

## **Drum Major Conducting: Basic Technique**

- Importance of strong basic technique CANNOT be underestimated. All basic aspects of conducting must be easily and effortlessly controlled before a drum major will be able to convey that sense of control to the ensemble—meaning YOU CAN'T FAKE IT.
- A DISCLAIMER: Be aware that you have already performed AT LEAST 50% of your audition prior to this class by the examples you have set earlier—through marching, playing, service to others and the organization, and, most importantly, the sense of maturity and respect for others you have demonstrated, meaning that you may easily be the best conductor and not get the position.

REMEMBER THE TERM DRUM MAJOR IS A MISNOMER

“YOU ARE NEITHER A DRUM NOR A MAJOR”

TRUE LEADERSHIP IS ACHIVED THROUGH SERVICE TO OTHERS AND  
SETTING POSITIVE EXAMPLES

### DUTIES OF THE DRUM MAJOR

1. Tempo, Tempo, Tempo
2. Being the Musical Leader
3. Conducting, not just directing

### TEMPO

- As drum major, recognition and maintenance of tempo is one of your most important responsibilities
- If you do not already have a metronome, BUY ONE IMMEDIATELY.  
Metronome = best friend forever...and ever
- If a metronome is not readily available, estimate tempo as closely as possible by referring to song you are familiar with (e.g. “Stars and Stripes Forever” is a common estimate for M.M=120) Get a song for a slow (M.M=70-90), moderate (M.M~120), and fast (M.M.~144-168)

## POSTURE

- The simple method→ be at attention with everything but your arms
- Posture must be commanding, but not rigid
- Monitor from feet up
  - Feet and legs—weight balanced between two feet together or close together, feel free to move around the podium within reason
- Upper body—basically a more flexible form of attention; tall and assertive; back straight and torso tall; weight and shoulders slightly forward and engaged; shoulders slightly down; head/neck straight and tall

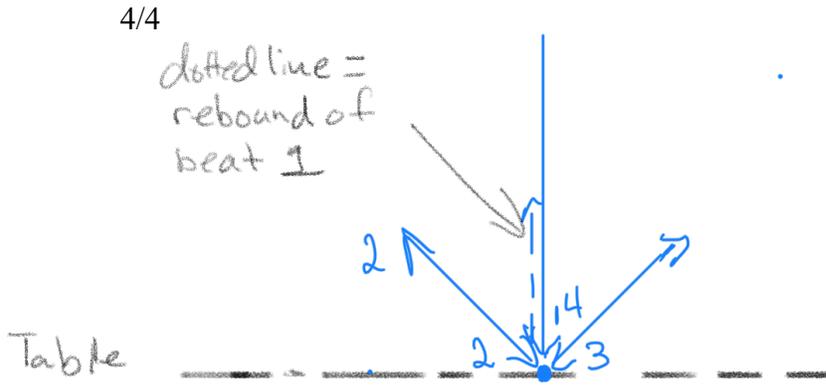
## ARM AND HAND POSITION

- Arms and hands should be very stable and controlled at all times→ work out if you have to
- Forearms should extend forward, creating an angle greater than 90 degrees at the elbows with the hand in line with or slightly below the base of the sternum→ this creates a more engaged and commanding position than with the upper arms relaxed at a 90 degree angle, which looks lazy (because it is)
- Hand position—wrist is a straight extension of the forearm; fingers together and cupped slightly; hand muscles should be slightly taut, like you're cupping a large ball→ this creates greater stability in the hands and wrists, which becomes VERY important while conducting

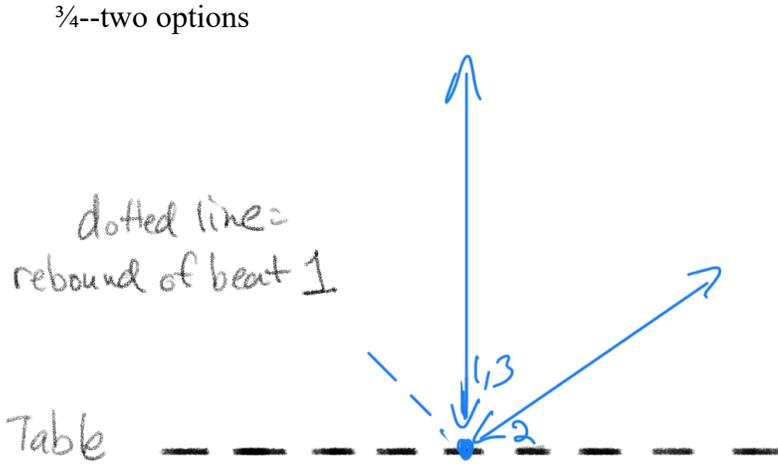
## PATTERNS

- General conducting principles:
  - EVERY MOVEMENT MUST BE DELIBERATE; no excessive or unnecessary movement; weird, pointless showiness is BAD; there must be a purpose to everything you do; REMEMBER—You are conducting the ENSEMBLE, NOT THE AUDIENCE
  - THE POINT AT WHICH THE BEAT IS INDICATED AND FELT IS CALLED THE ICTUS; the ictus is typically created by a rebound and *slight* pulse of the wrist/hand, as if flicking water off the tip of the fingers; this is usually the hardest thing to master for beginning conductors→ they usually flick the wrist too much
  - ALL MOVEMENTS MUST REMAIN STABLE; this relates to the importance of sturdy hand and wrist movements→ fingers and hands must stay move “as one” with the forearm, meaning that floppy, flimsy movement of the wrists and hands is both unnecessary and distracting to the clarity of the pulse
  - THREE BASIC PATTERNS—a standard pattern, a slow/legato pattern, and a “stop” pattern for very fast tempos; diagrams for right hand

