

A Semiotic Approach to Vulnerability in Conducting Gesture and Singing Posture

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Abstract : The disciplines of conducting (instrumental or choral) and of singing presume a willingness toward an open posture and, in many cases, demand it for effective communication and technique. Yet, this very openness, with the "spread-eagle" gesture as an extreme, is oftentimes counterintuitive for musicians and within the trajectory of human evolution. Conversely, it is in this very gesture of "taking up space" that confidence-gaining techniques such as the popular "power pose" are based. This paper consists primarily of a literature review, exploring the topics of physical openness and vulnerability, considering the semiotics of the "spread-eagle" and its accompanying letter X. A major finding of this research is the discrepancy between evolutionary instinct towards physical self-protection and "folding in" and the demands of the discipline of physical and gestural openness, expansiveness and vulnerability. A secondary finding is ways in which encouragement of confidence-gaining techniques may be more effective in obtaining the required results than insistence on vulnerability, which is influenced by various cultural contexts and socialization. Choral conductors and music educators are constantly seeking ways to promote engagement and healthy singing. Much of the information and direction toward this goal is gleaned by students from conducting gestures and other pedagogies employed in the rehearsal. The findings of this research provide yet another avenue toward reaching the goals required for sufficient and effective teaching and artistry on the part of instructors and students alike.

Keywords : conducting, gesture, music, pedagogy, posture, vulnerability

Conference Title : ICMMGEC 2024 : International Conference on Music, Musical Gestures and Embodied Cognition

Conference Location : Copenhagen, Denmark

Conference Dates : July 18-19, 2024