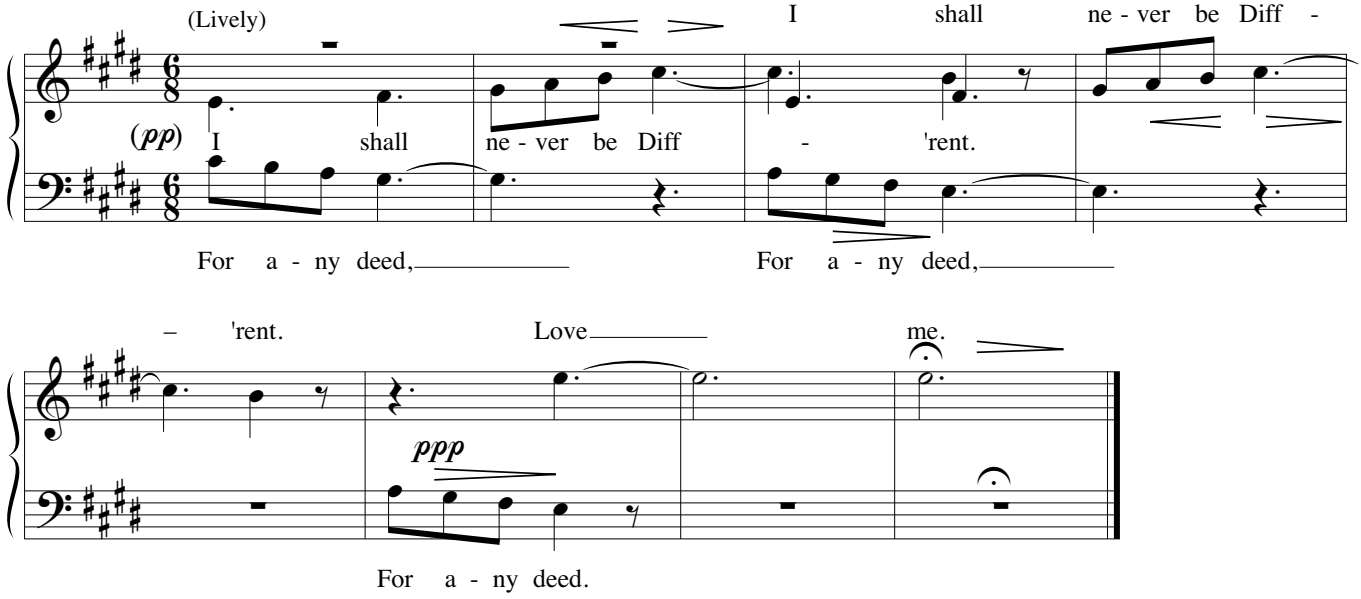
Berlioz writes 'tenu' ('held') instead of a pause. The implication is of a stopping of the pulse, but that the chord is not held very long at all, not as one would if he had written a pause mark.



Hymn to St. Cecilia, 2nd mvt. (end)

Benjamin Britten
(English, 1913-1976)

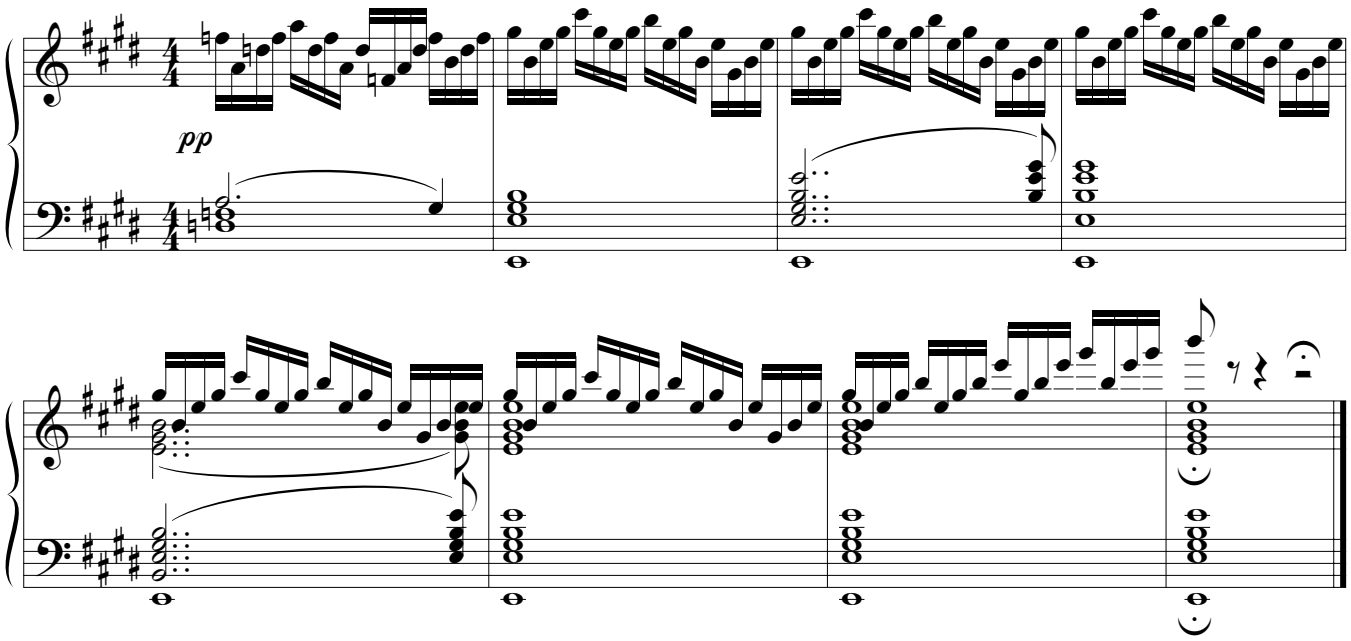
Britten places a diminuendo over the last soprano note in this excerpt. If he had not, the cut-off would probably be a very quick one. But the diminuendo just softens the effect so that, although the cut-off remains reasonably lively, it is not actually abrupt.



Die Walküre (end)

Richard Wagner
(German, 1813-1883)

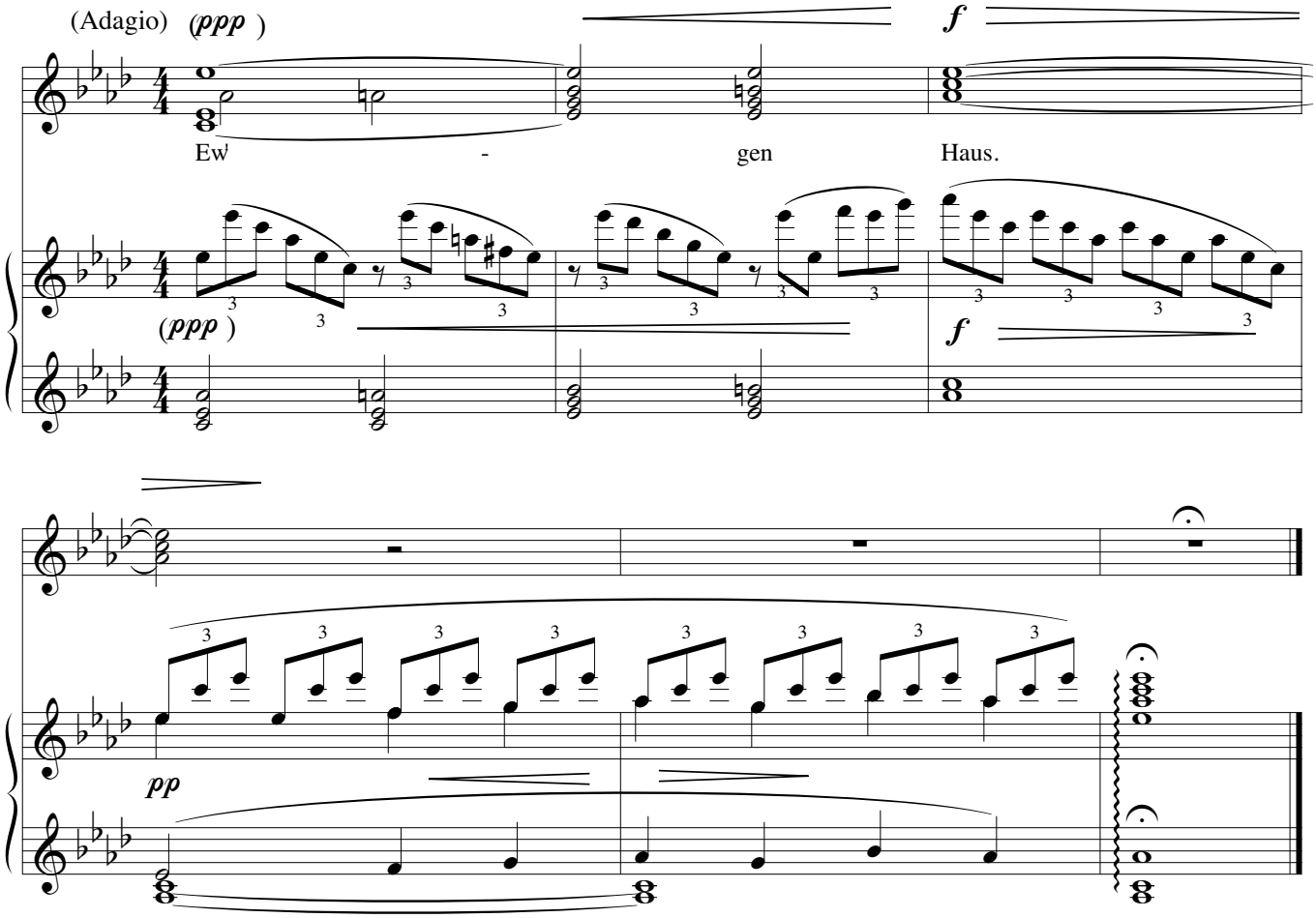
The last chord of Wagner's 'Die Walküre' is not actually loud, but it is sumptuous, played by a large orchestra and comes at the end of a long evening of music. The cut-off therefore will be very generous in size, in keeping with the exalted nature of the music.



Psalm 23 (1822)

Franz Schubert
(Austrian, 1797-1828)

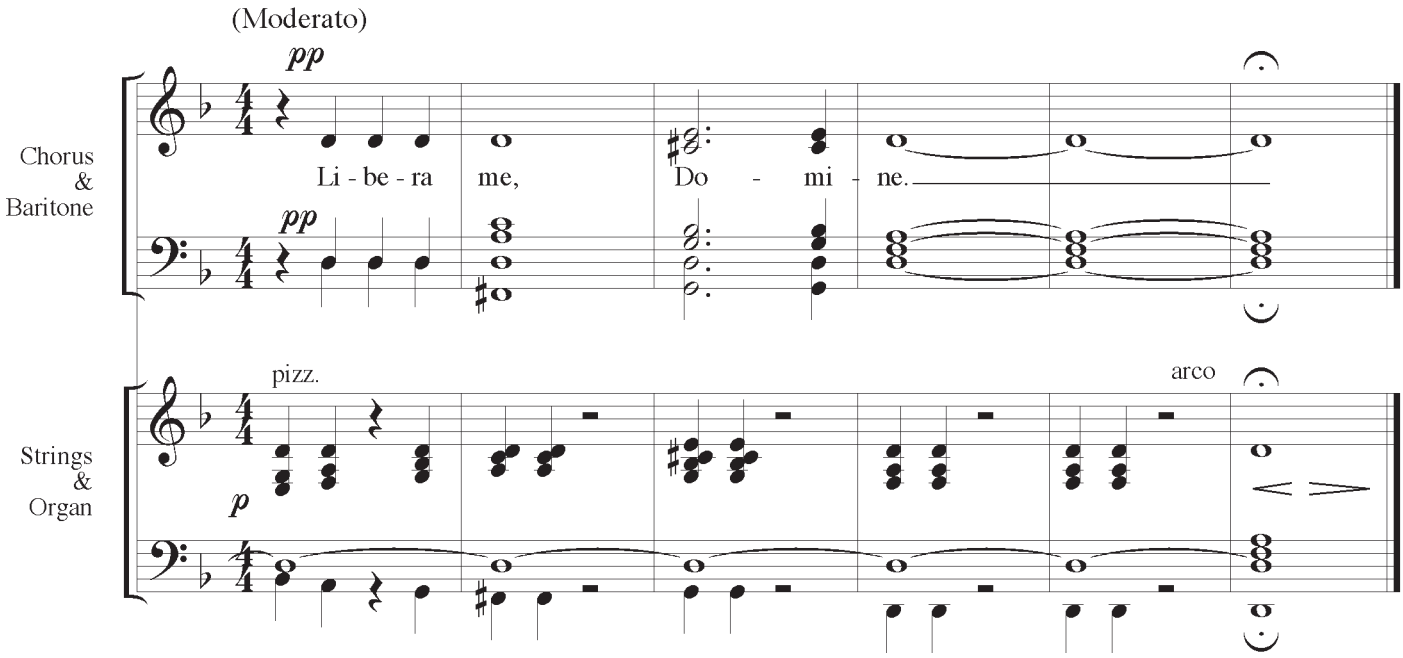
Does one conduct the pianist in the final two bars of this piece? Which would be the greater insult, to suggest that the pianist *needs* conducting, or to suggest that, having conducted every other bar of the piece, the pianist's closing notes are suddenly not worth conducting? Can you conduct in such a way as to avoid either accusation, giving the player the feeling of a loose rein that trusts him, but that still wishes to share the music-making with him? This is an art that arises a great deal in orchestral conducting too; for instance, consider the flute solo at the opening of Debussy's 'Prelude à l'après-midi d'un faune'.



Sometimes a composer asks for an expressive rise and fall of dynamic during a held pause. How is the conductor to show this when the beat is still? Try lifting the baton slowly with an increased grip for the crescendo and then letting it fall with a softening of the grip for the diminuendo. But remember that no purely mechanical gesture can achieve anything very much. It is the expressive intention in your own mind that has to reach outward expression in your body in order to draw a response from the players. Something must show on the face.

'Libera Me' (ending), from 'Requiem' (1891)

Gabriel Fauré
(French, 1845-1924)



Rallentandi

Subdivisions are useful in controlling a rallentando or ritenuto. (Ritenuto, meaning 'held back', could be likened to pulling the reins on a horse, whereas rallentando, 'gradually slowing', would be more like something winding down. Unfortunately , this distinction is often blurred in general usage.)

It is, however, important not just to break from 4 into 8 or whatever, without any care to musical subtlety. That would be to let the physical gestures determine the music, rather than the music determine the gestures. Rallentando is a gradual slowing and the more gradual it is, the more subtle must be the appearance of the subdivisions. This is similar to what was said about the flowing, gentle subdivisions required for 'Morning Has Broken'.

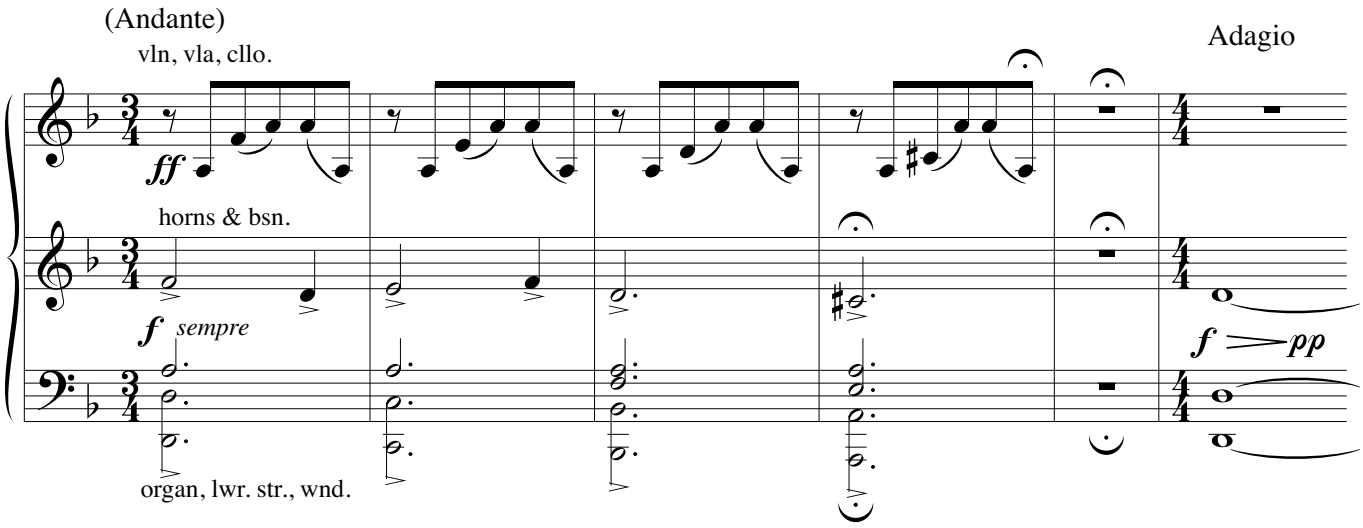
A useful exercise is to conduct a flowing 4 and very gradually slow down till the moment comes when it is just appropriate to begin hinting at the subdivisions. Then slow further until finally the subdivisions assume the same size and stress as the main beats. Then reverse the process with a gradual accelerando back to a flowing 4. Repeat this exercise and stay a while at the point where the subdivisions are only barely present. This state, where the music is neither quite in 4 nor 8, is the critical one to perfect in order to make your control of rallentandi musical. Of course, do the exercise in 2 and 3 time also, and do it with compound subdivisions as well as simple ones. Compound duple is the most important to master, just at that point where it is neither in two nor six but both.

Do this rallentando - accelerando exercise with a friend clapping the beats as you conduct. See if they can understand correctly when you want them to begin including or leaving out the subdivisions in their clapping. As you first begin to slow, subdivide only in your head, while using more space for the beat. (The beat must still flow, or there is no inevitability about when the next beat will fall.) Then, when you first actually make the subdivisions, only let them be hinted at.

Then try the musical examples on the following pages.

