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Choir master. Personality conduction and vocation

Tiberiu Ardelean

Tiberiu Ardelean

Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Ilarion V. Felea” of Arad
“Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad

Abstract

Conducting is an art, but, in the same time, a science. It assumes, beside talent a series of knowing of specialty, directly tied of this profession, but even solid musical knowing. To realize an authentic interpretation it should keep in mind the style of the century in which that piece was composed. An authentic interpretation cannot realize if the master doesn't know the intentions of the composer, which he should put in practice. For this, there are absolutely necessary the analysis of the works: under literary, musical and vocal aspect. The relevance of the choir master in keeping and transmission of the Orthodox Church musical ethos is a reality with the church identifies and which reveals one of the most important roles which has Church in promoting the musical orthodox values in the divine worship. And to show this reality with which the Church identifies, it should analyses the personality of the conductor, in his complexity, as a decisive factor regarding the importance of the orthodox musical ethos of the Church. The complexity of the conducting personality has in his centre, the notion of conductor, as a master choir or the orchestra.

Keywords

Conductor, choir, art, science, talent, vocation

1. The personality and the vocation of the choir master

Conducting, being a creation, implies multiple and various ways of conducting, adapted at different collective, and sometimes even separated interpreters and non-fixed immutable patterns. In a certain way it works with a good assembly and in a different way with another one weaker; or with a choir of amateurs and with a professional one. Even if from a rehearsal to another is different the way of working with an assembly, regarding the intended purpose. Of the composer aptitudes, of his creating capacities, of his musical culture and multilateral one, of his temperament and his personality it depends, in the greatest extent his artistic realizations. His personality is complete only in the process of practice, of the work with an assembly.

Also, this conducting personality is shaping when the conductor is lead of the spiritual life, integrated liturgically, when the formation he leads is in church, and it is part of the liturgical act made in the Holy Altar. The steel-lattice mast, the place where the choir sits in a church, should be in fully concordance with the Altar, because the liturgical dialog between the priest and choir is based on the texts and the liturgical hymns which are the public divine worship.

Regarded in assembly as a choral music, even the universal and the autochthonous one, we can conclude that this interested branch presents as a well-defined whole and contoured. Moreover, the Romanian choral music suffered many influences, where the majority of the written works were taken in a creative manner, showing at light many original works, inspired and with new means of expression, very pregnant.

The content and the essence of the Romanian musical art is sprung from the life of our people, a people of Latin origins, optimistic, sober, balanced, often leaning towards dreaming, old, full of vigour and self-confident, determined to act "better". The characteristic of our art is oriented to the classical phenomenon, showed by our big creators, in literature and arts¹ beginning with Eminescu, Blaga, Arghezi, Bacovia, Brâncuși and Enescu.

From the fact that the choral art is of many musical genders, starting from the simplest songs for kids, and going to the biggest vocal-symphon-

¹ D.D. Botez, *Treaty of chant and choral conducting (Tratat de cânt și dirijat coral)*, vol. II, Bucharest, 1985, p. 15.

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ically creations and of opera, some of the conductors, how it is absolutely fine, are attracted of one of the specific genders, following a deep preparation in the specific gender. One of the specialization is definitely tied of the church music, especially of the orthodox liturgically music. This specialization is a special one, because from the musical and conducting preparation he should have, it should have even a preparation theological-liturgically.

To made a complete analysis and in the same time brief, at what means the professional preparation of the choir master, it should first answer to the question: who is actually the conductor?

The conductor is a complex personality², of an extraordinary distinction, as I had and who will remain always alive in the memory of every musician, the greatest George Enescu. Obviously, having this model, we should emphasize the characteristics of today conductor and to see him as somebody "perfect" or which, at least to want to get to the perfection, from which anybody have something to teach. The conductor, especially the professional one, should have highly speciality studies, the talent that God gave him should be fructified even more to transmit to the public the artistic emotions which are written in the script, by the composer. But many times we see professional conductors whom musical culture and professional preparation is under the level of some amateurs conductors, and Hector Berlioz said in his conducting treaty that "are many mediocrities that are conducting artists, many time being their superiors"³. The amateur conductor has a modest preparation, but he always should practice, showing a permanent wish to knowing better, regarding the conductors with high preparations, and especially listening very much high quality music, of all his genders.

2. Multilateral development of the choir master

The profession of choir master has several aspects. The choir master should be an artist of multilateral formation, because his personality is defined under 3 aspects:

² P.G. Cesnokov, *Choir and his conducting (Corul și conducerea lui)*, E.S.P.L.A., Bucharest, 1957, p. 64.

