

## PERFORMANCE STYLE OF A CONTEMPORARY CHORAL CONDUCTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT ARTISTIC SPACE: FROM REHEARSAL TO MEDIA PRESENTATION

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**Abstract:** The article examines the performing style of contemporary choral conductors, including their typology and evolution in the modern artistic space. It explores the theoretical foundation and definitions of conducting styles and discusses the two main types: emotional and rationalistic. Additionally, it presents the perspectives of past conductors on the conducting process that remain relevant today. The skills of a conductor are evaluated by categorizing them into hard and soft skills. Hard skills include mastery of gesture, facial expression, general music theory preparation, and skills in analysing musical scores. Soft skills consider emotionality, charisma, and organizational abilities. The text traces the connection between the conductor's conducting style and their soft and hard skills. This study examines the impact of digital technologies on the role of choral conductors and the formation of conducting styles. It investigates the peculiarities of the rehearsal and concert process in remote music-making conditions, which are characterized by the asynchrony of the creative process. The study reveals the influence of asynchrony on the character and style of the conductor's work. It has been demonstrated that asynchronous performing processes can reduce feedback between the conductor and performers, resulting in aberrations in conducting style and a shift from managerial to decorative specificity.

**Keywords:** Conductor, Choirmaster, Performance style, Choir schools, Artistic space, Media presentation, Rehearsal, Transformation.

### 1 Introduction

The profession of a choral conductor in the modern era is evolving due to the implementation of digital technologies, the increasing role of sound recording, and the adoption of remote forms of education and music-making. As a result, the understanding of an individual conducting style is also changing. This evolution is influenced not only by the character or personal traits of the conductor, but also by the conditions in which the musician engages in creative activities.

The objective of this research is to identify an individual's performing style specificity in the context of choral art and its transformations in the digital age. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were addressed: summarizing and systematizing theoretical knowledge about the individual performing style as presented in musicological literature; analysing the concepts of "musical style" and "performing style" and defining their components; examining the factors that led to a reassessment of the conductor's role in the choral ensemble and, consequently, changes in applied conducting techniques and, therefore, conducting styles as a whole.

### 2 Literature Review

Recent research reveals several trends. Many studies explore the benefits of choral singing for health, emotional well-being, and education. Additionally, recent works justify the positive impact of choral singing on the older generation. Research has demonstrated that choral singing has positive effects on interpersonal relationships and social connection (Moss et al., 2020), life satisfaction (Radočaj-Jerković, 2022), and mental and emotional well-being (Maury and Rickard, 2022). Furthermore, P. Tremblay and M. Perron (2023) attempted to prove that choral singing slows down the ageing process, but they did not obtain convincing results to support this hypothesis.

The positive role of choral singing is also noted in groups involving younger individuals. Studies have demonstrated positive effects of choir singing practice on shaping personal

values (O'Reilly Viamontes, 2020), enhancing mood, and reducing stress (Linnemann et al., 2017).

Numerous articles have been written about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions on the field of musical arts. Studies conducted in the USA suggest that participating in musical activities during the pandemic can reduce stress, alleviate feelings of isolation, improve emotional and social well-being, increase self-confidence, and enhance overall comfort (Lewis, 2023). According to Herschel et al. (2022), this can also lead to reducing anxiety and an increase in global well-being. Research conducted in India has shown that "choral music impinges on a notion of personal intimacy that combines a collective sense of creativity and community" (Chatterjee, 2022). However, quarantine measures have had negative impacts on choir participants, including the deterioration of their well-being due to cancelled rehearsals (Youngblood et al., 2021) and negative effects on the social dynamics of the choir (Takala-Roszczenko, 2023).

Certain articles discuss different aspects of vocal voices in choirs. For example, N.S.V. Cardoso, T.C. da Silva Brito, and A. de Oliveira Camargo Gomes investigated the vocal range passaggio and found that "the passaggio identified in the vocal range profile of choristers, based on their frequencies and intensities were more frequent in soprano and tenor, compared to alto and bass, in changes to the low and high registers".

Several studies have investigated the influence of digital technologies on the advancement of musical arts, specifically in the realm of professional education (Semennyk et al., 2022) and sound recording (Bonshor, 2017; Adams, 2019).

A limited number of articles focus specifically on the practice of choral conducting. In a survey of 294 conductors in Norway, a group of Norwegian researchers found that the assessment of the role of conductors largely depends on their practice and experience. The researchers identified 17 competence elements of conductors (Jansson et al., 2023). The study compared the level of technical and expressive skills mastery among conducting students from choral faculties (Regier et al., 2022). Additionally, it investigated the communicative practices of conductors during the rehearsal process from the perspectives of two models of communicative behaviour: "communicative behaviours – assessments and directives", as conducted by K. Emerson, V. Williamson, R. Wilkinson (2019).

