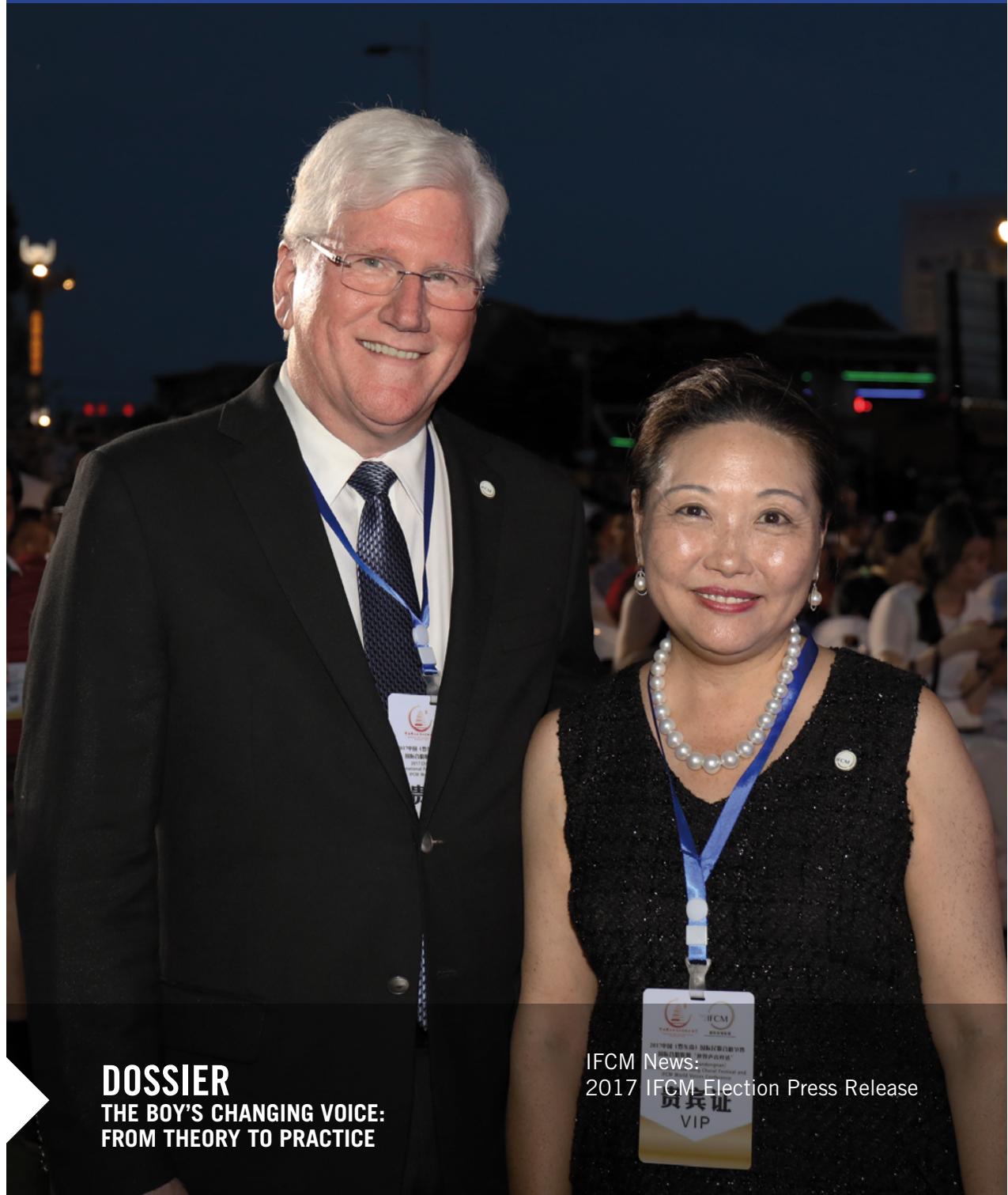




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**DOSSIER**  
THE BOY'S CHANGING VOICE:  
FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

IFCM News:  
2017 IFCM Election Press Release



# INTERNATIONAL CHORAL BULLETIN

## COVER

New IFCM President,  
Ms. Emily Kuo Vong with former  
IFCM President,  
Dr Michael J. Anderson  
Photo by Alex Kuo Vong

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# BILINGUAL CONDUCTING:

## Connecting voices and instruments through culture-specific vocabulary

**CHARLES HAUSMANN**

*choral conductor and teacher*

CHORAL AND ORCHESTRAL CONDUCTING CAN BE CONSIDERED TWO DIFFERENT CULTURES WITHIN THE SAME PERFORMING ART. TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY IN EACH, IT IS HELPFUL, IF NOT ESSENTIAL, TO BECOME FLUENT OR AT LEAST CONVERSANT IN THE LANGUAGES OF BOTH CULTURES; CONNECTING WITH A VOCABULARY THAT IS FAMILIAR AND CONGRUENT IN BOTH WORD AND GESTURE. IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT THAT THE TWO CULTURES BECOME COLLABORATIVE AND ARTISTICALLY AWARE OF EACH OTHER'S FUNCTION.