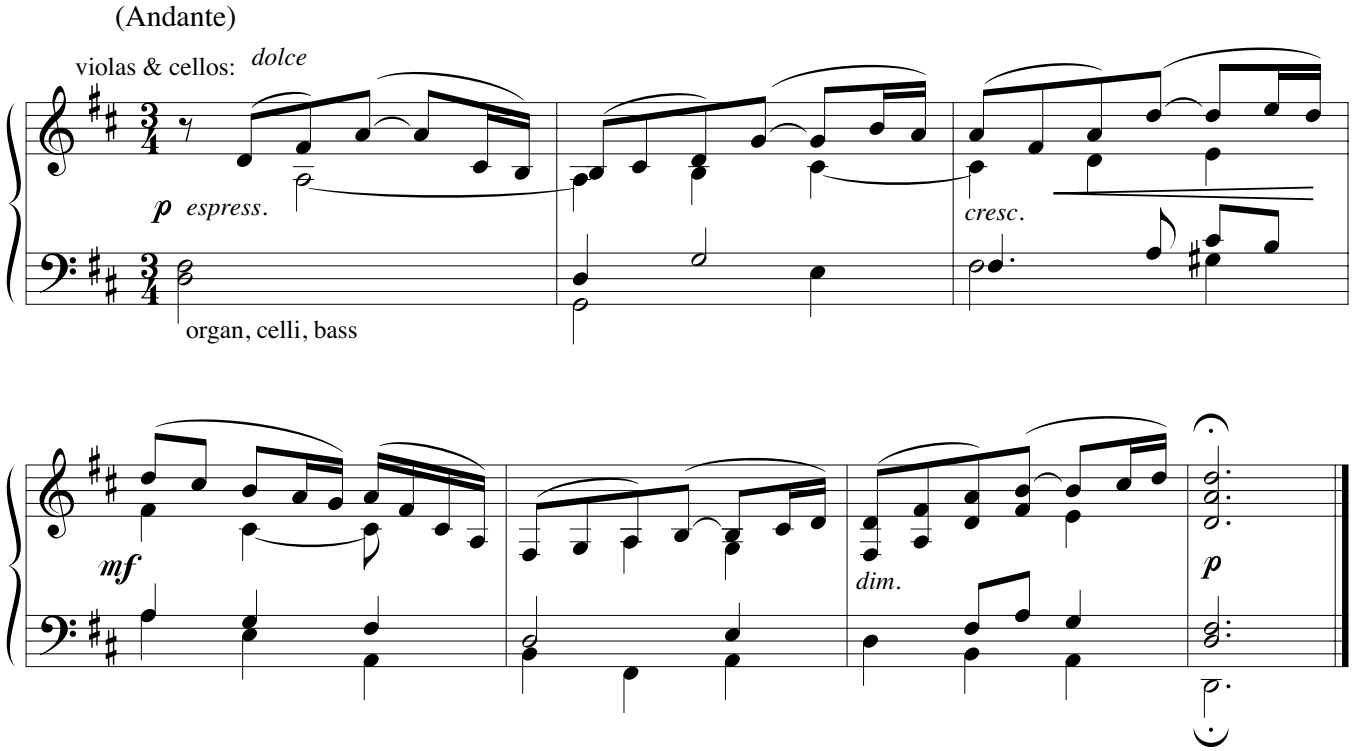
from 'Agnus Dei' (Requiem, 1891)

Gabriel Fauré
(French, 1845-1924)



'Agnus Dei' (Requiem, 1891) - ending

Gabriel Fauré
(French, 1845-1924)



Lacrimosa (ending) from 'Requiem' (1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(Austrian, 1756 - 1791)
completed Süssmayer

(Larghetto)

Chorus

Orchestra

Do - □ na ei - is re - □ qui - em, □

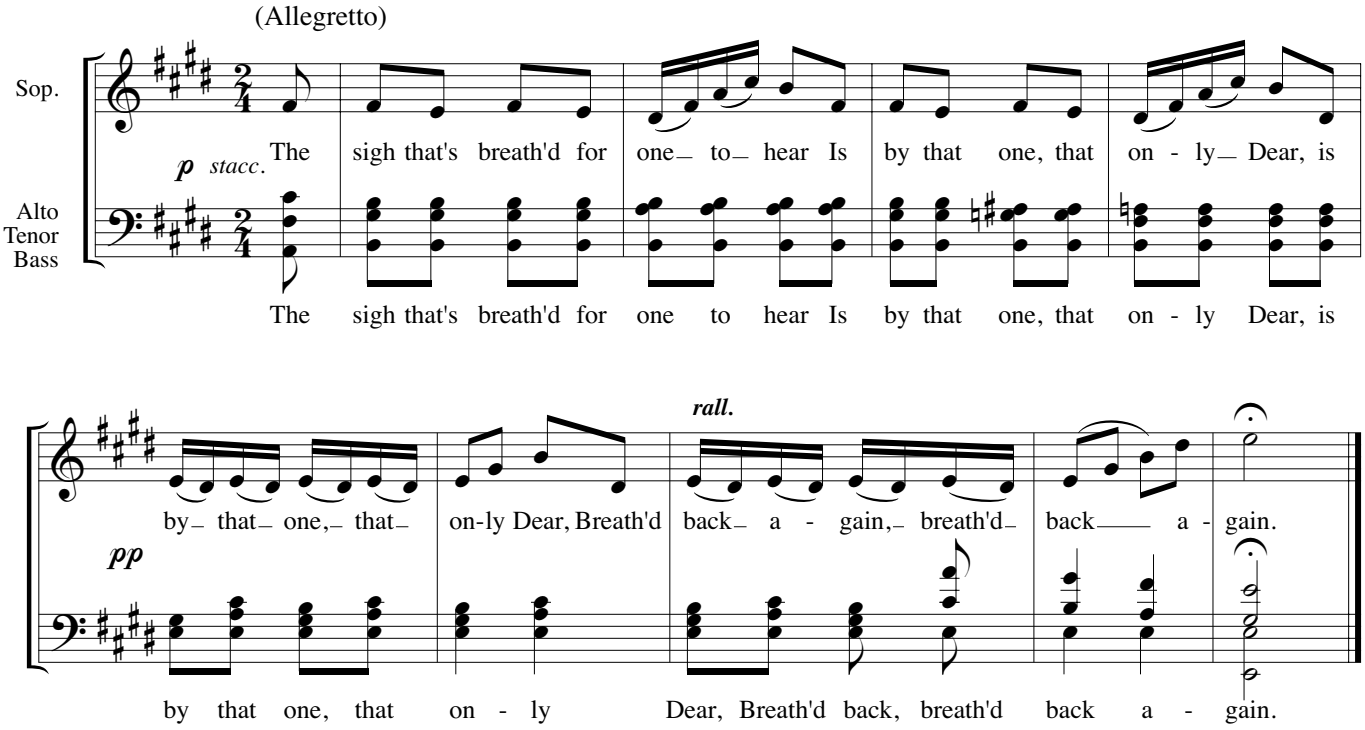
Do - na ei - is, do - na ei - is re - □

(Do - na ei - is)

– □ □ – qui - em. A - men.

Partsong: 'Echoes' (ending)

Arthur Sullivan
(English, 1842-1900)



Stage 7:
The Left Hand

unity
spontaneity
loosening up the left hand
adding and removing the left hand
when to use the left hand
choral entries and exits
from now on

Unity

By now, a good feeling should have been developed for the central role of baton technique and the unity and focus it creates. It is time then to add the left hand; hopefully, however, this can take place without splitting or in any way dissipating that focus. The left hand is not for 'showing' crescendos, diminuendos, cue points etc, while the right hand 'gives the beat'. The whole point of working without the left hand has been to force the baton and the face between them to incorporate all these elements into a single expressive unity. The left hand merely supports that unity. It has no separate, individual function of its own. Of course, being free of any requirement to indicate the pulse, its movements can be freer, can carry across a phrase in a special way, etc. But all the time, this is only making explicit in a different way phrasing that is already not just implicit but even, to a degree, explicit in the right hand.

Spontanaeity

The suggestions in this series of books concerning gesture are only to help a person get started. If you need no such analysis but prefer to just jump in and get on with it, that is probably better.

I really do not think that any conductor uses their left hand in a pre-meditated gesture at a particular point in the music of any piece. Spontaneity is of the essence. Does this mean, then, that there is no way for a beginner to practise using their left hand? Certainly there is - the range of possibilities can be tried out, first without reference to any music, and then with. But this is only 'trying out'. Until you move past a conscious, prepared use of the left hand, your conducting has not yet 'taken flight' and nor will the music.

So go ahead and use the left hand however you wish, if that is what you feel ready for. However, a number of music students, learning conducting as a necessary tool rather than as a vocation, find difficulty using the left hand at all. This chapter, then, is dedicated to getting a person started. Further chapters in Books Two and Three will discuss the use of the left hand in greater detail.

Left-handed conductors should, of course, read 'right hand' for 'left hand' throughout this chapter.

Loosening up the left hand

Begin by beating time to some pieces with the left hand only. The examples in Stage 1 (Getting Started) and the earlier part of Stage 5 (Subdivisions) will do fine, as well as 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' at the end of Stage 2 (Getting Started!).

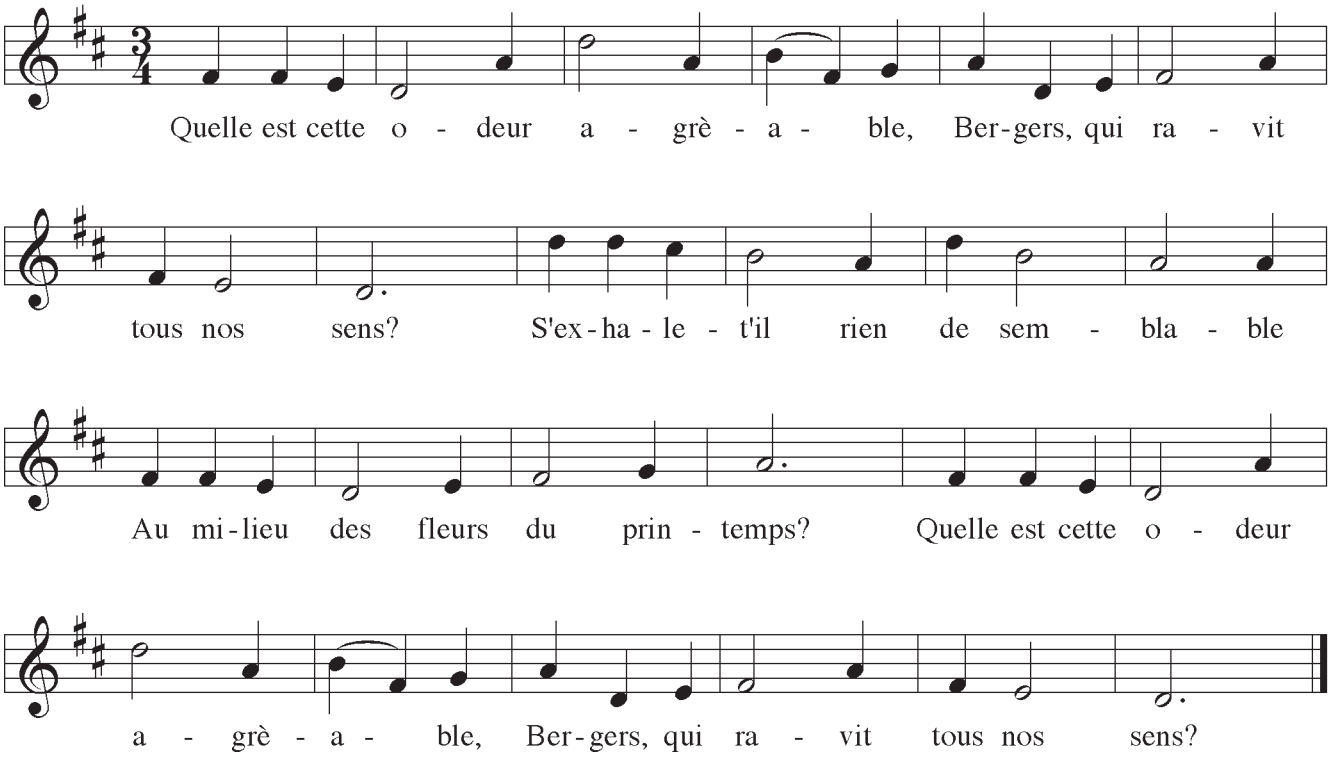
Be sure to keep the palm open, though without the fingers becoming stiff. Try with the palm facing sideways and also with the palm facing downwards. Palm upwards would only rarely be used, to encourage a strong or expressive tone, but you can try a slight upward tilt if you wish.

Adding and removing the left hand

It is very important not to end up merely mirroring the right hand with the left throughout a piece, as the effect is monotonous. Be able to bring the left hand into play and then remove it again after a few bars, bringing it back close to the body, maybe around waist level, maybe higher in order to be ready to re-enter the picture quickly and easily, depending on the musical context. Try arbitrarily adding and removing the left hand - sometimes palm down, sometimes palm sideways, or even slightly upwards - while beating steadily on with the right hand through this melody:

Quelle est cette odeur agrèable?

French carol



When to use the left hand

At this stage, the left hand is principally used at moments of fullness and withdrawn for simpler passages. Specially soft moments also usually call for some involvement of the left hand - for instance, to float higher, or to pull backwards in a suppressing gesture - but we will leave that aside for the moment.

Here are some excerpts from Purcell's opera, 'Dido and Aeneas' that call for certain basic uses of the left hand.

In our deep-vaulted cell (Act 2)

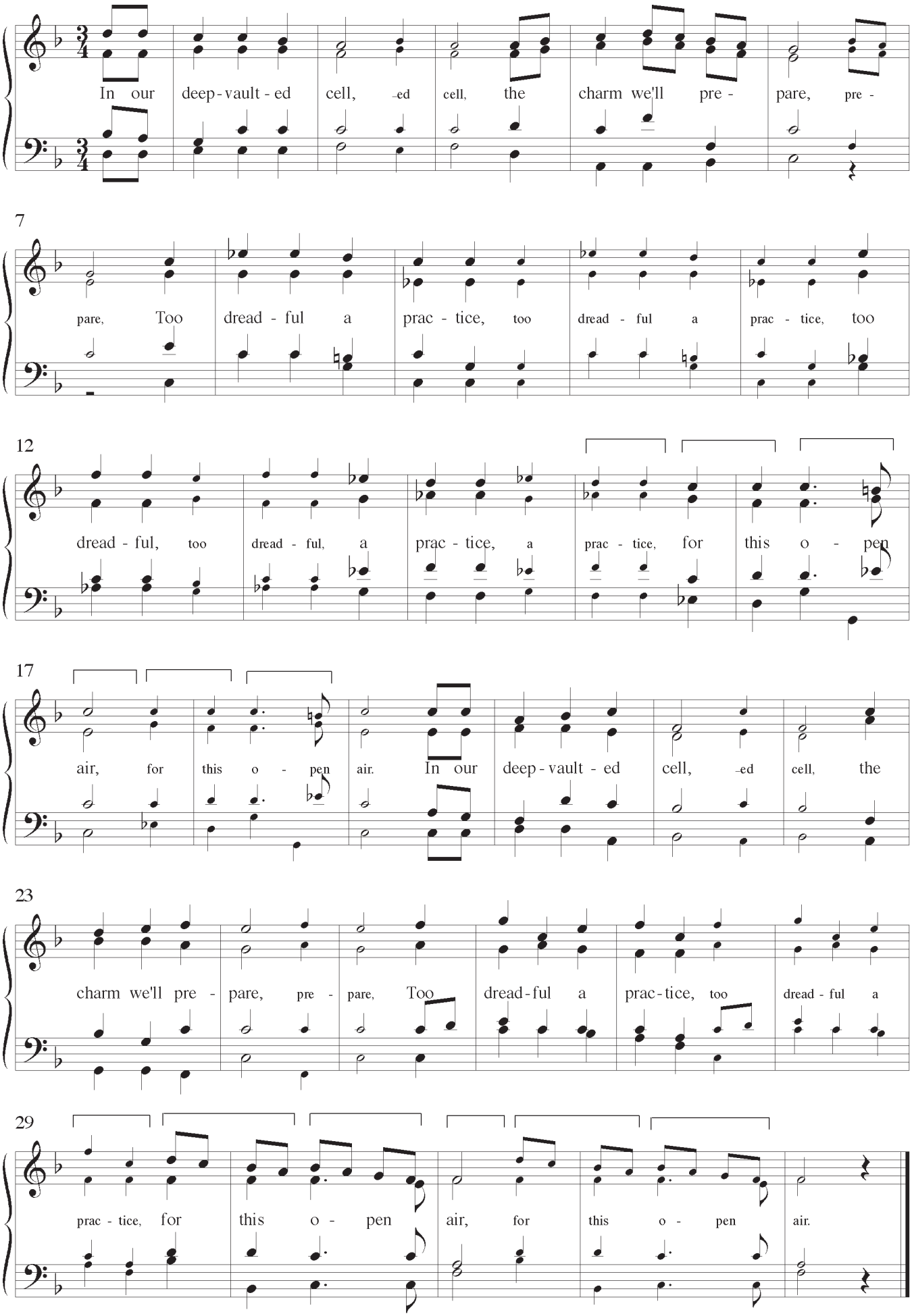
The chorus of witches are in an underground cavern, and the end of each phrase echoes back. This could provide an opportuniry for the left hand suppressive gesture mentioned above. (At each echo, beat suddenly smaller with the baton, and bring the left hand in to a static position, palm forwards to suppress the tone.)

However, the effect of an echo is better produced not by the full chorus singing pianissimo (ridiculous if the performance were staged, anyway) but by the use of an off-stage semi-chorus or, in concert performances, maybe a solo quartet among the choir. These would not sing pianissimo but at a normal volume. But an impressive tone from the main body of the choir, in order to 'create' the echo, wouldbe appropriate. Try using two hands to encourage such fullness, withdrawing the left hand after each phrase and using a simple right-hand-only beat for the echo. (An off-stage chorus would either have their own conductor, or no conductor, or a TV monitor of the conductor. In all these cases, a small, simple, clear beat with the right hand only is appropriate.)

Because the echoes are brief, the left hand will probably withdraw on a level, towards the chest rather than down to the waist, so as to enter and exit with the minimum of fuss. It might hardly withdraw at all, simply remaining still where it is.