### 4 Methodology

The study of literature on performance stylistics involves several methodologies. These include examining memoirs and recollections of works by prominent conductors of the past, studying scientific and theoretical materials devoted to this problem, observing conductors at work or on video recordings, and surveying contemporary practising conductors regarding various elements of the profession and educational aspects of conductor mastery formation (Broiako et al., 2022).

At this stage of the research, it is relevant to combine the first three methodologies. However, studying the experience of conductors from past eras is only partially accessible to the modern audience. Only a portion of it has been digitized and translated into English, while others are available only in print sources and have not been translated into English. On the other hand, the study of video materials is becoming increasingly important, particularly for analysing modern forms of remote conducting that involve temporal and spatial distance between performers and conductors.

Surveys, as used by researchers (including in the work by Jansson, Elstad and Døving, 2023), provide relevant results for studying methodological and social issues of collective

performance. However, they do not reveal the individual stylistic nuances of conductors that cannot be reduced to a list of separate positions.

## 5 Results

The study of musicological literature enables us to draw conclusions about the complexity of the concept of musical style. According to V. Moskalenko, musical style is defined as the psychologically conditioned specificity of musical thinking, expressed through the corresponding systematic organization of resources of musical language in the process of creating, interpreting, and performing a musical work (Moskalenko, 1998, p. 88). N. Ocheretovska states that musical style refers to “characteristic features of creative handwriting that are manifested in the music of a certain era, nation, and creativity individual composer” (Ocheretovska, 2008, p.104). O. Komenda highlights the stability, semantic inexhaustibility, creativity, adaptability in new conditions, and significant methodological potential of the concept (Komenda, 2009, p.116).

Researchers distinguish between historical, national, individual, and other styles. The historical style pertains to the stylistics of a particular era, the national style is inherent in a specific national culture, while the individual style characterizes the specific thinking of a particular composer or performer. However, the characteristics mentioned above, such as stability or the ability to unite various musical phenomena, apply to all styles (Tkach, 2018, p. 360).

The system of levels of musical style allows for distinguishing compositional and performing components. The former is used to characterize compositional creativity, while the latter is used for performance and can be used to identify the stylistic features of individual instrumental soloists, vocalists, conductors, and so on.

The concept of performance style is specific and is reflected in the works of researchers. According to O. Katrych, performance style is “a system of expressive means corresponding to the specificity of its musical worldview, which, preserving integrity, functions as a supporting factor for reinterpreting various compositional styles” (Katrych, 2000, p. 90). S. Kopylova mentions that performing style is defined as a set of performance tools and personal qualities that are inherent to a given performer or performance school. These factors determine the artistic integrity of the performance product, also known as interpretation (Kopylova, 1999, p. 256). According to Yu.Tkach, performing style is defined as a system of performing techniques and means that are formed under the influence of the components of the artist's creative method and realized in the process of interpreting a specific musical work (Tkach, 2018, p. 361). V. Zhyvov views the performing style of a conductor as a holistic phenomenon, encompassing the individuality of the artist, their stylistic orientation, and manner (Tkach, 2018, p. 361). The individual performing style of a conductor can extend to the choral ensemble, particularly if the conductor is a vivid personality.

Several factors influence the performing style of a conductor, among which professional and personal qualities of the musician can be compared to hard and soft skills. Hard skills, in turn, are divided into technical skills (mastery of gesture, mimicry) and intellectual skills (ability to analyse musical works, thoroughly understand the author's intentions). Soft skills include the ability to manage a collective, persuade the collective through explanations, convictions, and emotionally inspire the collective. The requirements for the profession of a conductor, as noted by practising conductors themselves, will be analysed in more detail.

H. Berlioz believed that a conductor “should be *active and vigorous*, should know the *composition* and the *nature and compass* of the instruments, should be able to *read* the score, and possess [...] other indefinable gifts, without which an invisible

link cannot establish itself between him and those he directs” (Berlioz, 2008).

The first aspect, which suggests being active and vigorous, is more related to soft skills and is commonly referred to as charisma. Essentially, a conductor must ignite the enthusiasm of choir musicians and emotionally engage the audience for the music to sound lively. According to A. Pazovskyi, this ability is characterized as “artistic-emotional influence of the performer on the recipient, thanks to which the performer can reflect the idea, theme, image in the listener's consciousness” (Tkach, 2018, p. 361).