Yet few sources address this issue, which will be referred to as “bilingual” conducting. Individuals who are bilingual move very naturally and quickly between languages. They are also familiar with the inflections, accentuation, conventions, and rhetoric of multiple cultures. Do conductors have this kind of natural

connection with both chorus and orchestra? One is usually a second language.

The literature on this subject debates whether there should actually be one or two separate fields of conducting. These authors can be viewed as “Unifiers” or “Separatists.” The unifiers believe that music is



music, whether choral or orchestral, and both use similar techniques, e.g. beat patterns, preparations, cues, and releases. And that gesture is used in both fields to expressively shape and move the music.

Yes, conducting patterns and gestures can have a similarity no matter who we are conducting, and musical notation is essentially the same. But are they the same? Is this a bit too simplistic or generic? Aren't there additional elements that make both fields unique?

The conducting "separatists," on the other hand, those who recognize two separate disciplines feel that the style of gesture is very different when conducting voices or instruments, since the manner of playing an instrument and singing are quite different.

Anthony Molina's research, which includes an extensive interview with Robert Shaw, confirms this when he says: "There are vital differences between choral and orchestral conducting, many of which are ignored or simplistically denied by some writers."<sup>1</sup> And a core thesis in *Choral Conducting and the Construction of Meaning* is that "gestural style is deeply imbedded within musical cultures."<sup>2</sup> In a practical sense, the orchestra and chorus often have very limited time together in preparation for a concert. Couldn't that preparation be more personal, concise, and convincing if we were more consistently "bilingual" in our rehearsals and performances?

I have found that singers and players respond more quickly and effectively when conductors communicate (verbally and non-verbally) in the language of the specific performers. I think this "cultural divide" should be explored more completely. How can our conducting be informed by a more culture-specific vocabulary, creating an empathic and willful connection between ensembles? We will explore five areas where the differences between the cultures can be seen more clearly and how this knowledge can contribute to a more bilingual approach.

## 1. THE MUSIC

The music of the orchestra and chorus are idiomatically quite different. In addition, instrumentalists and singers have their own separate parts. Only the conductor sees the full score and must unify the forces with a vision of the composer's intent. It is this integration that poses the first problem in combining cultures.

### *Score Mapping*

The process of integrating the various instrumental and vocal parts requires a kind of "score mapping," comparable to the concept of "body mapping," one of the basic tenets of the Alexander Technique. This is an approach to understanding our anatomy and how our various body parts work together for the purpose of improving how we move, feel and communicate.

Stacy Gehman describes it more succinctly. "If you change what you think, you can change how you move. And if you change how you move, you will change what you feel."<sup>3</sup> And social scientist, Amy Cuddy has said; "your

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Molina, *Choral and Orchestral Conducting: Similarities, Differences, and Interactions Between Choral and Orchestral Conducting*, DMA dissertation, University of Kansas, 1978, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Liz Garnett, *Choral Conducting and the Construction of Meaning*, (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Stacy Gehman, *Body Mapping*,

<https://www.alexandertechnique.com/articles/bodymap>

"If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world."

Ludwig Wittgenstein







“Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.”  
 Rita Mae Brown

mind can change your body but your body can also change your mind.”<sup>4</sup>

Applying this directly to the conductor’s art - if we analyze how the various parts of a score fit together, our mind and body will be more likely to respond expressively. And if our bodies express what we feel then we can better inform the orchestra and chorus. In other words, “if it is not in the mind it will not be in the gesture.” All maps and GPS devices highlight a chosen route. The same can be done with our scores either mentally or through a method of score marking.

*Background, Middle-ground, Foreground, Equal-ground, and Underground*

This mapping gives us, at a glance, what is of greater importance along the way. The decisions include what parts are prominent (foreground), supportive (middle-ground and background) or possibly of equal importance (equal-ground). In addition, there may be passages that provide a foundation (underground) requiring a distinctive color and articulation.

For example, in Mozart’s *Confutatis* the string parts provide this kind of emphatic, colorful foundation, while the vocal parts provide important rhetorical emphasis, the basset horns and bassoons a harmonic supportive role, the trumpets and timpani give rhythmic punctuation, and the trombones provide colla parte support to the voices. Each provides a distinct musical gesture that brings context-specific elements into focus. The relative importance we give to these elements defines our vision of the work. When this kind of mapping is used many of the problems of balance between chorus and orchestra can be lessened or eliminated completely. As

4 Amy Cuddy (2012, October), *Your Body Image May Change Who You Are*, TED, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-Mh1QhMc>

conductors we can choose which part (language) is most important at any given time and move back and forth between parts as needed for greater clarity and emphasis.

## 2. THE TEXT

On its most basic level we can look at the difference between conducting voices and instruments as a choice between texted and untexted conducting. In other words, choosing to allow our gestures to be informed either by the text or the music, or both. It is important to ask the question, which are we doing at any given time?