³ Hector Berlioz, *Memoirs (Memorii)*, Ed. Muzicală Publishing house, p. 460.

a. Artist-interpreter

The conductor is the one that, close to the assembly he conducts, shows on the stage in front of the public, and shows and acts as an artist interpreter. "A big choir master, says Pablo Casals, should be first of all a great interpreter. The convictive evidence of his value is the way he convinces and transmits to the musicians his way of seeing".⁴ The choir master should permanently be in love of his art, to release continuously his artistic level. This aspect of his profession of choir master depends of his preparation, his talent and his experience.

b. Educator

First of all, the conductor should educate his artistic collective. And in this process of education, is based on the psychical processes that are on his base, his educative personality⁵ should be doubled by a good psychologist. On the other hand, at the preparation phase of the assembly, in the rehearsal, the activity of the conductor is analogist to the educator. He is the one that explains in front of the collective of interpreters musical problems with he confronts, coordinates their activity, shows ways when different situations should be managed. The conductor should observe the mistakes, identifies the causes and indicate methods of releasing of those matters.

c. Organiser

The entire activity of the conductor is tied of his activity of organisation. He choose the members of the formation, he organise the assembly, he establishes the rehearsals, realizes the ways of rehearsal and the time span, the makes the repertoire, he arranges the members of the formation in concerts and in the rehearsals. How he organise the assembly, under his all aspects it depends his success and the achieving of the goal.

These aspects presented here, of the conducting work cannot be separated. Of course, there's not always a perfect balance between them, but they shape together the complex personality of the conductor.

⁴ Nicolae Gîscă, *The conducting art (Arta dirijorală)*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing house, Bucharest, 1982, p. 12.

⁵ Ion Romănu, Damian Vulpe, *The choir master and the choral chant (Dirijorul de cor și cântul coral)*, vol. I, Ed. Universității Timișoara Publishing house, 1971, p. 27.

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The conductor profession implies a sum of qualities and aptitudes.⁶ It is a work that has many aspects. Aptitudes, how big they were, cannot assure the success in a rich artistic activity. There are many things that a conductor should do, like the permanently individual study, complete and systematically, a fully palate of knowing. Under all these things, the physical aspect of the conductor, his physical qualities have a particular place in the development of the conductive acting. These physical qualities cannot be neglected in a profession like the one of conductor.

d. The hands of conductor

Are the principal ways with the collaboration is realized between conductor and the assembly. They should be in a perfect proportionality with the corporal constitution of the future conductor. If they aren't under this aspect of proportionality, they become an obstacle in conducting the formation. In the same time, the hands should have an absolutely normal mobility. And when I'm referring to the hands, I'm thinking not only as an assembly, but even to the parts of the hands, that should have some conditions. The forearm is the one that give clarity to the act and the conductive gesture. The hands should show a special elasticity to a better coordination and relationship between the conductor and interpreters.

e. The face and eyes

Because the biggest part of the wishes of conductor are transmitted with the face expression, he should have a bright face, truly expressive and mobile, being capable to transmit to the interpreters what the conductor wants, his feelings and wishes. The same attributes should have the eyes of the conductor, giving them a powerful strength of communication. These physical qualities that any conductor should have, should be mixed with a series of musical skills, solid musical knowledge, and of course, knowledge of general musical culture, and without them this job of choir master cannot be done.

3. Musical skills

- **Musicality** - through this we understand the capacity of feeling the nature of music, a certain sensibility, a certain taste in feeling the music,

⁶ I. Romănu, D. Vulpe, *The choir master and the choral chant*, p. 30.

ideas and the feelings of the composer. This musical feeling is observed to everyone, of course, in a bigger or smaller sense. The development of this feeling is realized through a deep and systematic study, and with several musical listening⁷.

- **Musical hearing** - a particular skill that emphasize the capacity of distinguishing the qualitative elements of the musical sounds, in the smallest differences. Regarding the distinguishing of the sounds, the musical hearing is of two parts: **the relative and the absolute hearing**.⁸

The absolute hearing offers the possibility of arranging the notes in a general stair, without the existence of a sound of mark. It is based only on the memory of the highness of the sounds. Obviously this kind of hearing is the best one, because it receives very quickly the mistakes, regardless of how the writing of the score is: classical harmony, modern polyphony, poly tonality, linear. But this does not imply repudiation of the conductors with relatively hearing.