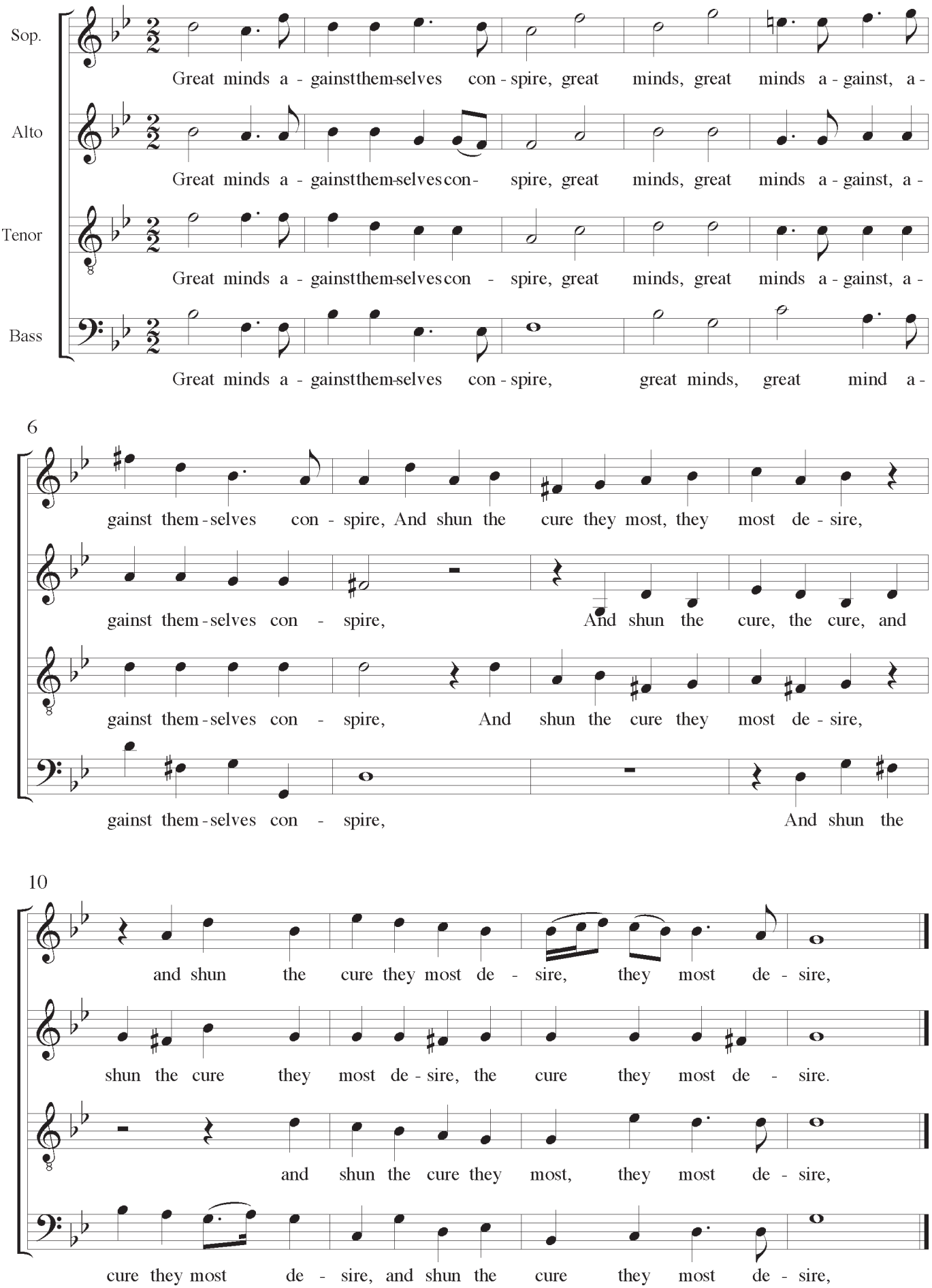
In our deep-vaulted cell

Henry Purcell
(England, 1659-1695)



Great minds against themselves conspire

Henry Purcell
(England, 1659-1695)



The piece involves a number of hemiolas - a feature of Baroque music in three-time, where the two bars before a cadence are taken with the beat at half (hemi-) speed, e.g. minim beats, instead of crotchet ones. In fact, one usually keeps the beat the same, (i.e. crotchet beats) but switches from a 3/4 pattern to a divided 3/2 pattern; instead of '1 2 3, 1 2 3', one beats '1 & 2 & 3 &'. The hemiolas are marked with brackets; because of the echos, they come in pairs. The subject will be dealt with more fully in Book Three.

Great minds against themselves conspire (Act 3)

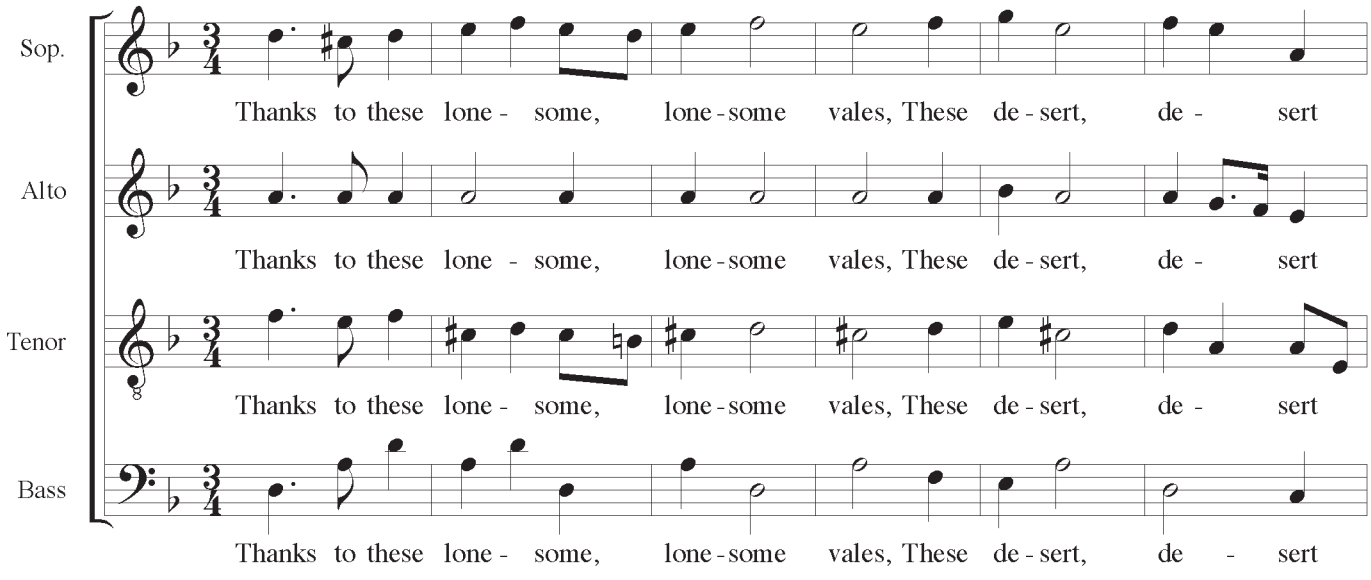
This brief chorus takes place near the end of the opera, after Dido has sent Aeneas away, but before she kills herself. The block homophonic writing at the opening suggests a full tone in order to convey both nobility and tragedy, while the break into flowing polyphopny at 'and shun the cure' brings a gentler quality of pity. Using the left hand at the opening but withdrawing it at the change will provide the necessary contrast, although as the polyphony continues, some use of the left hand to aid it on its way may be useful.

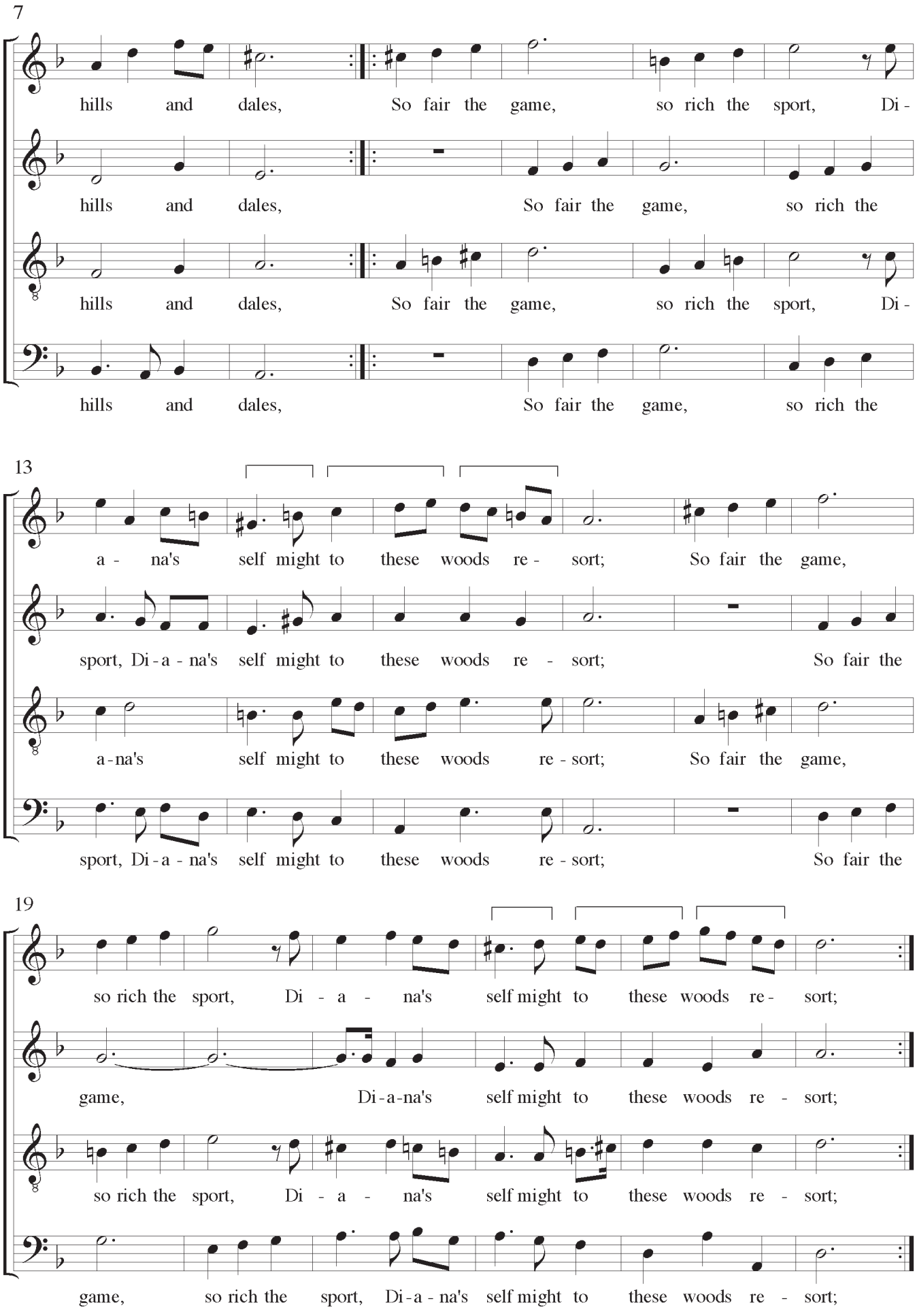
Thanks to these lonesome vales

Here is a light, pastoral number in which a flowing beat is needed and which must not become cumbersome or lumpy. It would be a shame to conduct the whole piece with only the right hand; and yet it is difficult enough for that hand alone to keep the required lightness and flow, without adding a mirroring left hand. Learn to bring the left hand forward from time to time in an encouraging manner (palm sideways or even upwards, not down) as if it is going to join in the beating and yet without it ever actually fully doing so. Or let it beat just a little; then leave it still; then withdraw it, etc. Hemiolas appear again in this piece.

Thanks to these lonesome vales

Henry Purcell
(England, 1659-1695)

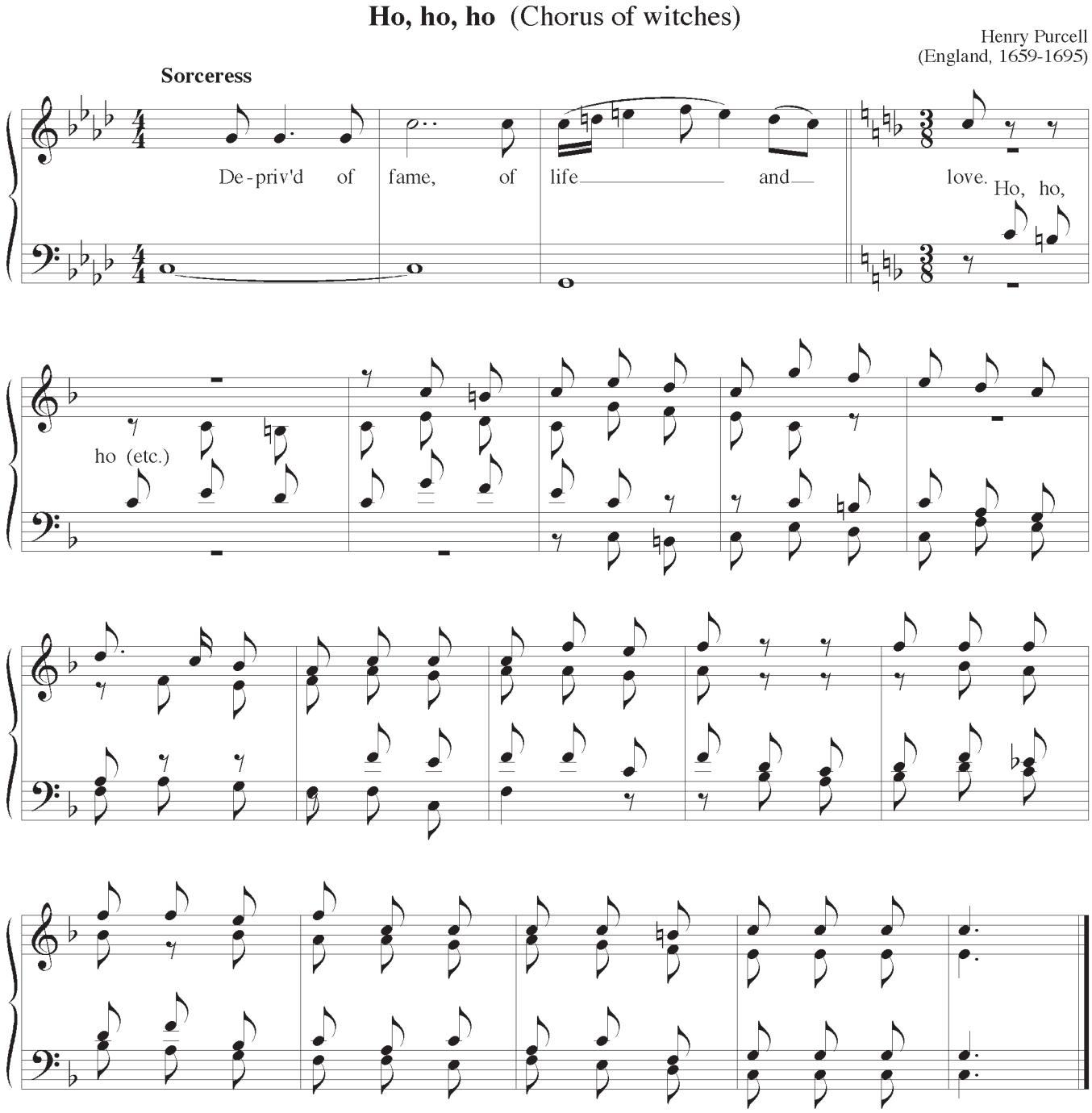



7
hills and dales, So fair the game, so rich the sport, Di -
hills and dales, So fair the game, so rich the
hills and dales, So fair the game, so rich the sport, Di -
hills and dales, So fair the game, so rich the
13
a - na's self might to these woods re - sort; So fair the game,
sport, Di - a - na's self might to these woods re - sort; So fair the
a - na's self might to these woods re - sort; So fair the game,
sport, Di - a - na's self might to these woods re - sort; So fair the
19
so rich the sport, Di - a - na's self might to these woods re - sort;
game, Di - a - na's self might to these woods re - sort;
so rich the sport, Di - a - na's self might to these woods re - sort;
game, so rich the sport, Di - a - na's self might to these woods re - sort;

Ho, ho, ho (Act 2)

This fast, triple metre is conducted one beat in a bar - only downbeats. This also will be dealt with more fully in Book Three. It can feel very restricted, as the pattern occupies only a single dimension of space (the vertical), instead of two (vertical and horizontal). As soon as one tries to put energy and force into it - as this second 'chorus of witches' clearly requires - an unpleasant 'hitting' quality can all too easily arise. This problem is doubled if one mirrors with the left hand.

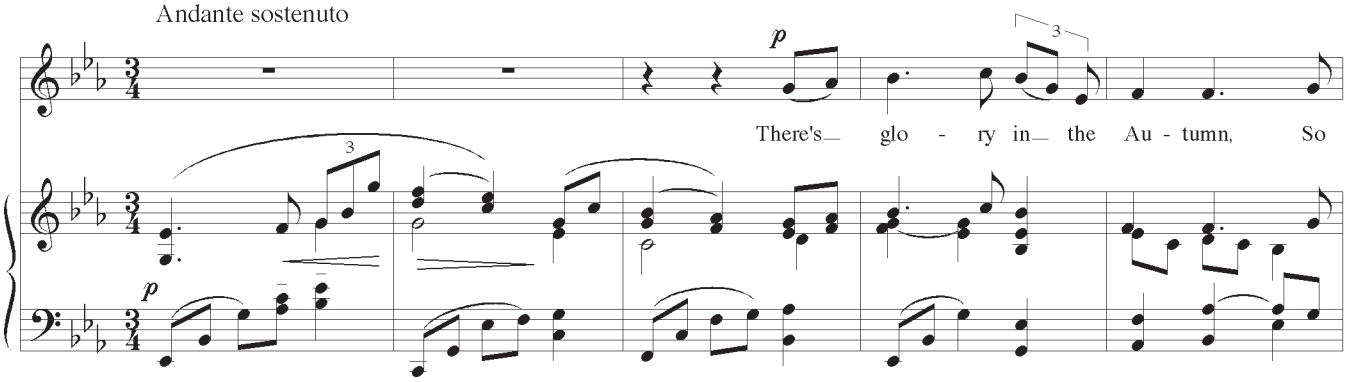
So, as with the previous example, we are faced with the question of how to use the left hand to encourage the musical expression without resulting in overkill. And in this case, it may not be appropriate for the left hand to beat at all. Yet for it to hang loose by ones side would give an effect of indifference. It must remain a vital and active part of the picture, and probably with a strong, open and tensed shape. It will probably join the right hand in beating the very last chord, holding it and releasing it. Should you feel the desire to use it during the main body of the music, your beat will probably be very small indeed - but none the less forceful for that.