On the other hand, a conductor must acquire hard skills such as the ability to analyse a musical work, knowledge of musical instruments, and vocal voices through a profound study of music history, theory, and choral studies. It is necessary for a conductor to have in-depth knowledge and the ability to grasp the main idea of the work to arrive at the correct tempo and performance style, as emphasized by R. Wagner (Waktan, 2008). K. Kondrashyn describes these skills as the ability to perceive the integrity of the work, sense tempos and their relationships, dynamic contrasts, climaxes, and the principles of performing *sforzando* and accents (Tkach, 2018, p. 361).

According to V. Zhyvov, a conductor's individual performing style depends on the specific psychological and spiritual organization of their personality, their way of thinking, and their emotional composition as an artist. Different understandings and emotions of the performed music, as well as a unique way of conveying it, are derived from these components.

By studying the memoirs of conductors, it is possible to discuss a historically formed typology of performing styles, which can be reduced to two main types: rationalistic and emotional. For instance, H.Iudin characterizes emotional conductors as those “who only need to strike a match to ignite the orchestra and lead it even without rehearsals”, while rationalistic conductors are described as those who “create the future concert performance gradually, layer by layer, like a beautiful building” (Tkach, 2018, p. 362).

Similarly, V. Zhyvov proposes a differentiation that includes intellectual aspects. The conductor characterizes the rationalistic type with “precise calculation of interpretation, logic of performing design, ability to build monolithic structures from details”; the emotional type with “artistic freedom based on subjective feeling, intuition, impulsiveness, spontaneity”, and the intellectual type with “depth, penetrability of performance, argumentation, and thoughtfulness” (Tkach, 2018, p. 362).

O. Katrych's typology distinguishes between the “classical” and “romantic” performing types based on differentiations. The classical type is characterized by the dominance of intellectual conception over direct emotional experience, a tendency towards proportion, harmony, and symmetry (Katrych, 2000, p.65). In contrast, the romantic style is characterized by a preference for the image over the idea, emotional experience over analytical generalization, and a tendency towards openness, permeability, and asymmetry (Katrych, 2000, p.65).

The correlation between the emotional and rationalistic is closely linked to the correlation between the conductor's hard skills and soft skills. Yu.Tkach identifies three components of conducting style: technical, artistic, and intellectual (Tkach, 2018, p. 360). The technical component encompasses the conductor's technical arsenal, including command over gestures, facial expressions, and overall body movement, which are basic hard skills acquired in higher educational institutions. The artistic component is more related to the emotional understanding of the musical work and the ability to convey emotions, which are soft skills that are often considered talents. The third component pertains to the conductor's analytical thinking, which primarily consists of hard skills acquired through experience and studying theoretical material in educational institutions.

A rationalistic conductor relies more on “hard skills”, specifically knowledge of the history and theory of music, allowing them to calculate necessary tempos and intellectually create the required sound image of the piece. In contrast, the “emotional” style is more characteristic of a conductor with vivid charisma and a gift for emotional conviction, grounded more in “soft skills”. However, it is important to note that emotional involvement does not exclude hard skills. The conductor's emotional intelligence is crucial in the creative process and is based on an in-depth understanding of the history and theory of music.

Soft skills also encompass the capacity to coordinate and lead a group. As stated by R. Kofman, the most demanding aspect of the conducting profession is the interaction between the conductor and the ensemble. The conductor's decision-making process is guided by a combination of amicability towards individuals and accountability to the composer (Kofman, 2009, p. 36). The interaction between the conductor and the collective is crucial during the rehearsal process. This interaction is referred to as the “communication style with the collective” and can be categorised as either “authoritarian” or “tolerant” (Tkach, p. 363). An authoritarian conductor issues commands without discussion, whereas a tolerant (democratic) conductor consults with subordinates (Prokulevych, p. 8).

The above observations primarily apply to the pre-digital era when activities occurred exclusively in real-time and involved direct contact with the performing ensemble, both in concerts and rehearsals, as well as with the audience during concerts.

The development of digital technologies and their integration into the field of musical arts has given rise to a fundamentally new type of musician's activity: remote conducting. This musical activity involves collective music-making through communication technologies, enabling musicians to collaborate despite being physically separated by hundreds or thousands of kilometres. It became particularly relevant in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of unprecedented quarantine measures in many countries, which included a categorical prohibition on collective gatherings, even for the purpose of musical performance. Due to the risk of incurring significant fines or even imprisonment for violating bans on collective gatherings, musicians, including choir ensembles, have been forced to resort to remote forms of music-making. This applies to both professional concert collectives and educational ones. Regular concerts, which are the result of the educational process of choir singers, have now changed to online performances (Krechko, 2021, p.153).