The relative hearing shows the opportunity of determining the highness of the sounds and the musical spans, without correctly enclosing them in a general musical scale, if is not given the mark sound. The relative hearing can develop through exercises of intonation, permanently controlling this veracity, especially through the study of an instrument.

The musical hearing can be in the same time , melodic and harmonic. If the first one assumes the differentiate of the sounds and the musical spans, the second assumes these differentiation from a quantitative and qualitative point of view, of the harmonic spans, of the accords and the functional reports between them. It is not doubt that both are extremely necessarily to a choir master. Obviously, the first one is easy to gather, and the other is formed and perfection, through the study of the spans and the harmonic accords at an harmonic instrument, like the piano. The development of the harmonic hearing is achieved by acquiring knowledge of harmony and score reading.

- Additionally the conductor must have a hearing timbre. This requires differentiation of timbres of voices and instruments. Its development is based on knowledge of their timbre of voices and instruments, achieved through numerous musical auditions knowledge by attending the con-

⁷ N. Gâscă, *The conducting art*, vol. I, Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing house, Bucharest, 1982, p. 12.

⁸ N. Gâscă, *The conducting art*, p. 13.

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certs and opera, and more through effective participation in a choir or orchestra. And everything related to musical hearing, there is a notion of internal hearing. It gives the conductor the possibility to perceive sounds and combinations of them, to form their image in his central nervous system without using voice or instrument. Internal hearing is of great importance in conducting practice and especially during interpretation of music.

- **The rhythmic sense** - It is absolutely indispensable to any conductor, knowing that one of the main tasks of the conductor is to achieve unity in metro-rhythmic musical execution process. Music is an art of time,⁹ is called a rhythmic art. Therefore it is imperative for a leader to possess a rhythmic sense as developed and refined, and then, feeling the rhythmic structure of music, share it by conducting gestures.
- **Musical memory** - possessing a good musical memory, the conductor can focus better on the musical execution. It has the opportunity to follow more closely the manner of execution, to give inputs correctly and on time, but especially to give the whole interpretation itself. H. Scherchen reinforces this fact and says: "The conductor must learn score so during conveyance, and he can always lead from memory. Only in this way is free to keep his eyes orchestra".¹⁰ But when we talk about a memory of the score, we do not refer strictly to learn by heart the entire speech melodic and harmonic, but in principle, to memorize, harmonic structures and forms that need to be executed in the score.
- **Musical taste** - show personal contribution limits¹¹ of the conductor's interpretation of a musical work. It is therefore of very great importance for the conductor. The smoothness and refinement of this skill depends on good implementation issues related to tempo, tone, agog elements and dynamic ensemble sonority.

4. Musical knowledge

To fulfill this noble mission of choir conductor, it is required a thorough musical education theorist and performer.¹²

⁹ N. Gâscă, *The conducting art*, p. 14.

¹⁰ H. Scherchen, *Handbook of Conducting*, ONP, p. 15.

¹¹ N. Gâscă, *The conductive art*, p. 15.

¹² N. Gâscă, *The conductive art*, p. 18.

- Music theory with her whole arsenal: scales and tonalities, rhythmic, metric modes, intervals, tempo, transposition.
- Arpeggios is a condition without which you can not impart conductor. This skill is achieved through a daily and systematic study
- Harmony- knowledge of harmony, conductors are necessary to identify the expressive meaning of the musical discourse, based on the ratio between the operational agreements. Often in practice the conductor reach when he needs to harmonize certain works, or make reductions voices from 4 to 3 or even 2 when it comes to children choirs.
- The counterpoint is that which supports the conductor in the process of studying and implementing the polyphonic parts. It helps to bring out the melodies overlay enable it to emphasize the voice that has the greatest importance in the melodic speech.
- Musical forms - analyzing a score clear that one of the parties is important considering the form they have.¹³ During her study, especially during rehearsals, musical execution is fragmented learning is a process commonly fragments and considerable results both by conductor and overall. It also requires knowledge of musical genres, both vocal and instrumental as.
- Notions of choral singing - with the choir conductor, but also works with the opera singers. For this reason it needs to know the voices of working, to distinguish timbre lines between which means the ambit of a voice between vocal registers. When working with amateur conductor, education is required to make voice choral singing, to exercise the vocal sound emission. From this starting in the choice of repertoire; Depending on the possibilities vocal choir conductor will choose repertoire that he will address to.
- Knowledge of an instrument - the conductor must have knowledge of an instrument, preferably the piano. The piano is the instrument that should not be absent from any rehearsal room. Knowing the piano helps the conductor in studying harmonic of the score, to develop the creative capacity, it developed ways of interpreting a piece of music, given that the conductor is primarily an interpreter, he is the singing by the members as a whole.
- Reading of the scores - Hector Berlioz was saying very succinctly:

¹³ Livia, Teodorescu – Ciocănea, *Treaty of forms and musical analysis (Tratat de forme și analize muzicale)*, Ed. Muzicală, Publishing house, Bucharest, 2005, p. 34.