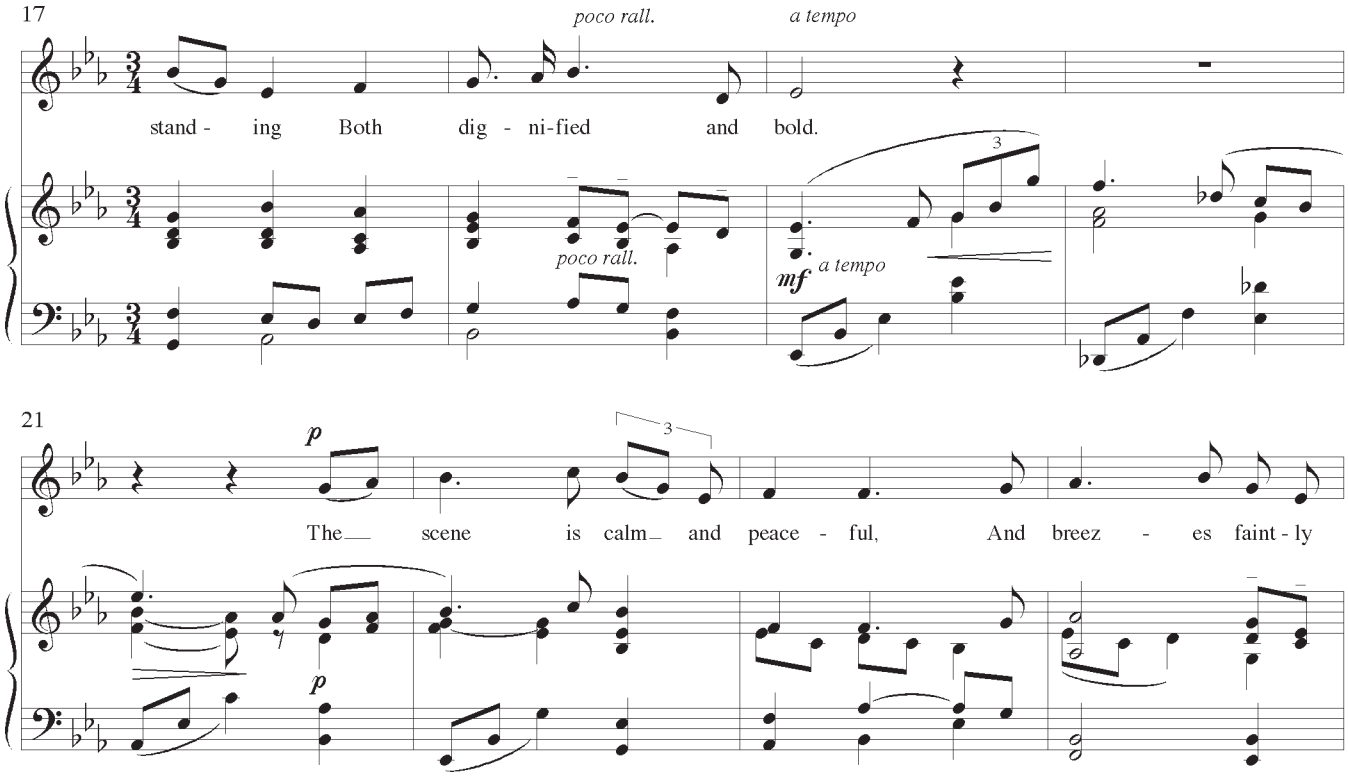
Choral entries and exits

Take a look ahead to the piece at the end of the next chapter, 'Autumn Sunset' by Eric Thiman. You will see that the (unison) choir enters after a short piano introduction, and finishes the first verse in bar 19 with a held note followed by a further passage on the piano to link into verse two. The left hand can be very useful in bringing a choir in and in taking it off at such moments.

At the opening, try conducting the piano with the right hand alone, bring the left hand forward during the course of the second bar to prepare the choir, then on the second beat of the 3rd bar let it move out left (i.e. 'out' of the second beat only, not 'into and out' of it, through the 'click' point). Use both hands in mirror image for the first few beats of the singing. If this results in too abrupt a breath for the choir - taken over one beat instead of two - let the left hand release itself into mirror beating from the first beat of the 3rd bar.

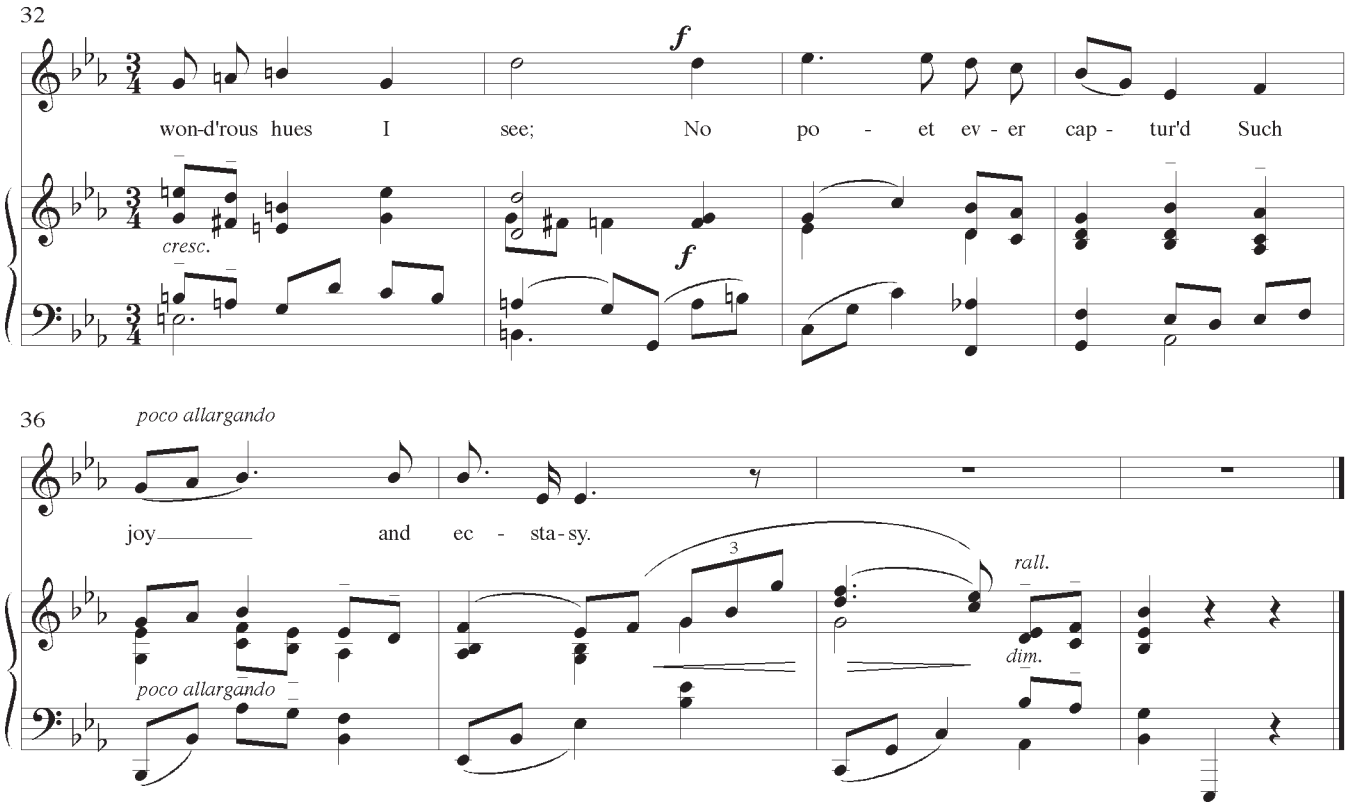


At the end of the verse, for the words 'both dignified and bold' which are marked forte, you will probably be already using the left hand, probably beating in mirror fashion. On the word 'bold', make the downbeat with the left hand, palm slightly upwards, and hold still while the right hand continues beating. On the third beat of the bar let the left hand gently tap the beat, to indicate the choir's release. The right hand then continues alone with the piano, the left rejoining to bring the choir in for verse two in much the same manner as for verse one, just a little gentler to suit the words.



It might be useful to try the previous excerpt imagining the choir's last note of verse 1 to be a dotted minim, rather than a minim, keeping the left hand rock still until it is time to lift into a down-beat tap for the choir's release. A dotted minim tied to a further crotchet could also be practised.

The end of verse two presents a common problem. Finishing as it does with a dottoed crotchet, followed by a quaver rest, one must either tap a half-beat to show the cut-off or show nothing at all. The former seems very fussy and interferes with the natural quality of the music. The latter, on the other hand, may lead toa scrappy finish, particularly if the choir is used to being regularly shown precise cut-offs in the interest of good ensemble. My own choice in such a case is to prefer naturalness to precision, if a choice has to be made. However, if the choir thinks not of 'stopping on a half beat' but of singing the vowel just into the third beat before releasing, a freer movement of the left hand out of the third beat will be sufficient to encourage them in this. This particular instance is made simpler by the fact that there is no final consonant to be got together. A soft consonant, like an 'f' of an 's' would not be too much of a problem. A hard consonant like 't' or 'k', however, could easily become ragged and require some rehearsal to get together and yet not drawing unnecessary attention to itself, a problem that all too easily arises where 'precision' is valued above naturalness.



From now on

They say that when learning to touch-type one must, at a certain point, take a decision not to use any other way of typing, so that the skill can grow and strengthen properly. Similarly with the left hand in conducting, from this point on try never to revert to right-hand-only conducting except for some specific purpose, for instance to practise some piece of baton technique, or to learn a piece gently in private. (I don't mean that the left hand should be active all the time; but it should come into action quite frequently.)

Stage 8:
In front of a choir

breathing
quantity
breathing for an entry
breathing mid-melody
quality

nervous energy & discipline
children
adults

an 'active' choir
forcing an equal relationship

giving v. listening

diction

memorisation

with or without a baton?
with a baton
without a baton

auditions - a word of warning

'Autumn Sunset' (Eric Thiman)

Breathing

Conducting a choir highlights the need for an awareness of breathing. This need of course exists when conducting wind players and, in a broader sense, all music 'breathes'. But choirs, particularly those consisting of young people or inexperienced adults, depend to an enormous degree on the conductor's awareness of how they need to breathe.

Quantity

A student of conducting does well actually to sing what he is about to conduct, among other things simply to discover the sheer volume of breath needed to sing even the simplest melody with any sort of projected tone. The shallow breathing of normal speech simply will not carry the voice through a sequence of musical phrases. At least some expansion of the lungs downwards (using the diaphragm muscle that lies below the lungs) and sideways (including across the back) is necessary for vibrant singing.

(Another reason for singing the song through is to gain freedom from inhibition, if it exists. You need to be able to sing in front of the class, if you are studying in a group. If you cannot, you have yet to acquire the freedom and confidence of personality necessary to be a truly convincing conductor.)

Take any piece of choral music and sing it over with a good open, free voice, until you have a feeling for the size of breathing you need. If, as is quite likely, you find yourself unable to manage the phrases in a single breath, decide, according to the grammar of the words, where you will take extra breaths and mark them in the score. Pay particular care if you think the breathing capacity of the members of your choir may be less than your own. All this is an essential part of preparing a score and will pay rich dividends when it comes to standing in front of the choir.

Then conduct the piece in silence, but with an imaginary choir and imagining that same degree of breathing. An intermediate stage where you both conduct and sing might be useful in order to let your own physical breathing teach your hand(s) the required gestures, but beware this doesn't just result in both bad singing and bad conducting. (If you have any residual uncertainty in keeping the beat-patterns correct, singing and conducting a piece at once can effectively help you past this, helping the melody and the beat-pattern to unify.)

Breathing for an entry

Can the 'required gestures' be described? In a sense they already have been, on page 18 ('Indicating the entry'). Coming out of the preparatory beat larger than normal encourages a breath. But one of the worst common aspects of poor choral singing is the tendency to breathe just on the upbeat to a phrase. Single-beat breaths may be a necessity in-between individual phrases of a melody, but where two (or more) beats are available, as they normally are at the opening of a song, they should generally be used. Sometimes dramatic expression may call for a single-beat breath, but more often the musical character asks for a broader breath.

All too often, a tendency to breathe on the final beat before singing betrays nothing so much as an inability to breath and count at the same time: the singers count the rests till the last one and breathe on it, feeling additional rhythmic 'security' from taking this breath with a jolt (and, no doubt, a tight, closed throat, rather than an open, relaxed one). It cannot be emphasised enough that the pulse is an internal, mental affair; this subtle, 'hidden underlay' quality to the beat is what gives classical music its infinite flexibility and range of expression. The breathing is then left free to take place across the beats, fast or slow, lively or dreamy, light-hearted or tragic, according to the character of the piece (and, of course, the vocal demands of the phrase).

By and large, then, you are not going to want to show your choir a breath on the beat before they sing by coming out of that beat especially large. The sense of expansion that encourages the choir to breathe has to somehow take place across, probably, two beats before the singing. Try breathing and conducting at the same time to see if you can gain a feel for this, letting the left hand flow smoothly across the two (or three) beats, suggesting the expansion of the lungs. At all costs, avoid cramping the rib-cage with your upper arm; remember what was said in Stage 1 about space in the armpits for the basic stance and baton-hold. Let the rib-cage expand freely and fully as you breathe. (This is another reason for not leaving the left arm limp at ones side just because one might not be using it actively; leave it clear of the rib-cage, subliminally encouraging the choir to breathe fully.)

It is quite likely that, in addition to encouraging this two-beat or three-beat breath, you will want to give some final indication of the entry itself, by indeed coming out of the last beat a little larger than the rest. But be careful. For instance, if one were to emphasise heavily the actual click of the last beat or come out of it too large, one could destroy the whole sense of flow in the breathing that one has built up across the two beats, and end up after all indicating an 'extra' breath on the last beat, just the point where in fact a good singer should have completed the intake of air and be 'turning around' to come forward into the singing, shaping the initial consonant. Any final indication of the entry has to be incorporated into the indication of the broad breath. In certain circumstances it can certainly help to give the click of the last beat clearly so that all feel it well together during the broad, 'unrhythmic' breath; but a balance must be struck between giving the choir correct and necessary help and merely spoon-feeding them to the detriment of their musical development. Instinct on your part must settle where this balance lies.

If this has seemed rather a dry, convoluted discussion of the subject, and if practising it alone in your room seems even drier, find someone who is studying singing and ask them to sing for you as you try a few openings of songs. Don't simply ask them "Was that alright?", hear them say yes and then go home; repeat the openings over many times, learning to feel their breathing with them, learning to identify with it. Let their breathing and your conducting become one thing. If in return for this favour on their part they were to ask you to accompany them at the piano for a while, this will be nothing less than another way of practising the same thing: awareness of the singer's need to breath fully, and one thing more - to allow the music its resulting necessary flexibility where breaths lie mid-melody.

Breathing mid-melody

Breaths taken between individual phrases of a melody are often not shown with rests in the musical text at all, but it is necessary to remain sympathetic to them. If the piece is rhythmically tight in character then lee-way for breathing may be limited, though it sometimes just has to be allowed. In other, more rounded moods, flexibility for beathing can become part of the ebb and flow of the phrasing, a part of the music's essence, without which it would feel actually wrong. But even in pieces of strict-time character, never leave your choir short of breath. If you are not sure how much space to allow or not allow, sing the passage yourself many times till you get a clear feeling for it, before conducting it in silence, stopping the beat for <u>just a split second</u> at the centre of the beat after which the breath is taken.

When you are with a choir, then, you should be both sensitive to their legitimate need for time to breathe, and yet also very precisely aware of when they are merely being lazy and failing to breathe early enough. The general rule is, of course, to breathe between phrases by coming off the last note of the old phrase early enough to allow yourself the breathing space you need, not to sing on long and then borrow extra time for the breath before the following phrase, thus pulling the song apart. If the choir are doing this wrongly they should be corrected at once and encouraged to become aware of the need to lead their audience on through the song, like through a good story, beginning each phrase in time. Even where there are a couple of beats available between phrases, do not allow the choir to linger over the end of the old phrase and then breathe in a rush. Have them breathe promptly and use any available time then to prepare the new phrase, shape the coming consonant or vowel. Few things make such a dramatic difference to the compelling nature of a choir's delivery.

Quality

As well as allowing enough time for the breath, the conductor must be aware of the quality of the breath taken. It has been mentioned how the lungs must expand both downwards and sideways to take in sufficient air. But what of the throat area, where the sound will be actually produced? There are two important points, but they apply not just to the singing but also to the preparation for the singing. They therefore have an audible effect on the quality of the breath that the conductor should be aware of.

1. Relaxation & Openness

The lower jaw must fall slightly: think of the back bottom teeth dropping almost a centimetre. This changes the sound of the breathing from an obtrusive, relatively high-pitched noise to a barely audible, darker, more hollow one. Feel the cold air on the throat.

(Related to this: neither the tongue nor the larynx should rise and block the sound. Leaving the larynx relaxed and down when singing high notes makes a dramatic difference to the tone.)

2. Lift & Placing

For a clear, lively tone and in particular for a choir to sound in tune, the singing needs to take place as if above the roof of the mouth, sent up in the front of the face. This needs to be prepared as one breathes, so that the near-silent breath sound described above takes on a lighter, 'lifted' quality also.

This 'lift' should not come from below the note, but as if lifting off the ceiling that lies above it, creating a space into which the note can naturally rise. The note finds its 'placing'.

The airstream coming from below carries the note; as the air is used, the ribcage should not collapse, but rather, the diaphragm gently rises.