The most significant feature of remote ensemble musicianship is the impossibility of synchronous communication due to the specific delay of the digital signal, which is usually about 0.2 s when transmitting a signal between opponents. This is how the difficulties of such music-making are described in the work: if musicians play a duet and start to play one after another and the second musician starts exactly focusing on the first one, the latter will hear the partner in 0.4 second later than they should. Obviously, this will make the musician stop and wait for 0.4 seconds to synchronise the performance. Instead such behaviour of the first musician will surprise the second, and at least will similarly make them stop and wait for 0.4 seconds for the partner to restore synchronicity. Obviously, this chain of “waitings” would stretch endlessly, making the artistic performance unsuitable (Bondarenko et al., 2023, p. 252).

The challenges of remote conducting significantly affect the conductor's role and conducting style. Remote conducting is characterized by the lack of direct feedback on the sound production of the ensemble members, which means that the conductor's gesture is no longer effective in this regard. Even if a performer carefully watches the conductor's video during the recording of their choral part, the conductor cannot adjust their gestures in real-time to influence the character of the performer's singing. This loss of simultaneity in the performance process leads to asynchronization. As a result, asynchronization in

performance reduces the conductor's directing role and increases the decorative aspect.

Video recordings of virtual choir performances have been created to show different facial expressions of choir members and a video frame of the conductor. Experienced musicians can observe the desynchronization between the performance and the conductor's gestures, indicating a disconnect between the gesture and the timbral-articulatory characteristics of the sound. It is important to note that the final product is greatly influenced by the sound engineer who mixes all recorded choir voices and the video editor who handles the integration of video and audio. This can further diminish the conductor's leadership role. If the video editor lacks sufficient competence, it may exacerbate the desynchronization between the conductor and the choir, enhancing the decorative effect of the conductor's presence.

The conductor's role is reduced in the case of digitally recording a choir ensemble. The choir's track is part of the musical composition's score, while the other part is recorded by the orchestra or generated electronically. The rhythmic organization of the performance relies on a metronome signal activated by the sound engineer to synchronize the choral soundtrack with the instrumental one. The conductor's role in this case is limited to organizational aspects and partial corrections.

## 6 Discussion

The prospects for the development of conducting styles in the future will depend on the advancement of digital technologies and their application in asynchronous music-making. The prospects of asynchronous music-making remain insufficiently studied at the moment, but even now, we can identify areas of its application, which include at least the following circumstances:

- music-making in conditions of extraordinary situations that hinder or make it impossible for musicians to gather collectively (such as pandemics or wars);
- preparation of digital sound recordings involving many ensembles or with electronically generated components, typically achieved by recording individual choral parts and subsequent editing;
- the practice of choral ensembles performing to pre-recorded accompaniment.

Asynchronous forms of music-making imply a weakening or even a break in the feedback loop between the performer and the conductor, which will inevitably affect the performing style. It is anticipated that the “emotional” type of style, which relies more on “spontaneous” creative decisions, may lose its significance, as such a style heavily depends on the feedback between the conductor and the performer. However, this does not devalue the importance of the soft skills of the conductor. Soft skills will continue to be necessary for addressing organizational issues, influencing performers through prior instructions and feedback, emotional motivation of performers, and so on. In the realm of creating media products, there is a likely increase in the decorative role of the conductor, emphasizing the aesthetics of conducting gestures and their visual appeal to the audience. This highlights the question of the aesthetics of conducting gestures and their attractiveness from the audience's visual perception perspective.

## 7 Conclusion

The performing style of a choral conductor is considered to be a set of techniques and methods used to interpret a particular musical work. In each case, the conductor's style depends on their personal qualities, including their temperament and charisma, as well as their hard skills. These skills include mastery of the motor apparatus, knowledge of music theory and history, the ability to analyse a musical score, and the expressive means laid down by the composer.

A typology of conducting styles can be categorized as either "rationalistic" or "emotional". The former relies more on hard skills, while the latter relies on the conductor's charisma.

In the context of distance music-making, which has become widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting styles have been affected by the asynchronization of the creative process, resulting in reduced or prevented feedback between the conductor and the performers. The conductor's role shifts from being directive to becoming more decorative.

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#### Primary Paper Section: A

#### Secondary Paper Section: AL