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- "I conclude that in order to form perfect conductors, candidates must be familiar with all means at hand reading of the score, and those who are not able to overcome this difficulty will not rule than half conducting art, even if they are versed in orchestration, composition or even the mechanism of rhythmic combinations."¹⁴
- History of music - the whole process of interpretation of a work, integration in the era composer, knowing his life, the general context where he lived, are helping the conductor in forming a conception and in performing at a better understanding and interpretation of the musical work.
- Folk music - is the source of all creation where is rooted the music. His knowledge of modes and popular stylistic genres aspects regional removes incorrect or misleading executions of musical works inspired by folklore.

5. General culture knowledge

General culture¹⁵ should not be missing from the baggage of knowledge of the conductor. It is imperative that complements and broadens the horizon of the artist. To masters of the interpreted conductor must always be in contact with other arts and sciences, such as literature, history, modern languages, social sciences, psychology, pedagogy, theater, film, dance.

All these lead to a very thorough training of the conductor, but also very necessary for the performance of the conductor.

6. Conclusions

Conducting art is a synthesis between the technical and the creative art. Hence the results of personality importance of multilateral conductor and his role as the leader of a team. When we talk about the personality of a conductor that refers to three aspects¹⁶ namely:

Conductor as interpreter: In order to fulfill this role, a good conductor must know the art of music and conducting, should be constantly con-

¹⁴ H. Berlioz, *Memories*, p. 473.

¹⁵ N. Gâscă, *The conductive art*, p. 17.

¹⁶ N. Gâscă, *The conductive art*, p. 27.

cerned with his artistic level. Musical taste, sensitivity, imagination are some of the attributes that the conductor must develop constantly. Interpretation does not mean mechanical reproduction of music, but refers to an act of artistic creation. Conductor and performer are two concepts that are intertwined, becoming a whole. For the success of interpretation must be a close connection between conductor and chorus.

Conductor as an educator: the conductor is the leader and an educator as a whole. Through his artistic personality, he must form collective cultural aspect. The specific conditions for each assembly job in hand, the readiness of singers must persuade the conductor to use the most effective teaching methods in order to achieve the proposed artistic desire. At rehearsals, he must deal specifically with choristers left behind it in order to raise the same level of training all members of the assembly.

Conductor organizer: conducting all activity is linked to a whole series of organizational actions as: discussions, approaches, putting staff on stage, procurement and multiplication of materials, travel, etc.

The conductor must be firm and precise in everything he does, doesn't give up anything that he has proposed to pursue his ideas to the end. He must persevere in achieving the desired result. A decision once taken, or in the interpretation or in the organization work with all, shouldn't be changed.

From the perspective of the positive traits of character, the profession of conductor cannot be done without: the spontaneity of reflexes, sense of observation, spirit of initiative, calm and self-control, strength of character, sense of discipline, punctuality, modesty, enthusiasm at work.

In different circumstances the conductor must act quickly to find the most appropriate solutions. At the same time he must not show nervousness, irrepensible self, it is very fast-forwarding assembly members.

In other news, the conductor must have a keen sense of observation, to be able to timely notify all the mistakes and correct them to intervene. This implies a distributive attention. The spirit of discipline is mandatory in a community. But conductor must not be excessively severe, as there should be neither excessively lenient. His observations should be firm, specific, timely, but asked in a polite way.

Besides all these qualities, you need to possess any musician, performer, conductor profession implies the presence of special skills that we named a skill or talent conducting conductor.

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The presence of this skills explains why a conductor manages to make easily understood by the ensemble, he manages to captivate and keep the attention on. Failure to explain its lack of art conducting musicians, instrumentalists, composers and performers. Music history records sufficient examples. Doubtless only the amount of skills and qualities, above - exterior and interior - guarantees success in being a conductor. But the skills, qualities alone are not sufficient. They must be coupled with a serious general training and specialized profession of conductor being an entire knowledge of general and musical culture.