All these qualities take time and practice to develop and understand properly. But the above will point the young conductor in the right direction, along with the comment that the lungs and diaphragm are an 'active' area, the throat a 'passive' one, and the mouth and lips an 'active' one again. A fuller account of basic singing technique is given is three appendices, one in each volume of this series.

The only thing to add is a word of caution about 'training' choirs in vocal technique when you yourself hardly understand what you are talking about. Be prepared to take many years exploring the area, absorbing a whole range of ideas, waiting until you feel genuinely convinced about something before you ask it of your choir. Of course, experiment and try things out with them. But while your feel for the subject remains half-baked, as for most young conductors it must inevitably be, inwardly recognise this fact and behave accordingly. Only thus will you leave the way open for the time to come when something will truly fall into place for you and you can ask for it from your choir with authority and assurance, and with successful results.

Nervous energy and discipline

A brief word here about rehearsing children's and amateur choirs. You will want the music-making to be vibrant and alive. This creates a fair degree of energy in the room and among the singers, and one of the strongest demands on the conductor's character and charisma is to keep this energy channelled into the singing and not dissipating itself in an ill-disciplined way.

Children

The problem is at its most obvious with young children who may begin by sitting poorly, their minds wondering, their singing feeble, and have to be woken up with a degree of 'entertainment'. But having once woken them up, the conductor begins almost to regret having done so because it is so hard to contain a group of now lively and excited children and focus their energy as he wants. He knows he needs that energy or the singing will be lack-lustre, probably flat in pitch and, after twenty or thirty minutes, further rehearsal will become virtually impossible through simple tiredness or boredom on the part of the children. But when the conductor has that energy awoken, it demands hard work on his part to keep the group focused and disciplined enough to work effectively and he must know how to provide challenge of just the right kind and at just the right level as the rehearsal proceeds: when to tighten things, when to loosen them for just a moment, how to let the individuals doing especially well know that their efforts are recognised and appreciated (without their becoming 'teacher's favourite'), how to bring weaker members along with the group and so on. It takes time to build a well-knit, hard-working yet happy, ebullient group, but the rewards are enormous. Children's voices have a unique sound of their own that brings immediate joy to countless listeners.

Adults

In theory, adults are more used to focusing and disciplining their energy in order to use it creatively and effectively. But an amateur choir often consists of people who have worked like that all day long and come to the choir for social reasons as well as musical ones. Of course, the musical activity remains at the heart of their evening and for this they know they need a choir that works well and will feel short-changed if the conductor fails to secure that from them. But the same conflict between nervous energy and discipline often has to be faced. The most common symptom of this conflict comes when the conductor stops the singing mid-flight in order to make a point. The nervous energy aroused by the music - whether by exciting musical content in itself or merely the attempt to sing a particularly challenging passage, especially if fast - finds its outlet at once in a stream of comment, laughter and general conversation pouring from the mouths of the choir without break or pause after the singing itself. (Professionals, of course, would never waste their energy in this way and in any case tend to rehearse at a lower level of nervous energy in order to conserve their reserves for actual performance.)

Different conductors will find a different balance with their amateur choir according to what suits them and what level of result they hope to achieve. And they may well find it necessary to take a breather every now and then during the rehearsal to let the nervous energy work itself out a little among the choir. But until he can also stop the choir in the middle of its singing to make a point and yet keep the choir from talking, its energy suspended and ready to go at once back into the music, he has not achieved a really effective working relationship with them.

It should not be overlooked, though, that the conductor who fails to arouse any nervous musical energy in the choir, or who represses such as is naturally there through an over-authoritative manner, may be in the worst case of all - his performances may be dull. Just like a good horse, a choir needs to be both spirited and disciplined. Whilst working towards that though, it has to be admitted that a spirited horse that repeatedly throws its rider (conductor) is preferable to one with its spirit broken or non-existent, meekly obeying whilst longing for freedom.

An 'Active' Choir

When a choir only responds to the most energetic gestures on a conductor's part, you are onto a loser. They have learned to use the conductor as a crutch, rather than a partner, not standing (or singing) on their own two feet. An imbalance between the energy expenditure of the conductor and that of the choir is a serious fault - on the part of the conductor. (It's very bad T'ai-Chi, too.*) What does a conductor do when working with a 'lazy' choir, then? Of course he works hard, very hard. But he directs his energies very carefully and precisely towards making his choir 'active', breathing fully and giving the voice properly, so that there is something of substance there to work with. Think of the relationship as the same as playing chamber music, an interaction of equal contributors.

So - if in a piece of music you find yourself tempted to drive or hit the beat, to lean forward, or to urge the singers on with any movement or gesture not truly in keeping with the exact spirit of the music, try to realise that you are doing the opposite of the right thing and making the choir weaker all the time. But be patient also; drawing lively contributions from all members of the choir may take a while and is only fully possible anyway if the members are reasonably of a level with each other.

Also remember that, rather than simply thinking, "Don't hit the beat", "don't lean forward" etc, one needs to fill the vacuum with something positive. Let the stance reflect a full-breathing posture and the character of the music; the baton likewise. Remember the motto of this book - that conducting is music made visible. Of course, when little is forthcoming from the choir, these things may only be moderate on your part. But they must be there.

And then give time for the communicative power of all this to grow. It is a very subtle process, whereby these positive thoughts and feelings begin to emanate from your conducting and reach the singers so that they are naturally and inevitably affected by them. No matter how long it takes to develop such an aura and influence, what is certain is that it will never happen if these thoughts and feelings are not properly present in your gestures and face because they have been replaced by (even slightly) frenetic attempts to 'get the choir to sing'.

Forcing an equal relationship

There is, in fact, another rather more radical approach to this problem when it is serious (and the choir not too large), which is not to conduct the choir at all - at least not with beats, and maybe with no more than a very occasional gesture. A solo singer with piano accompaniment needs no conductor but takes responsibility for breathing and singing absolutely naturally and automatically. Why should this be any different for the members of a choir? The conductor's role is to coordinate and (hopefully!) inspire the singing of the group, but not to make it happen in the first place. Sitting (on a stool) or standing with the choir, feeling the breathing with them (maybe helping the choir start simply in this way, without the use of the hands), showing and pointing special moments, looking, listening, encouraging, rehearsing, doing all these things and yet not actually conducting with a beat pattern can be very effective in correcting such an imbalance of responsibility, the choir members quickly discovering that they must become active and aware of what they are doing. Then at a certain point, when this energy and participation is well-established, it becomes possible for the conductor to conduct fully once more - because there is now something to conduct.

This something, reflected in the tone, is quite simply 'substance', singing that exists, both aurally and psychically. The conductor must look at the choir and relate to this; therein lies the joy of choral conducting. For the conductor, it is a form of chamber music, and he relates to it as much with his eyes as his hands.

* T'ai-Chi, as has been explained, is not confined merely to the use of the body but of all energy (including mental energy) and to all relating (including to choirs).

Giving v. listening

How often one hears choristers and conductors talk about the need to listen, without making any acknowledgment of the fact that listening tends to block the free giving of tone. How rarely one hears an amateur choir where both abilities are fully active and what a joy it is when one does. Choirs whose attention is closely focussed in on themselves as they 'listen' to each other tend to be pale in tone and lacking in communication - in a word, boring to listen to. Choirs that give at the expense of listening, on the other hand, can sound hectoring and lose quality of blend and tuning; some voices may have a vibrato beyond what is acceptable for blend. If you want to listen to a choir that has both qualities in full measure, try John Eliot Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir.

Diction

Much could be written about diction, but to be really successful, diction has to be incorporated into a sound vocal technique, the vowels used to focus and resonate the sound, the consonants to launch the tone and send it on its way, using the facial cavitites. But this is to go ahead of ourselves at this stage. A few tips may be helpful, though.

The first is that mouthing the words with your choir should only be done rarely. Clear, expressive diction is their job, not yours, and you can end up doing too much for them. You will tend to communicate with them via your mouth, which is a less comprehensive and effective method than full conducting.

Next is the fact that large choirs singing in large venues, and particularly where an orchestra is involved, will have to exaggerate the consosnants to a surprising degree in order to be intelligible and to give the music effective life. Just as written words could not be understood by the audience in such a venue unless written extremely large, so with spoken words and even more with sung ones.

Finally, try not to let final consosnants become a purely technical matter, neatly placed at a precise point but with the musical expression ignored. Listen to singers like Janet Baker or Dietrich Fischer-Diskeau and hear how they pronounce their final consonants with expressive character.

Final consonants should still be together, of course, and the general rule at the end of phrases is that they are placed on the beat that follows the note - on the rest, that is. However, there can be exceptions to this, moments when it is better to treat the beat with the rest as the moment for breathing, or one may simply not get enough air to sing the next phrase well.

Memorisation

Its value to the conductor: you will conduct much better.
Its value to the choir: it will sing much better.
Its value to everyone: you will have a much more rewarding time.

Try it - you will see!

(Also, the conductor should avoid blocking the space between himself and the choir with a high music stand, or even with any music stand. Try placing a low music stand somewhat to your left side, assuming you are a right-handed conductor.)

With or without a baton?

Many choral conductors work without a baton. This applies equally to men and women and so is not just a matter of the female personality being less concerned with implements that extend the body's power than the male one is. (Think of young boys' obsession with toy weapons.) Nor is it anything to do with any sexual significance the baton might have (don't laugh - no psychologist would…), though this might connect to some degree with the tendency for male conductors to steer themselves towards orchestral work, while most women seem to prefer to work with smaller choirs.

With a baton

In itself, the baton has a dual importance. Firstly, it creates a clear and authoritative focus that helps quite simply coordinate a large group of musicians. Secondly, that same authority carries a certain power that not only helps unify the musical expression of such large forces but in any case comes into its own in the expression of certain adult emotions, often expressed in music with an intense and yearning melodic line, this regardless of the size of the forces involved. Pierre Boulez, who never uses a baton even for a large orchestra, has said that his primary concerns are rhythm and dynamic - in other words, not expression.

If a choir is large, then, the clarity, focus and authority of a baton can be a great help. But even this is to assume the choir to be an adult one. The formal nature of baton technique may make it meaningless to a group of children, whether large or small, and inappropriate to the sort of music they would be likely to sing.

If the choir is both adult and small, the use of a baton nevertheless remains a strong option, but use a small one - not more than 14". For practice' sake, use a baton in 'Autumn Sunset' if you are conducting it with the class. The song has a strong legato line, the class is adult and you need constantly to build up your baton technique at this stage. It will teach you much about conducting that will help you if you decide later to lay the baton aside.

Without a baton

If or when you do decide to work without a baton, the right hand will, of course, be open, lively and expressive as it gives the beat. But even now, the same advice applies as when giving the beat with a baton: keep the palm to the floor most of the time - it gives a sense of stability and 'foundation'.

(If some of the advice in this book seems very restrictive, accept that it represents a starting point only, but one designed to help you discover things about conducting you may be glad of. Ask musical friends to watch as you conduct a few bars with the hand in different positions and see how they feel about them.)

Nevertheless, if your relation with the choir is so fluent that you hardly need to supply a beat much of the time, the right hand, freed of this task, will be able to forget about being 'palm to the floor' and adopt any expressive position it wishes. One sees this particularly with conductors who are primarily singing teachers. And one reason they can be so free is precisely because they have trained the choir's members, often as individuals, to carry the responsibility for their singing the same way as a solo singer does. Their singers are truly 'active', as was mentioned earlier in this chapter.

This same 'responsibility' exists in good orchestral players, who have likewise trained as individuals. It is a certain difference between the disciplined nature of playing an orchestral instrument and the immediacy of using the human voice that ultimately makes it normal to use a baton with an orchestra, but not always so with a choir.

I, personally, dispense with a baton when conducting a small choir, but only as long as it is responsive. I also use a much freer technique than anything taught in these books. If, however, the choir seems unused to working closely with a beat, I would use a small baton and a clear beat.

Auditions - a word of warning!

Holding auditions to set up a new choir or other group need not be too fraught an undertaking. Things are quite different, however, when re-auditioning an already existing group, especially where it is at all 'community-based', for example, belonging to a church or a small town.

In such a case, it is essential not to proceed without the clear backing of the clergy or choir committee or whatever group is responsible for the financing and administration of the choir. Full discussions to agree on the degree of 'pruning' of the membership and to face up to the implications re vital, so that the conductor can have full confidence in the steady support of that body - he may need it!

The other thing to remember is that the convention is to give a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, after the audition and in private (e.g. through the post, or a personal phone call), never at the audition itself. No further comment of any kind should ever be given. It can be tempting for a conductor to attempt to justify his decisions, or to give some sort of feedback, or to be drawn into comment simply in order not to seem too aloof and impersonal. This is almost invariably a bad idea, adding insult to injury even with the 'best' of intentions. Those intentions are liable to be actually selfish, failing to recognise what is best and easiest for the person being 'axed' regardless of how one appears.

Having said all this, removing ageing voices or weaker musicians from a choir can bring about a dramatic improvement in the musical result. And though it may hurt to send long-standing members way, it may be essential if one is to attract new young blood to a choir. Once a choir has been through such a trauma, it may do well to establish a policy of regular re-auditioning its members every two or three years. though this too may lie too heavy on the members to be appropriate.

AUTUMN SUNSET (Eric Thiman)

Although only a simple piece for unison choir, there is both breadth and passion in the melodic line of this song, and this even though for much of the time it is not loud. This requires a firm hold of the baton if you are using one (with just a hint of position three within the position two?) and an equally firm drawing of the 'line' from beat to beat. Feel the tip of the baton (or the fingers) moving through every centimetre of this line. A gently wavy beat that might be appropriate in a song with a lighter, daintier quality is out of place here. And any distractions along the arm - for instance, if the elbow goes up as the hand goes down, even if only fractionally - will destroy the sense of 'line'. No matter that the upper arm may move very little, the whole arm must go as a unit and in a simple, direct pattern.

Again, a firm-bodied tone is needed from the choir to express natural glory and the feelings of exhilaration and wonder aroused by it. There are many kinds and characters of 'piano' dynamic, and this one has substance. Feel it in the conducting.

Deep, full breathing is necessary for the choir throughout the song to achieve this tone, as well as well-shaped and well-rounded vowel sounds, very much 'on the voice', i.e. with a good, firm, resonant contact between the air-flow and the vowels.

At bar ten there comes a radiant key-change. This must show in the conductor's face, as well as with, possibly, a slight rising of the base-line of the beat.

The opening of verse two is calmer and gentler than that of verse one (an example of the difference between 'piano' dynamics). Let the contrast be clear - but without losing a sense of full breathing. A soft passage needs special support and projection.

Likewise, the end of the verse will rise to a slightly grander forte (with the allargando asked for) as the poet sums up his thoughts. Notice, though, that the last bar on the piano is marked for a rounded ending, not a forceful one.

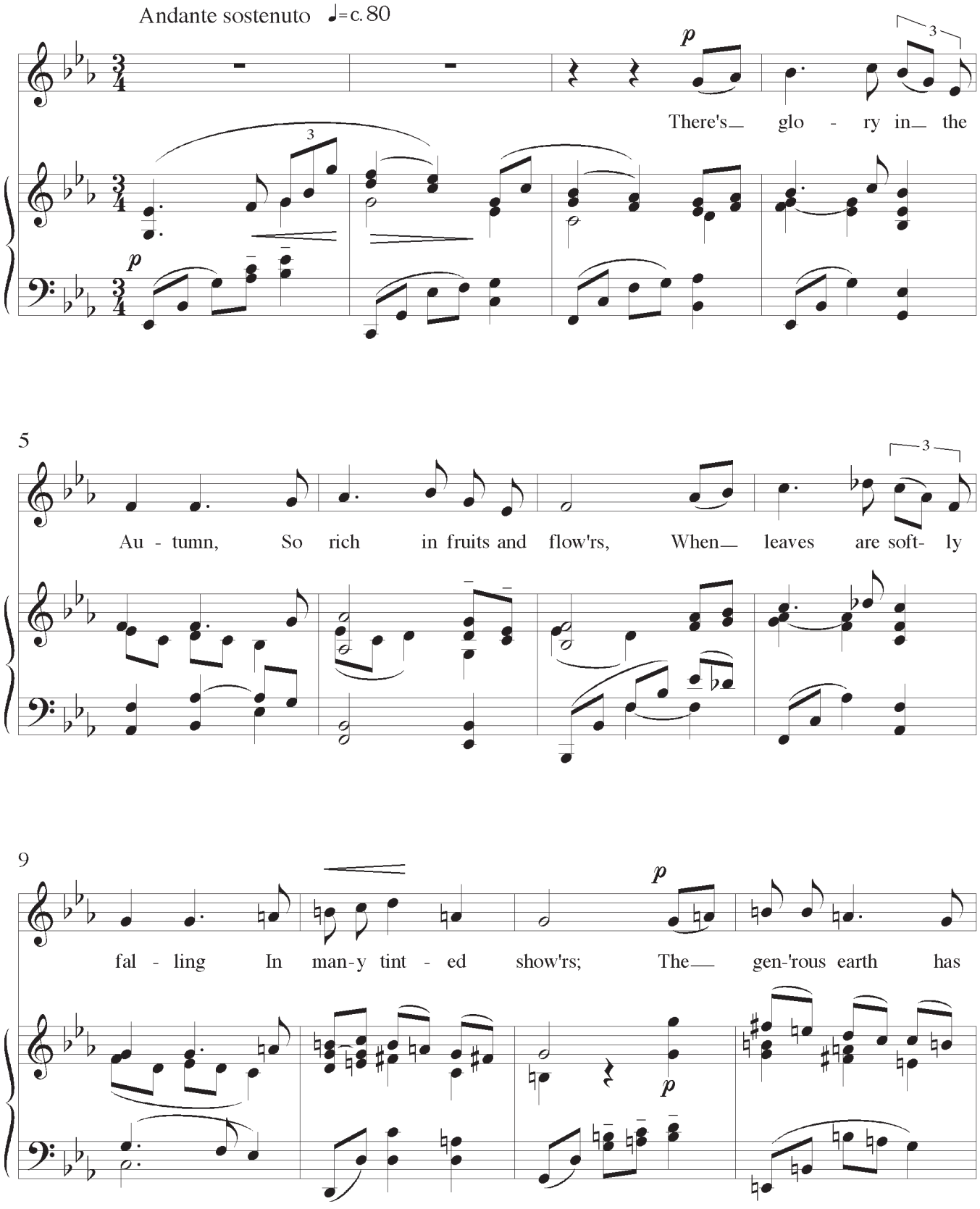
This is a song intended for older children. But even adults, if untrained, might find it hard to sustain every four-bar phrase in this piece with a single breath; yet to break every phrase in two seems a pity. One phrase in each verse in particular asks to be joined through. Which one is it?

