



## How to use a music score

*How do conductors use scores?*

### **Catherine:**

So we've already talked, in general terms, about how conductors work with scores all the time, in whatever they're doing. But it would be good to talk a little bit, actually, about what happens in rehearsal, which is the bit that the concert going audience wouldn't usually get to see, I suppose.

### **Mark:**

Well, the rehearsal is where the real work is done, really. What the public sees in the concert is, obviously, the end result of the rehearsal process. But the rehearsals are where the conductor is able, or not, as the case may be, to put their personal imprint on the performance.

So, the score is there, as I said before, as our kind of user manual to the how the piece is. And we'll be referring to that constantly as we go through. So, for example, in the concert, hopefully, you start at the beginning, and get to the end without stopping. Not always the way, but 99 times out of 100, that's what happens.

And in the rehearsal, one of the things that you'll do, of course, is stop and start. So on a very simple practical, level, if you stop three minutes into a 12 minute movement, you need to have a way of telling them where to start again. Because if you went back to the beginning every single time, that would be incredibly tedious, and the orchestra would kill you for it. And it would also be a very, very inefficient use of, what is normally a very finite amount of time to rehearse.

So scores will have certain landmarks in them we do that. So, we have this thing called rehearsal marks. So every, I don't know, 30 or 40 bars, they'll be a letter, letter A, and 40 bars later, letter B. So that on a very simple level, if you stop, you can say three things to the orchestra. You should never say more the three things, because nobody listens to the fourth, fifth, or sixth. And then you can say, OK, let's go from letter C. And everybody can find one that is in their music, and off you go. So it avoids the need to go back to the beginning.

And really, in rehearsing *modus operandi*, our way of working, is pretty simple. We can play the music. We can play it, again. We can stop, and do it slowly. Because that can very often give-- If the music is quite technically difficult, playing it slowly, as you would if you were

practicing a piece of music by yourself, playing it slowly will give everyone a chance to work out the notes, and how to fit it together with everybody else.

Or we can play it with less people, so we could ask only the strings to play, or only the winds to play, or only the people with a certain line. When I ask the first violins, and the flutes to play the melody that they have together. And then they can hear, in isolation, without everything else, how that all fits together.

So that's our, kind of, basic way of working. You know, play it, play it again. Play it slowly. Play in bits. And gradually speaking, that process will bring it all together.

There are certain very basic, human body languages which most people on the planet will understand. And therefore, we try to build that into our physical techniques. So that, although we're trying to show the pattern of the music, and the number of beats in the bar, we're also showing how the music should be phrased, or shaped, or how it should be balanced, whether the-- perhaps the brass should play a little bit quieter, and the violins, a little bit longer. All those kind of things, we can rehearse while we're going.

But all of that has come from our experience of the music, and how to make the orchestra sound good. But in a very specific context, from our study of the score.

**Catherine:**

Well, I suppose it's that thing, again, isn't it, about the conductor being able to have that overview about how everybody fits together. And trying to show that, in terms of the body language, as much as possible ... that coordinating role that a conductor plays in producing an interpretation, and a performance, which is coherent.

**Mark:**

Absolutely. We're not there to play every single note. I'm not in a rehearsal, or a concert. And I'm not reading every single note that goes by, because I have-- if one looks at a Mahler score, for example, you have something like 20 staves of music there, starting with the woodlands at the top, and then the brass, and then the percussion, then the strings.

You simply couldn't read every single note of that all at once, of course. And so you're providing this kind of managerial overview, whilst the individual musicians are playing their own lines. So, it really is quite a lot like leadership, in its finest, most ideal form. Even a little bit of eye contact, if somebody does something exactly as you want it, you glance at them and smile.

If not, you just a little bit quizzical, or frown, perhaps. You know, the very, sort of, subtle communication can take place, even between one individual, the conductor, and up to 100 musicians, perhaps.

But, yes. The more you can communicate without talking, the more efficient the process of rehearsing is.

**Catherine:**

Well, thank you. I think that's been a really interesting insight into the process of rehearsals.

**Mark:**

Thank you.