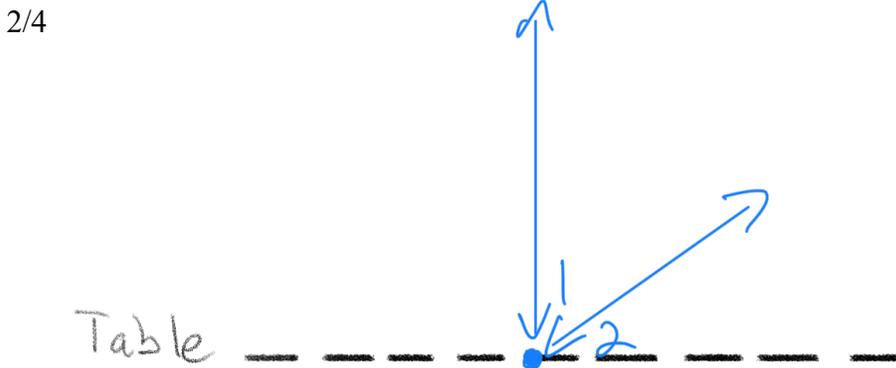
Focal Point Patterns Diagrams



•NOTE: rebound of beat 1 goes at most half as high as the beginning of the downbeat



NOTE: inward rebound should still be smaller than downbeat



### Slow/Legato Pattern

More fluid; move arms and hands against “a resistant force”; your ictus points “brush the table” rather than tap it, as in a standard pattern; move s if through water (or molasses or yogurt or any other semi-liquid substance to create a sense of fluid pull throughout the pattern); create the same kind of resistance a mime would use to “move something heavy”

4/4

3/4

2/4

- NOTE: A variation on this, “the arch pattern” can be used at faster tempos to demonstrate lyricism or lilt in the meter

“Stop Pattern”

Ictus is conveyed in a slightly different way in that there is no noticeable rebound (the wrist still flick, though); instead, fast, clear and crisp movement in the appropriate direction indicates the beat

4/4

3/4

2/4

## RELEASES

- Two Handed—loops counterclockwise for right hand; mirror on left (one handed releases will be discussed with the left hand independence)
- Release ictus must be clear through a sharp stop on beat of release or through angular rebound
- Must begin pattern on beat following release

## DYNAMICS (TWO HANDS)

- Levels/changes indicated through size of pattern
  - Important to maintain ONE primary source of motion (a.k.a. wrist, elbow, or shoulder); smaller patterns (for softer dynamics) use more wrist and elbow motion, with the focus shifting gradually up to the shoulders as the size of the pattern increases; smaller patterns CAN be visible if the movement is very clear and crisp, even from the back sideline
- Can also drop left hand in softer or thinner parts

## LEFT HAND USAGE

- Generally mirrors right hand (but don't overdo it); can be dropped to side during soft passages or loud, legato passages where the right hand pattern sweeps across the body
- Comfortable independence from the right hand is necessary but difficult to achieve; several exercises exist to develop independence→ move left hand in a circle or other geometric shapes while conducting a pattern w/the left hand or try to un-stack and restack a pile of quarters w/the left hand while conducting the right hand
- CUES—two types: long prep and short prep; the most important part of a cue is the PREP→ you MUST look at the group you are cueing w/eye contact if possible and MUST breath with the immediate prep to insure accurate and assertive entrance
  - long prep—usually used before major entrances or potentially awkward entrances→ the left hand is held stationary on the horizontal plane (called the “Table”) for a measure or longer before the cue is to occur; begin staring at the appropriate group at this time; the immediate prep occurs on the beat before the cue→ the left hand comes up towards the left ear and tips of fingers and thumbs come together→ hand comes down on cued beat and finger/thumb comes apart on ictus table
  - short cue—the long prep without the measure-long extended prep

- immediate prep for beat three can also come the left hand moving across the chest towards the right shoulder
- Reentry into pattern is typically one or two beats after the cue, but can vary due to context
- Slightly different process if cue is on last beat of measure→ the hand rebounds up off the table instead of staying down for the beat; this is because it can confuse the ensemble into thinking that beat one is a beat earlier than it actually is
- HOLDS—prep and place left hand on table palm up
- DYNAMICS—can have a long or short prep just as the cue does
  - Crescendos—immediate prep takes place beat prior to beginning; left arm comes down, bending at the elbow, like beginning a curl of the bicep; hand is in a fist, palm up, approximately in line with the waist; beginning of cresc.—hand smoothly moves upward during crescendo duration (no longer than two measures)—can be palm up or palm in; my preference is palm up because it serves the purpose of sustaining the sound; reenter pattern as soon as appropriate
  - Decrescendos--Same concept except prep is up by the head, similar to a cue; begin decrescendo by showing palm and gradually coming down

## COMMANDS

- Clap—must cup hand and palm to create a more "resonant" clap
- Always give at least two claps prior to giving a command so a tempo is established
- Must use as deep and "manly" voice as possible, even if you are a girl
- You are responsible to demonstrate any command used by the marching band as part of your audition
- You should know the commands better than me at this point→ if you have any questions about them that I do not know the answer to, I will ask the directors and let you know

## "WHEN YOU'RE UNCOMFORTABLE"

- A.K.A. When the band is not together

- You must demonstrate a control of the situation; there are a number of magical ways that you can help bring the band back together
  - Conduct a very steady pulse—this can be difficult during a tear, but pick whichever group you think is most correct and use a very large and crisp pattern to bring it back together;  
YOU CAN ALMOST ALWAYS GO WITH THE DRUMLINE
  - If a tear happens leading up to a large “hit point” or major change in the music, give a HUGE CUE AND/OR DOWNBEAT on the time that should happen—for some reason that almost always works.