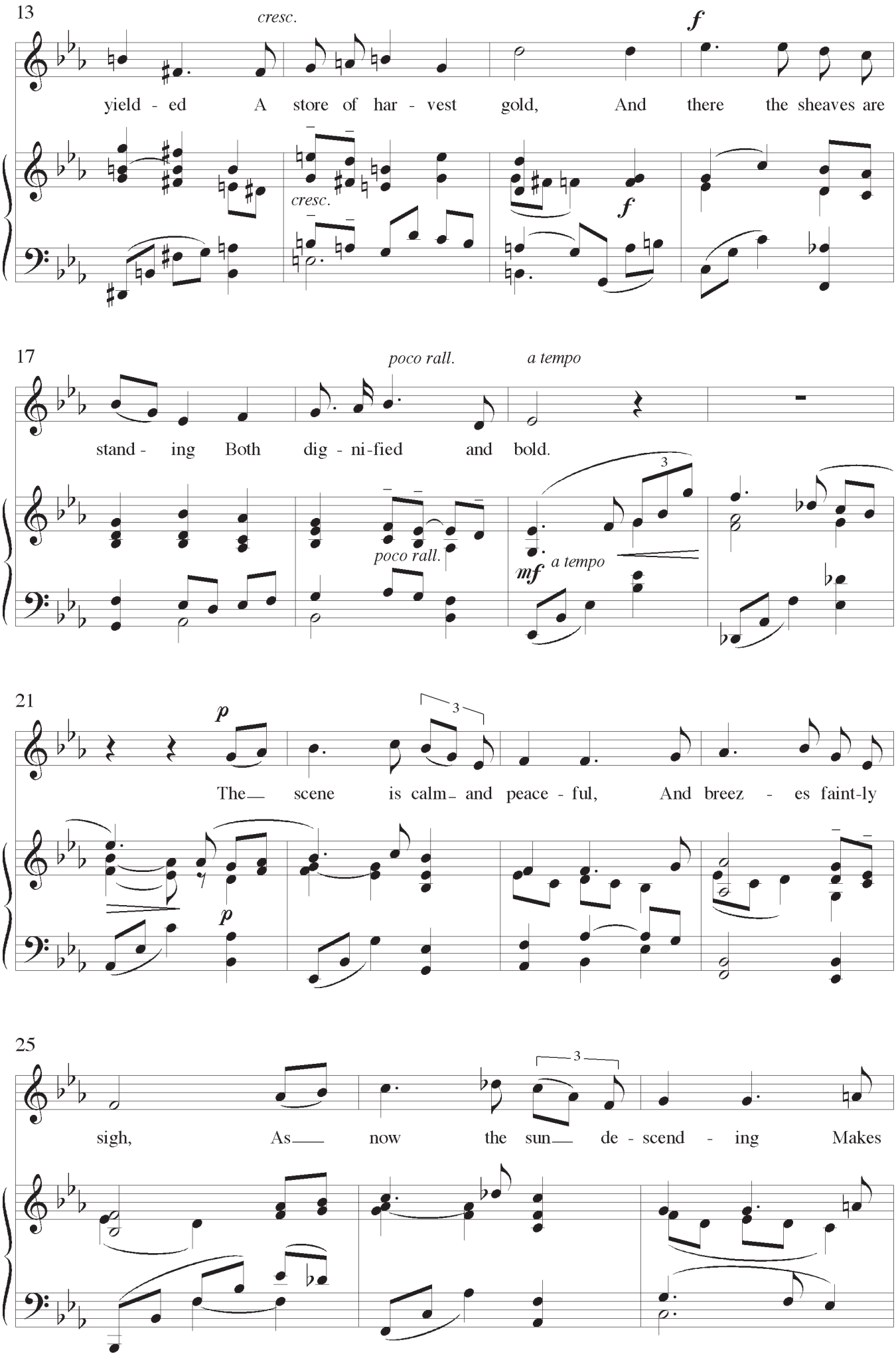
Autumn Sunset

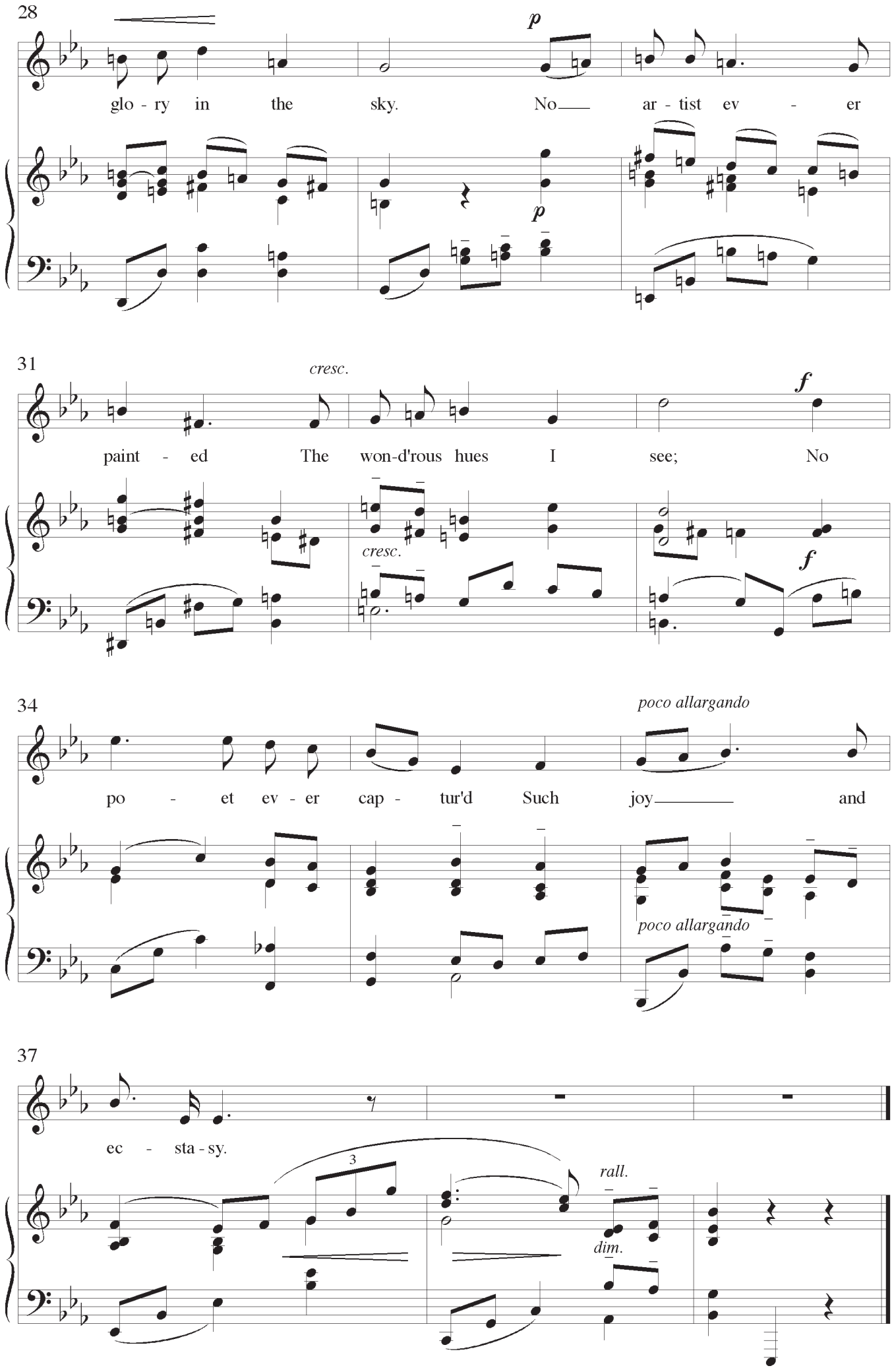
Unison Song

Marjorie E. Kirtley

Eric H. Thiman




13
cresc.
f
yield - ed A store of har - vest gold, And there the sheaves are
cresc.
f
17
poco rall.
a tempo
stand - ing Both dig - ni-fied and bold.
poco rall.
mf
a tempo
21
p
The scene is calm and peace - ful, And breez - es faint-ly
p
25
sigh, As now the sun de - scend - ing Makes


28
glo - ry in the sky. No ar - tist ev - er
p
p
31
cresc.
paint - ed The won-d'rous hues I see; No
cresc.
f
f
34
poco allargando
po - et ev - er cap - tur'd Such joy and
poco allargando
37
ec - sta - sy.
3
rall.
dim.

Appendix One:

Basic Vocal Technique - 1

introduction

Section One:

overview
posture
breathing (diaphrammatic)
relaxed vocal fold area
singing on 'ah'

Section Two:

breathing (intercostal)
active and passive

Introduction

An aspiring young conductor is much more likely to find a choir to conduct than an orchestra; it is likely, also, to consist of untrained amateurs or of children. Unlike instrumentalists, who work hard for many years to be able to play their instrument, the people he thus finds himself working with probably know little or nothing about the true use of their instrument, the voice. It is up to him or her to help them. This may involve specific training - for instance, with the exercises contained in this appendix and those in Books Two and Three. But much more, it involves a feeling for how good vocal tone is produced, a feeling that then finds its way into his or her gestures and rehearsing. For instance, a good conductor will never do anything that might encourage or even allow late breathing, or a tight jaw and shoulders, any loss of buoyancy in light passages, etc.

The absolute fundamentals of good voice production are neither complex nor difficult. I am laying them out in three stages across these three books. When the first stage is mastered by a choir, it should never sound thin or harsh; after the second it should be unlikely to sing flat in normal, accompanied circumstances, and when it has absorbed the third stage, a bright, engaging tone should be the reward.

Nothing in the following pages will harm young voices.

Section One

Overview

It is a good idea to begin by seeing the whole general concept of singing technique briefly explained. You will have some idea then how all the individual pieces of the jigsaw fit together. On the page opposite is a diagram that attempts to give such an overview. Take a look at it now before continuing, working from Section A at the bottom of the page upwards through Section B to Section C.

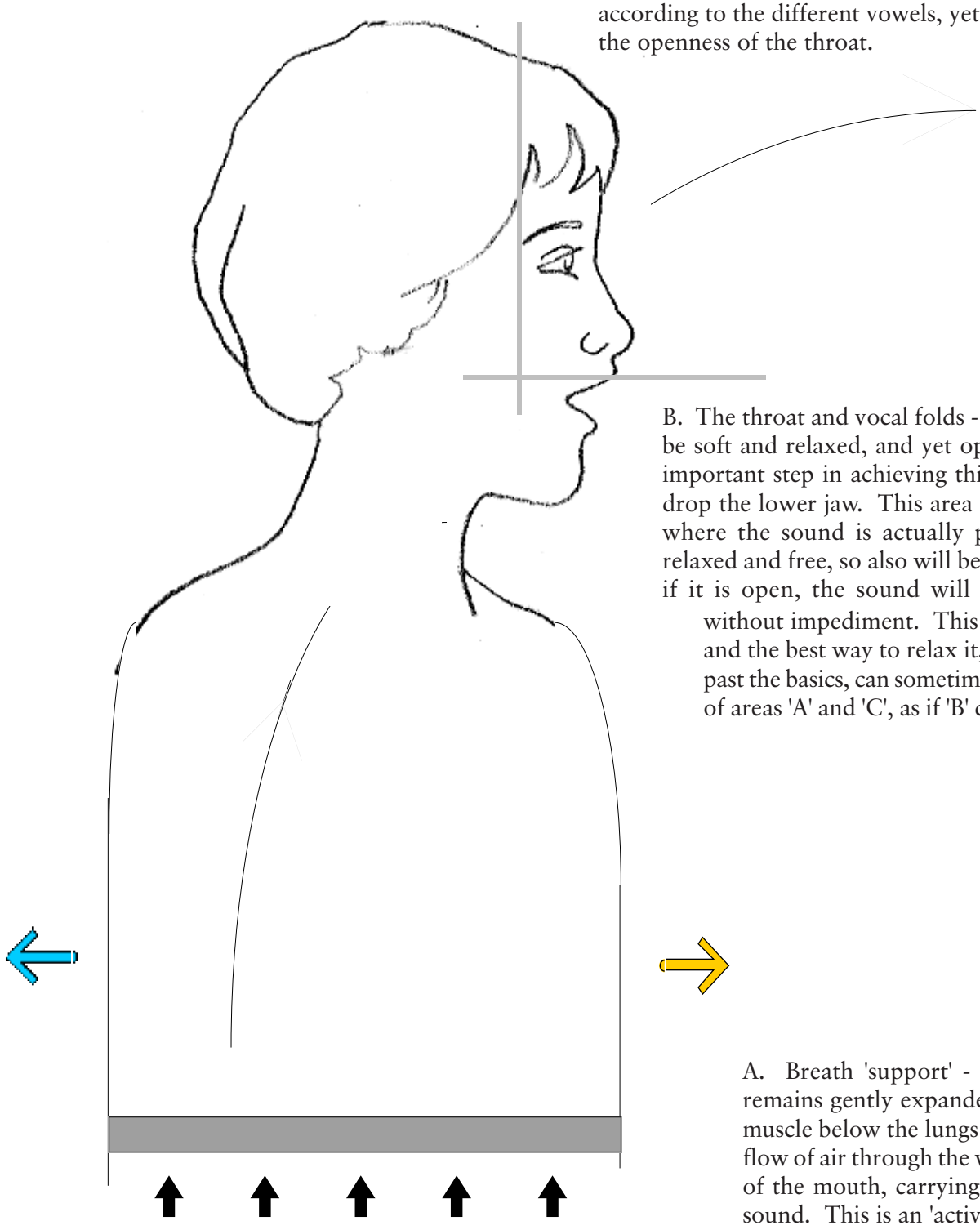
Posture

When standing, it is best not to lock the knees; nor should the tummy stick out. Find a link between the lower spine and the soles of the feet. The result is both stable and flexible.

When sitting, on the other hand, the danger is not having too great a curve in the small of the back, but rather losing it altogether. Stand in front of a chair and feel the curve in the small of the back with the back of the hand. Then sit, using only the front few inches of the seat, and feel with your hand that you have kept the curve. A quick, easy way to ensure a choir has this posture is to have them stand and sit without moving their feet. This posture is very relaxed, but allows deep breathing, as well as other benefits too numerous to mention.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

C. Resonance and projection - on its way down the hall the sound is passed through the cavities that lie in the front of the face and above the roof of the mouth. By lifting and focusing the sound through this area, a bright shining tone is obtained that can carry without electronic aid. The mouth nevertheless shapes the sound according to the different vowels, yet without affecting the openness of the throat.

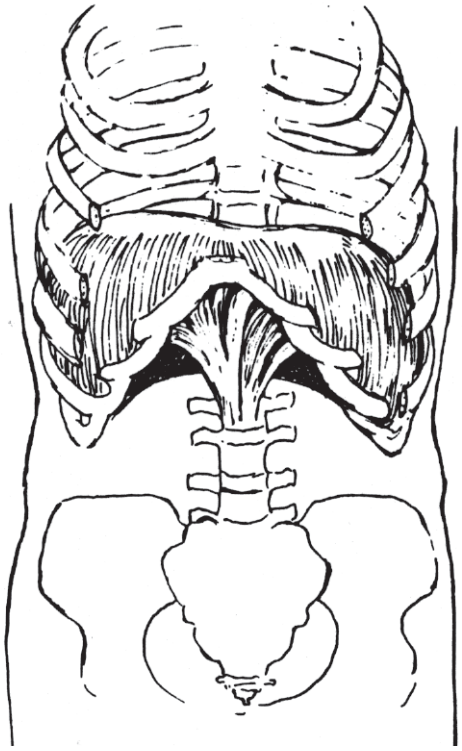


B. The throat and vocal folds - this area needs to be soft and relaxed, and yet open, and the most important step in achieving this is to soften and drop the lower jaw. This area is the 'magic spot' where the sound is actually produced; if it is relaxed and free, so also will be the sound, while if it is open, the sound will be fully released without impediment. This is a 'passive' area, and the best way to relax it, once one has got past the basics, can sometimes be to think only of areas 'A' and 'C', as if 'B' did not even exist.

A. Breath 'support' - while the ribcage remains gently expanded, the diaphragm muscle below the lungs rises, producing a flow of air through the vocal folds and out of the mouth, carrying ('supporting') the sound. This is an 'active' area.

Breathing (diaphragmmatic)

The diaphragm is a large, mushroom-shaped muscle that lies below the lungs; it is the principal muscle used in a singer's breathing.



As it lowers and the lungs fill, the tummy goes out; as it rises and air is expelled, the tummy comes in. This is entirely logical - the more air you contain, the fatter you are. But because most people use shallow breathing, up near the shoulders (horribly near the vocal folds for singing) their natural impulse is to stretch upwards when they breathe in, making the tummy thin; hence the often-heard cry of 'Breathe in!' before taking a photograph containing middle-aged men. Then, when they breathe out, they let everything fall and the tummy go out, a collapse that has nothing to do with creating and presenting a steady vocal line. This tummy/breathing relation has to be reversed to a correct one for singing, before all else.

To help children (or even adults) be quite clear with themselves about this, let them prove it to themselves by patting and poking their tummies:

breathe in - get fat - pat

breathe out - get thin - poke

Relaxed vocal fold area

For the voice to sound relaxed and free, the shoulders, throat and jaw need to be relaxed.

Shoulders - this exercise may not be possible in all situations, and some adults may find it next to impossible to achieve. However, it is extremely beneficial. It consists of letting the arm go limp and remaining so, while an assistant holds it by the wrist and tests it. It is an exercise in letting go of muscles, of not doing, rather than doing. The person practising should keep their head up normally throughout, not allow it to drop. Let them think of stage lights catching their eyes so the audience sees them well.

a - As a first step, let the assistant gently push the arm from behind the elbow, letting it fall back loosely against the body.

b - Next, the assistant should take the person's wrist with one hand, holding it up about a foot in front of the person's shoulder, and with the other hand they gently bring the person's elbow out a little and let it drop back again. The elbow should hang down vertically.

c - If exercise b is secure and without trace of tension, continue it while the person pulls in their tummy muscles and then relaxes them. (This is independent of any breathing, for now.) The aim is to be able to use these muscles for breathing quite independently of the shoulder muscles. Working the breathing must not produce tension in any area near where the sound is produced. When this muscular independence has been achieved, go on to practise with full, diaphragmmatic breathing.