When conducting music with instruments and voices it becomes essential that we understand the differences. Concentrating on the texted music, we want the words to be understood and to bring added meaning to the musical line - to be rhetorically context-specific. In addition, choruses often have to overcome the orchestral time and sound barriers to avoid being late and overpowered dynamically. This requires careful attention to the actual sounds of the words - the phonemes, syllables, and word accentuation. Phonemes (the smallest units of speech) create a kind of micro-rhythmic element where every sound is a rhythmic entity. Robert Shaw, a great exponent of this technique would say: "Don't sing words. Sing all the sounds of the words."<sup>5</sup>

If conductors are aware of the smallest units of sound in a language, and how to propel them rhythmically and project them dynamically our texted conducting can become more helpful and convincing. Conductor Simon Carrington has said that "choral singers and many solo singers do not use rhetoric enough of

the time."<sup>6</sup> The same could be said of conductors. When we are concentrating on texted music, we want the words to be understood and to bring added meaning to the musical line. So we become involved in a more rhetorical conducting model - one that shapes the music according to the desired delivery of the text.

## 3. THE INSTRUMENT

The vocal instrument, and of course the various instruments of the orchestra, although having things in common, are quite different. The technique required to play an instrument - the way they attack and release notes, and the colors they create - are distinctive and unique. As conductors, visualization and audiation become important in empathizing and thereby "willing"

how a singer or clarinetist breathes, how a string player bows or how a percussionist strikes an instrument informs our gesture and helps the players feel that we know what we want from them. Do we want long bow strokes or tongued notation, or consonant emphasis?

The four areas of knowledge that can help us achieve this empathic understanding are: 1) knowing the mechanism and technique required to play the instrument or sing, 2) having an inner ear concept of the ideal sound we should expect to hear, 3) visualizing the choral/orchestral formation and actual placement on the stage (this also can help with dynamic control and projection of sound), and 4) understanding the vocabulary or jargon of the players - how they communicate with each other.



the singers and players. How does it feel to play a specific instrument? How will that instrument articulate a note? What sounds are you expecting to hear?

What we know about the instruments significantly informs our gesture. For example, knowing

## 4. THE REHEARSAL

Different rehearsal styles should be recognized between orchestras and choruses. It is important to know the traditional ways of working with each ensemble separately and the special dynamics of the joint choral/orchestral rehearsal. The challenges are to make the ensembles aware of the function of each in the texture and musical delivery, creating a unity of effort. We need to "enculturate" our performance. According to sociologists, Grusec

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5 Robert Shaw, in a rehearsal with the Houston Symphony Chorus, Houston, TX, February 1988.

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6 Simon Carrington (2012, March) *Choral Conducting Masterclass at the Three Choirs Festival*, <https://youtu.be/9sZo2m0Rcsl>.

“One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.”  
Frank Smith



“Some people need to be bilingual more than others; for me being bilingual is not an option, it is a necessity.”  
Jeffrey Nelson

and Hastings: “Enculturation is the process by which people learn the requirements of their surrounding culture and acquire values and behaviors appropriate or necessary in that culture.”<sup>7</sup>

In the rehearsal process the orchestra and chorus will acknowledge the differences of each and will attempt to make two ensembles adapt and learn from each other for the purpose of unity. Robert Shaw always said that orchestras need to sing and choruses need to play – to learn each other’s language.

### 5. THE PERFORMANCE

Recognizing the cultural differences between the orchestra and chorus, our goal is to communicate more quickly and naturally between forces. The added element in the performance stage is the listener. How can our combined forces and cultures convey to an audience the text and musical line, and deliver them in proper context? Hearing the music only once, how can we bring the experience into clearer focus for them?

Like a power point slide presentation, we want to highlight the important events vividly through memorable pictures, stories, and events along the way. To do this our conducting should become a kind of rhetorical conversation from the conductor, to the performers, and to the audience.

In fact, the areas that we have discussed in the bilingual conducting process parallel Cicero’s five canons of rhetoric.

1. Inventio (invention) – the process of analyzing and mapping the score.
2. Elecutio (speak) – deciding on how to deliver the text.
3. Dispositio (organization) – the relative importance of instruments and voices.
4. Memoria (memory) – combining forces to learn and rehearse the work.
5. Actio (delivery) – conveying the music to the audience

Once the performance begins we no longer have speech in its normal sense. But this rhetorical process has given us the tools to communicate with a culturally specific vocabulary, creating a more empathic and willful connection between conductor, ensembles and finally the audience. We become, as conductor Ivan Fischer has said about the process, “guardians of unity.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> J.E. Grusec and P.D. Hastings. *Handbook of Socialization: Theory and Research*. (Guilford Press, 2007), 547.

<sup>8</sup> Ivan Fischer, in *Guardians of Unity: Conductors in Conversation*. Berlin Philharmonic Digital Concert Hall, 2016, <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com>.

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