Jaw - It is the lower jaw that needs to be relaxed, falling a quarter of an inch or so at the back, rather than parting too wide at the front (see pictures). The initial effect of this is to feel and look a little stupid. But what is stupidity? It is vacancy, over-relaxation. Yet it is impossible for the throat area to be too relaxed when singing. And from the upper teeth upwards we will want to be very lively and intelligent. Within a few weeks, this 'stupid' look will vanish into the overall picture, remaining visible only to the experienced eye of the conductor as a certain softness at a critical place at the back of the lower jaw.

This loose, dropped jaw should be practised first with tummy movement, in and out, then with full diaphragmmatic breathing. The sound of the breathing should be noticeably softer, and maybe a little darker, when the jaw is loose like this. You should also feel the cold air on the throat a little.

tight

forced

relaxed but open

Singing on ‘ah’

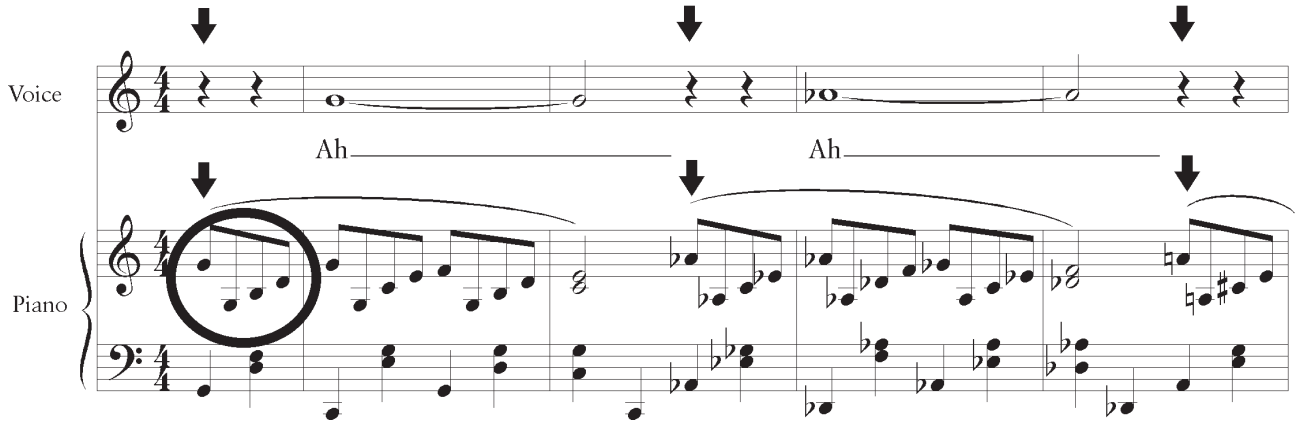
‘Ah’ is the loosest, most open vowel. It is the sound that comes when lips and tongue play no part. It is what the doctor has you say if he wants to look down your throat. Thus it lets out the full voice without hindrance.

Sing long notes on ‘ah’ with diaphragmmatic breathing and a dropped jaw, fairly low in the voice, where it will be relaxed. Perhaps leave some fingers lightly on the larynx or jaw to be sure there is no movement or tension as the sound starts. (The larynx rises when you swallow, in order to block the wide-pipe - obviously then, for the larynx to rise when you sing is very wrong.)

Doing this with the piano, it is particularly important that everyone breathes in good time, not just for the first note, but consistently for many notes. Be sure the breath is taken at the points marked with an arrow, no matter through how many keys the exercise is taken:

Exercise 1

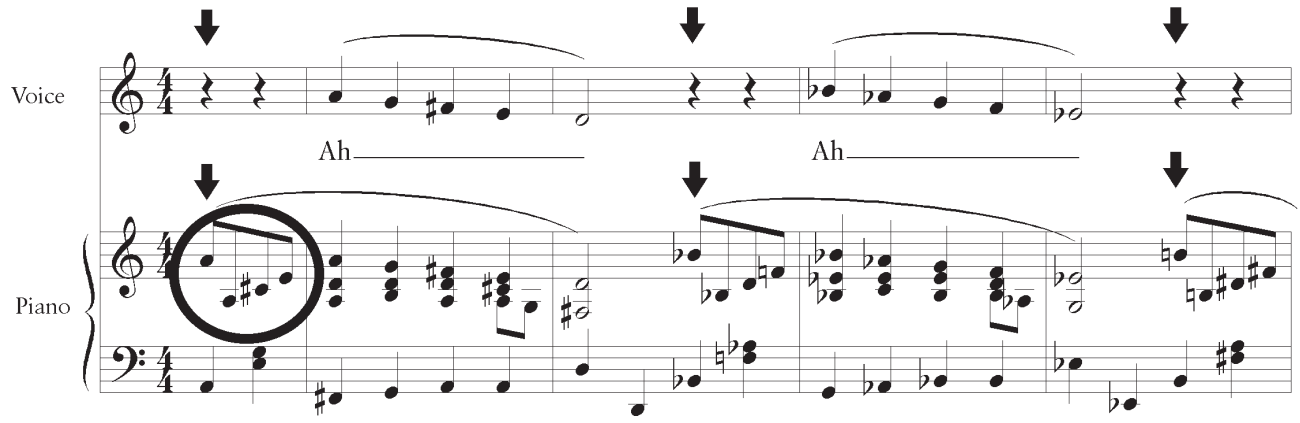
Breathe promptly with the four notes of the piano every time…



Also try five notes descending. Don’t allow the tone to break (or the larynx to jerk) between notes, but sing with a continuous positive flow of air, of tone.

Exercise 2

Breathe promptly with the four notes of the piano every time…



Develop a real sense of release as you sing these exercises, letting go of the sound and allowing the whole of the voice to carry away from you down the room, full and flowing, though without force, without being pushed. Instead of an attack as you start each long note or phrase, think of the way flowers open on speeded-up films.

Section Two

Do not proceed to this section until all the previous material has been thoroughly mastered.

Breathing (intercostal)

As well as filling the lungs downwards by lowering the daiphragm, the singer also fills them out to the side and across the back, by expanding the ribs, which employs the 'intercostal' muscles. (The only direction in which he or she does not fill is upwards.) Gain a feeling for this in the following two ways:

1 - Place one hand on your tummy, below the navel. (This is the abdomen, of course, the stomach being rather higher; but in common usage it is the tummy.) Place the thumb of the other hand halfway up the ribs on one side, then turn the wrist to place the fingers around your back. Breathe in first below (diaphragmmatic) and then with the ribs (intercostal), running the two together into a single action. To breathe out, however, only use the diaphragm, the ribs remaining gently expanded. In this way, the pressure gently feeding the air through the throat is well away from the vocal folds, whiel the expanded ribs form a kind of protective cage, keeping all pressure away from the throat. Then relax the ribs and repeat.

2 - Stand and swing the arms up to 'touch the ceiling'. Leaving the ribcage still, let the arms fall over behind and down to your side. Let the shoulders fall relaxedly on the raised ribcage. Repeat with a loose floppy jaw. Then repeat, breathing in as you raise the arms, and holding the breath as they fall; finally breath out using the diaphragm.

Having discovered this breathing in those two ways, give it regular practise in these two ways:

1 - 'Resilient Ribcage'. Soften the jaw and breathe in, first with the diaphragm and then with the ribs. Holding the breath, test the resilience of the ribcage by placing the backs of the fingers firmly against the sides and bouncing a little. Then breathe out steady from the diaphragm while continuing to test in this way.

This exercise can also be done as 'Steady Sternum', placing the fingertips of one hand firmly against the sternum (breast bone) after breathing in, and checking that it does not fall as you breathe out.

2 - 'Shirt Collar'. Go to a mirror, soften the jaw and breathe in, diaphragm and ribs. Watch the position of your collar carefully and be sure it does not move as you breathe out.

Active and Passive

Become fluent at the above exercises till, without hands on or a mirror, you can do a full exhalation not just slowly and steadily, but also quite quickly. This faster 'full exhalation' should make no appreciable noise on the throat, since the throat should offer no resistance.

With these quicker exhalations, become very aware of the diaphragm as the active area and the throat as the passive area. It is like playing tennis, where the ball is hit by a racket that is held by the hand. In singing, the note is launched by the airstream, which is created by the diaphragm muscle.

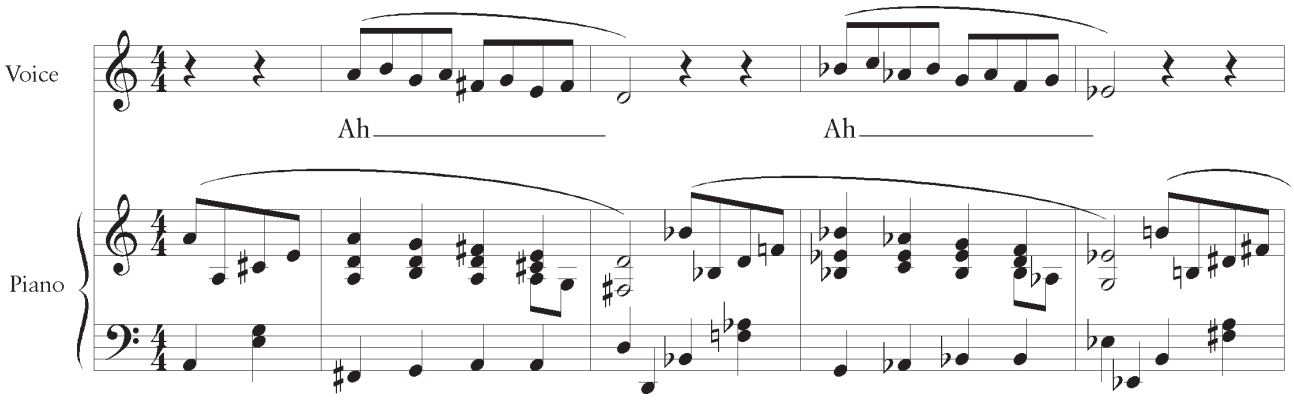
A further analogy with tennis lies in the preparation for the launch. The arm action in tennis involves first a swing-back, then a turning, and then a movement in to meet the ball. Let young students (and older ones, if necessary) imitate this movement with their arm while coordinating it with breathing in (swing back), a moment to turn, followed by the sending of the breath a little ahead of time to feel fully launched at the right moment.

Fit this breathing against the piano (Ex. 1), breathing in at the arrow and during only the first two or so of the piano's quavers, launching the breath well in time to 'meet' the downbeat when one would sing. Having gained a thorough feeling for this with the breathing only, sing the long note also, eradicating any kind of hesitation at the moment of producing the tone. The singers should prefer, if anything, to sound early. (This can transform the effect of a choir's singing, as well as the musical relationship between them and their conductor.) Keep a loose jaw.

Having launched the note, keep it motivated with the airflow throughout its duration. Children often find it easier to achieve this on a scale than a single long note, because the scale has an element of melody to it. However, the long note forces the issue; if a person can give 'flow' to the sound on a long note, they have genuinely achieved this aspect of singing. Imagining the 'ah' vowel round and like a ball spinning away from one.

Use this tennis-style launching of the voice also on the five-note descending scale. Also practise a wavy version of the scale:

Exercise 3



This will help bring a bit of life and lift to the voice, though how genuinely to achieve this will be the subject of that part of the course contained in Book Two.

Appendix Two:

Junior Choral Repertoire

Unison with piano

Richard Rodney Bennett	The Aviary	OUP
	The Insect World	OUP
Howard Blake	The Land of Counterpane	Faber
Frank Bridge	A Spring Song	OUP
Benjamin Britten	A New Year Carol	
Dunhill	April	Stainer & Bell
Dvorak, arr. Davies	Moon Rainbow	Ashdown
Fauré	Pie Jesu (from 'Requiem)	Novello
Cèsar Franck	Panis Angelicus	-
C. Armstrong Gibbs	Five Eyes	B&H
Giordani	Caro mio ben	Schirmer
Graves	Inside the basket	Curwen
Michael Head	A Green Cornfield	B&H
John Ireland	Alpine Song	
Irish, arr. Hughes	Irish Country Songs:	B&H
	I know where I;m goin'	
	She moved through the fair	
	Gartan mother's lullaby	
	The Sally Gardens	
Irish, arr. Hamilton Harty	My Lagan Love	B&H
Peter Jenkyns	The Little Spanish Town	Novello
E. Markham Lee	Arcady	Leonard, Gould & Bolttler
Purcell	Fairest Isle	
Roger Quilter	June	B&H
	Over the mountains	"
	The Fuchsia Tree	"
	To Daisies	"
Eric Thiman	I hear spring calling	Roberton
	I love all graceful things	"
	The Dandelion	"
	The Silver Birch	"
Schubert	The Trout	Novello
	Joy	Elkin
Schumann, arr. Young	Butterfly	Curwen
Sullivan	The sun whose rays ('The Mikado')	
Various	26 Classical Songs	Novello

Two-part with piano (or organ)

arr. A.C.	Br. James' Air	AC
Maurice Blower	Hie Away	Curwen
Frank Bridge	Pan's Holiday	Braydeston Press
	The graceful swaying wattle	
Eric Coates	Coloured Fields	Chappell
Dvorak	Moravian Duets	AC

Fauré	Messe Basse & other sacred works	Novello
Handel, arr. Geehl	I know that my redeemer liveth	Ashdown
Humperdinck	Evening Prayer	Roberton
Liszt, arr. Geehl	Woodland dreaming (Liebestraum)	Ashdown
Mozart (arr. Ley)	Ave Verum Corpus	OUP
Pergolesi	Stabat Mater (exceprts)	Novello
Schubert, arr. Geehl	Ev'ning breezes (Serenade)	Ashdown
	The Lord is my shepherd	Ashdown
Spirituals, arr. AC	Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?	AC
	Joshua fight the battle	"
Eric Thiman	The Thrush in Spring	Roberton

Three-part unaccompanied

Kodaly	Evening Song	B&H
Lassus	Mon ceour se recommand a vous	-
Morley	Now is the month of Maying	-
	Though Philomena lost her love	-
	My bonny lass	

Three-part with piano (or organ or harp)

Britten	Ceremony of Carols	B&H
Elgar	Fly, singing bird, fly	Novello
	The Snow	"
Fauré, arr. Ratcliffe	Requiem	Novello
Michael Head	Ships of Arcady	B&H
Haydn, arr. Geehl	My mother bids me bind my hair	Ashdown
Irish, arr Nelson	Quiet Land of Erin	CNC
Spiritual, arr. A.C.	Little David	AC
Spiritual, arr. Nelson	Sister Mary had-a but one child	B&H
Spirituals, arr. Trant	By an' by	OUP
	Children, go where I send thee!	"
	Ev'ry time I hear the spirit	"
	Steal Away	"
	Swing low, sweet chariot	"
Schumann, arr. A.C.	Moonlit Night	AC
	The Walnut Tree	AC
Vivaldi, arr. Ratcliffe	Gloria in D	Novello

Light Cantatas, etc.

Michael Hurd	Pilgrim	Novello
	Rooster Rag	Novello
Joseph Horowitz	Captain Noah and his floating zoo	Novello

Christmas Songs (unison)

(collection)	Merrily to Bethlehem	A & C Black
(collection)	Carol, gaily carol	A & C Black
Gerald Brown	Bells across the frosty plain	Roberton
Gerald Brown	Christmas time is carol time	Roberton
Robert Chilcott	Mid-winter	OUP
Sue Furlong	Good News Carol	Sue Furlong
Michael Head	The Little Road to Bethlehem	B&H
John Rutter	Shepherd's Pipe Carol	OUP
"	Star Carol	
arr. A.C.	Don oíche úd i mBheihil	AC
	Suantrai	"

Christmas Songs (two-part)

Rebecca Byram-Wigfield	Christmas Bell Song	Roberton
Shona Donagh	Forest Carol	
arr. A.C.	Quittez, pasteurs	"
	Dutch Carol	"
	Patapan	"
	Sans Day carol	"
	Silent Night	"
Sue Furlong	A New King for Israel (Nativity Musical)	Sue Furlong

Christmas Songs (three-part)

arr. A.C.	Duan Nollag	AC
	Breton Carol	"
	Nous allons, ma mie	"
	In dulci jubilo	"
	Past three o'clock	"
	The holly and the ivy	"

Appendix Three:

Elementary String Fingering & Bowing

beginners and intonation
finger patterns 1, 2 3 & 4
the violin
the viola
the cello
bowing
general care
recommended repertoire

Note: The contents of this appendix would all be known to any string player as well as many others. They are, furthermore, only of relevance when facing the task of taking an elementary string group or orchestra. In general, then, readers may choose to skip it. But it is included in case a person finds themeselves about to direct such a group and does not have this basic knowledge at his or her fingertips. It then becomes essential, if the person is to do their job responsibly. Remember that the rewards of doing a job well far outweigh false considerations of how far up the profession one is doing it.

Beginners and Intonation

Everyone knows that beginner string players usually play out of tune! But they needn't, and all string teachers put great efforts into avoiding this. Each has their own way of going about this, but one of the most important and widely shared methods is that of introducing the various notes in the first position systematically and gradually over a fairly long period of time. (The first position is that where the fingers of the left hand are used at the very beginning of the string, producing notes scalewise from the open string.)

Finger Patterns 1, 2, 3 & 4

It is not at all uncommon for only a single pattern of notes to be used throughout the first year and only when these have settled thoroughly and the child plays them safely and fluently in tune to go on and add the backward 2nd finger, producing finger pattern two.

These two patterns alone make up the required syllabus for Grade One, an exam usually not taken till after a year and a half of playing. It can take a further year and a half to secure the notes of finger patterns 3 and 4, reaching a Grade Two level and theoretically having all the available notes in first position. Learning third position in order to reach high C and D on the violin E string, along with securing the tuning in a fluent use of the first position is the work of Grade Three, again about a year and a half's work.

Clearly any person in charge of a beginner's orchestra or string group needs to know about this, or he or she is liable to place music on the children's stands that they are not able to play, or that, even if they make a stab at playing it, is undoing their teachers' hard work at trying to keep the children's playing in tune.

The following pages contain reference diagrams to help the non-string player determine what notes are available at what stage. It is not impossible to step outside the range of notes a child knows if it is just one exceptional note. But be ready to have to explain it, and don't use such a piece unless you feel you must. Even one note repeated several times (e.g. a backward first finger, learned not under the teacher's guidance but haphazardly in the middle of an orchestral rehearsal) can be sufficient to damage the child's left-hand position on the violin and weaken their playing from then on.

The Violin

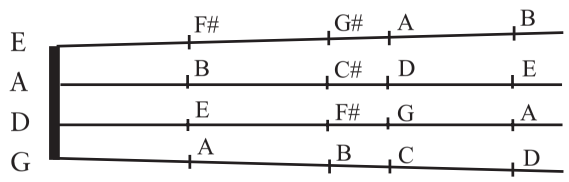
It will be seen at once that until a player has finger pattern two, it is not really possible to play in harmony at all. Children who have not yet taken a Grade One exam should not be in an ensemble taken by other than a qualified string teacher.

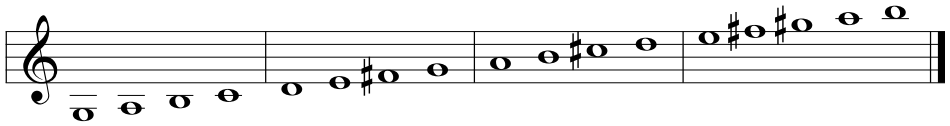
When children have taken Grade One and are preparing Grade Two, this does not automatically mean that the notes of finger patterns three and four now become usefully available to their orchestra or string group. Acquiring any real fluency with these notes is partly the job of Grade Three, and good tuning at speed in the key of, say E flat major, may take till Grade Four. That is also the grade at which second position (1st finger where the 2nd lies in first position) is generally taught, the most helpful of positions for playing in F major. Grade Four is also the level at which playing in third position becomes reliable enough to be at all useful in an orchestra.

One must then add to these cautionary remarks the guiding principle that the two things that matter most in ensemble playing are a clean tone and absolutely pure intonation. Without these two things, the result cannot be pleasing either to listeners or players, so that people are being encouraged to do a thing badly - and then, presumably, receive praise for it. This in turn subliminally teaches all concerned that music is not taken seriously, the way other activities are, and is really only 'for the birds'. Enough said…

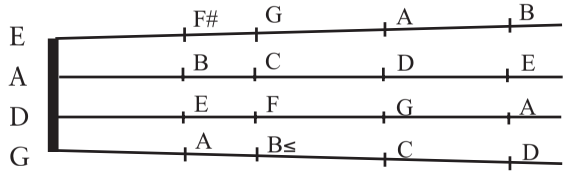
VIOLIN

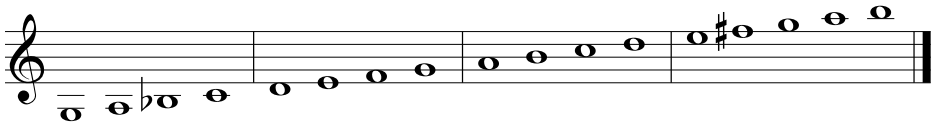
Finger Pattern 1



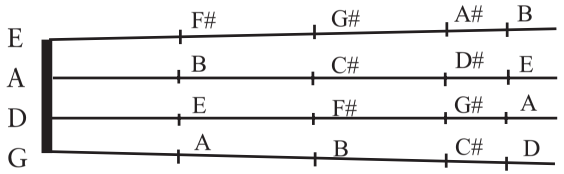


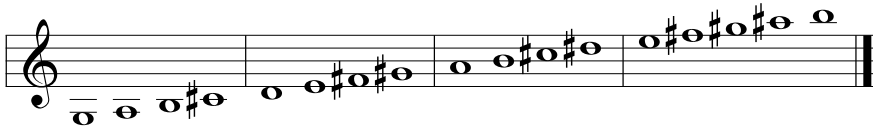
Finger Pattern 2



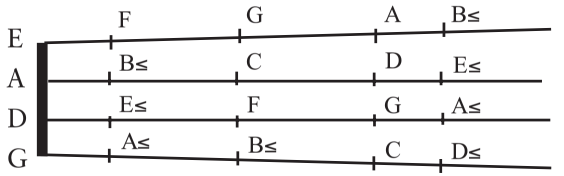


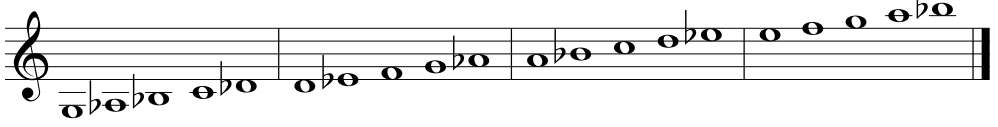
Finger Pattern 3





Finger Pattern 4





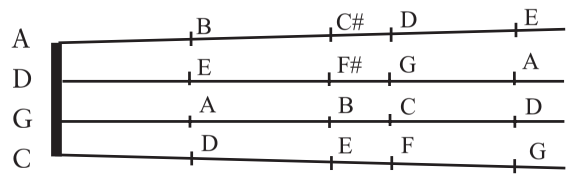
The Viola

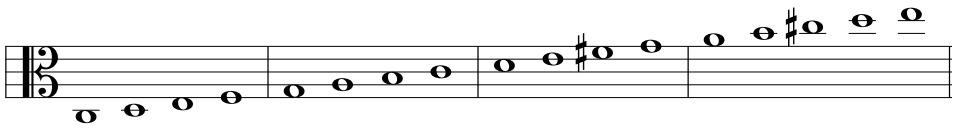
As you will see, the viola dispenses with the violin's E-string in order to gain the lower C-string, theoretically making flatter keys a fraction easier and sharp ones a fraction harder. However, children do not normally begin the viola till they have already obtained most or all of the notes in first position on the violin. This is both because a choice for viola is a very individual thing and does not normally mature until a certain stage, and because physically a young child may still have to use a half or three-quarter size violin. Though a viola C-string can be fitted to a full-size violin and still sound vaguely acceptable, it would be too loose on a three-quarter violin to be generally recommended.

However, a common problem facing the conductor of a junior ensemble is the absence of any violas at all. Always keep an eye out for items that offer a Violin Three line as an alternative to Viola. If you are making your own arrangements and are using the key of G as the one most likely to sound clean and in tune across the ensemble, you will find the absence of low F sharp on the violin a considerable drawback for a violin three line, but some published arrangers manage this problem remarkably skillfully. It is always a mark of an arrangement by someone who truly understands what is needed (Sheila Nelson, John Auton), rather than a composer asked by a publisher to 'write something easy'.

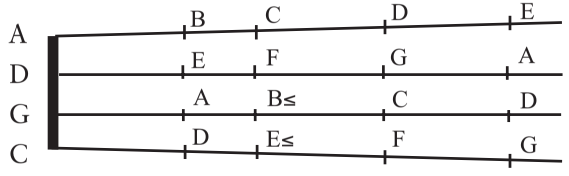
VIOLA

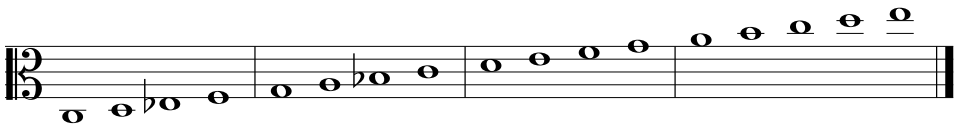
Finger Pattern 1



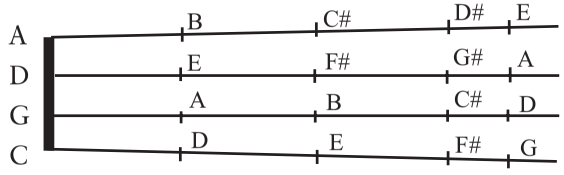


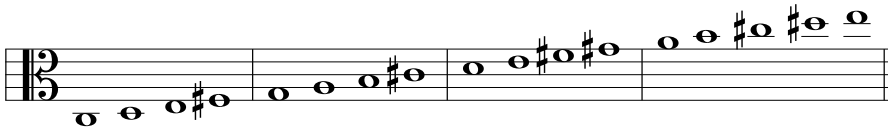
Finger Pattern 2



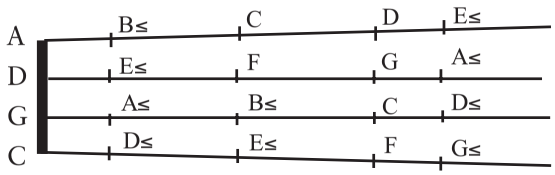


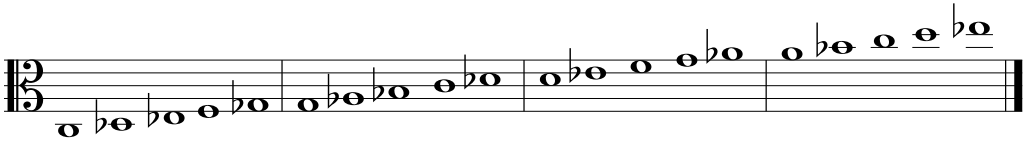
Finger Pattern 3





Finger Pattern 4





The Cello

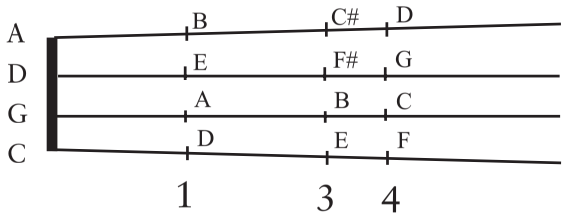
The cello strings are identical to the viola but an octave lower. However, the greatly increased distances between the notes leads to an entirely different way of fingering them. In finger patterns one and two, the four fingers each lie only a semi-tone apart. In patterns three and four, the whole-tone stretch is always between the first two fingers, never the others.

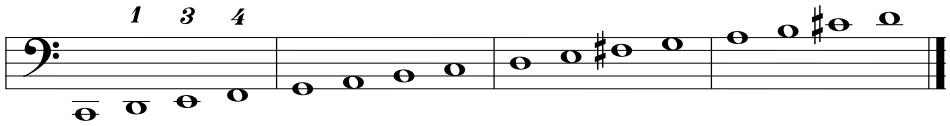
Some arrangements make a point of giving the melody at times to the cellos, while others are really terribly 'consciencious' about giving every line its go at the tune. Though in principal there is nothing wrong with this, it rarely works well. The simplest, most effective approach is simply to harmonise in four parts. Going beyond this for musical variety can be very good. But if you get the impression that an arranger has gone beyond this simply because he thinks, or has been told by his publisher, that every child ought to 'get a go at the tune', beware. Firstly, if the texture is not skillfully designed to let the melody through when it is given to the inner or lower parts, the melody will probably just be lost. A wide range of dynamic, supposedly a 'good principle' of teaching children, is actually damaging in the early stages of string playing, when a free, resonant tone is what one is seeking to develop, not a cramped, dead one. Trying to balance down ten violinists so that one poor viola player or cellist can stand right out with the tune is not really an option. Secondly, such arrangements often chop the tune into so many little bits one can no longer enjoy it as a melody anyway. Remember both that these simple folk melodies are often as beautiful, if not more so, than ones from 'classical' compositions, and that children need to enjoy them fully as music, not just as a fun exercise in seeing if they can all stay together. A viola player will get more reward from playing a harmony line in a successful, beautiful rendition of a simple melody than from suddenly 'getting the tune' for two bars - only to have it snatched away again anyway.

A situation can arise where as well as a few talented violinists, there is a talented cellist, above the standard of the other cellists and third violinists. Complex arrangements exist to deal with this situation, but unless you are actually facing it, these arrangements are of no use to you.

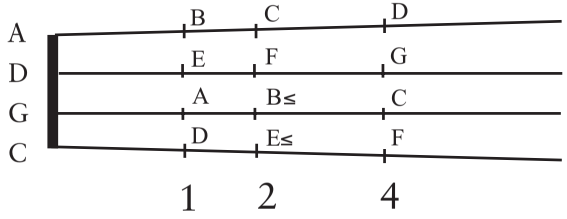
CELLO

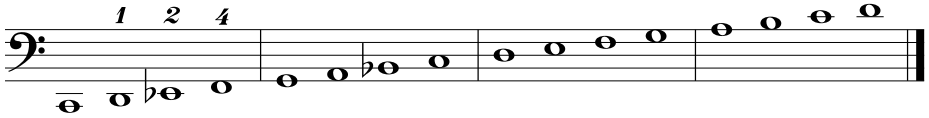
Finger Pattern 1



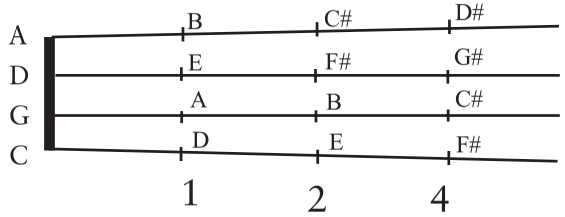


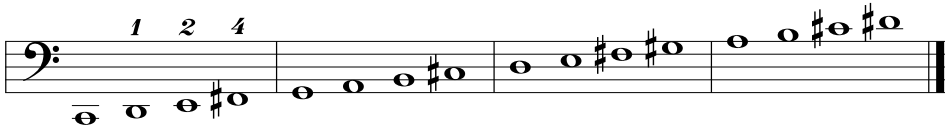
Finger Pattern 2



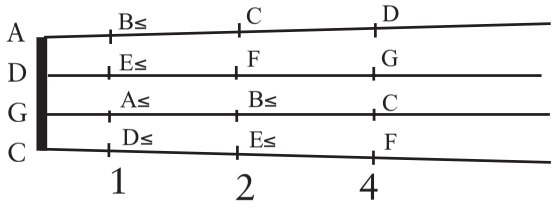


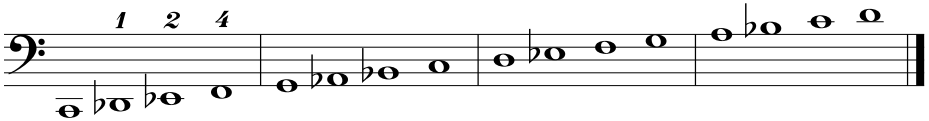
Finger Pattern 3





Finger Pattern 4





Bowing

Down-bows, marked ⊒, begin at the heel, the heavier end of the bow where it is held.

Up-bows, marked ⊑ begin at the point or tip, the light - and fragile!! - end of the bow.

The general rule for beginners is to use a down-bow on stressed notes. Thus if a piece begins on a downbeat, the players should use a down-bow; if on an up-beat, an up-bow. Also, the final chord of a piece is generally a down-bow. If a long note has a diminuendo, this is best on a down-bow, and if a crescendo, this is best on an up-bow.

A generous use of the bow is to be encouraged, and in particular beginners should not be allowed to avoid the lower six inches of bow. There are times when it would be wrong to ask them to use this part of the bow (e.g. plain or legato quavers), but in music of a simple character its regular use will open out the tone and the whole feeling of the playing in the most desirable way.

Slurring notes in pairs should be little problem, even to a Grade One player. However, when slurs go to three or especially four notes, this can lead to a slow bow movement, and the loss of generosity of tone. A Grade Four player learns to compensate for such slow bow movment by strongly increasing the bow pressure. He or she will also have learned to use a vibrato to give such 'pressured tone' a necessary roundness. They will also, hopefully, have learnt to apply this pressure without tightening the bow-hold or the bowing arm. (They are also maybe beginning to reach an age and beginning to play a repertoire where such 'adult' intensity of tonal expression has some meaning.) Teachers will differ in how much pressure they like to introduce into the bowing at what stage, but as a general piece of advice, prefer bow-motion to too much pressure in the early stages. Think of the sound of a Baroque string group and aim in that direction rather than the style of Brahms!

If players are at a Grade Two level, an 'on-the-string staccato' can be used, though it should not be overdone. It is done in the middle of the bow, or sometimes at the point. If they are approaching Grade Three, a true, lifted, 'off-the-string' staccato becomes available, though preferably not on a passage where the left-hand work is at all difficult (e.g. with shifting between positions). This is done at the heel of the bow, and nearer the middle when fast. Try to keep the tone clear and clean, not scratchy, and if intonation suffers, be concerned that too much is being demanded. Keep a close watch on bow-holds - if the grip is tightening and the hand-shape becoming unnatural, attempting the lifted staccato could be causing the fault.

There are many string teachers who introduce these bow-strokes rather earlier than I have suggested above, but they remain my guidelines, especially for ensemble and orchestral playing, where tone-quality and intonation must always be the paramount concern.

There are usually a few children unable to rise to the mental-physical challenge of following the bowing marks in a piece. If their tone and tuning are acceptable, this need not make them too much of a burden on the ensemble. But in general, stress the importance of following the markings. They are designed to make the music 'work', feel right on the instrument, and become more and more critical as time goes by. For instance, since lifted staccato will only work at the heel of the bow, the bowing must be designed to accomodate this - not always a simple matter.

General Care

Chairs should be placed in an orderly way before the rehearsal, such that all players are facing the conductor. There should be sufficient space between them for players to bow fully and freely.

Instrument cases should be left at the side of the room, not opened amidst the playing area.

Bows should be rosined before every rehearsal.
Both bow and instrument (belly, fingerboard and strings) should be cleaned at the end of every rehearsal.

Children who forget their rosin, cleaning duster and shoulder rest must learn to remember them.
(An occasional teacher teaches a violin hold without shoulder rest, but this is rare.)

No bow or instrument should ever be placed on the floor, even for a moment.

All movement within a room where there are instruments out of their cases should be steady and calm.

Recommended Repertoire:

John Auton:	Folk Songs for Strings, Books 1 & 2
Sheila Nelson:	Tunes for my String Orchestra; More Tunes for my String Orchestra

Sandra Dackow Library

(Contents of Part Two)

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(Contents of Part Three)