

Variations on a Theme of Score Study Methods

Seminar presented by
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at Coe College, Cedar Rapids, IA

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Abstract

The purpose of *Variations on a Theme of Score Study Methods* is foremost to provide the conductor or student an opportunity to reinforce their study skills, while learning a score by approaching it as if it is full of puzzles to be solved rather than one daunting task to fulfill. Many texts and courses offer a helpful and universal *how-to* when it comes to beginning the process of score study. The lecture-demonstration along with this handout aims to take the studies of scores to the next level by approaching new, unfamiliar, or an old works from multiple angles. The clinic draws from the strengths of the creative performing artist in order to improve upon skills that may be less dominant. Visual, hands-on, and aural skills are reinforced through activities without the pressure of grading or an actual performance.

* indicates seminar activity

Theme: First Steps

Basics

Start here. Research before study can aid in the context study of your score.

- a. Academic research: *history, biography, other pieces from the same area, location, or composer, etc.*
- b. Listening/observation: *without relying too heavily on other people's interpretations, they can be helpful in gathering the 'whole picture' before you start: various recordings and videos; attend concerts and rehearsals to listen and to watch; take note of variations in tempi and other crucial musical ideas and perhaps how it is justified*
- c. Know the context of your chosen work: *Is it a single work? Part of a larger work or collection? What are its origins? Has it previously been performed, and where? Composer intentions, if any?*

Generic Score Marking Methods

Many texts and courses offer universal, handy, and colorful score-marking guides to assist in forming a more visually comprehensible score. Here is just one example of what you could do with colored pencils.

Lead - *general notes in margins, conducting patterns, analysis*

Red - *loud dynamics; important spots such as dissonances 'alert'*

Blue - *soft dynamics*

Yellow - *important notes (mutes, tutti, key or tempo changes, non-harmonic tones, clef change, etc)*

Purple - *phrasing*

Green - *staff separators*

Dark blue - *Cues/entrances*

Orange - *changes in or new sections (from moderato to vivace, time signature changes, etc)*

Use symbols or pictures to mark hard-to read cues (especially for percussion) or conducting patterns. The mind generally processes symbols faster than words.

Be careful not to over-highlight sections. Make important notes 'pop out' from the score rather than having to wade through all of them. Know the score well enough that this excess of information is not required.

Step-by-Step Marking

For any method of score study, keep the following in mind while studying and marking.

1. Instrumentation: which instruments and for how long; preparing parts; performance practice or other special needs; score layout and abbreviations
2. Duration: Important for concert and rehearsal lengths in particular
3. Mark (as needed):
 - a. Phrasing or Form
 - b. Significant changes in formal sections
 - c. Harmonic analysis: general-specific
 - d. Melodic interest
 - e. Recurring themes or motives
 - f. Same or different parts across ensemble/doubling

- g. Cues, Entrances, Cut offs, Fermatas
 - h. Dynamics
 - i. Tempos (old-new)
 - j. Special effects or cues or directions
 - k. Bowings and styles, breath marks, articulation
 - l. Rehearsal letters, measure numbers! (Saves a LOT of time)
 - m. Foreign terms, instructions, transpositions
 - n. Special notation
 - o. Highlight key areas, but do not be excessive
4. Comprehensibly learn the score:
- a. Refer to other scores and editions. Some are notorious for mistakes or known for their accuracy. Correct misprints (refer to errata).
 - b. Read parts both horizontally and vertically
 - c. Crucial spots: arrival points, fermatas, accelerandos, subito changes, etc
 - d. Find connecting tissues based on all your score markings that will aid in easing your conducting technique and allow room for artistry
 - e. Style and character and using nonverbal communication
 - f. As you go through the score, take notes of problematic spots for rehearsal and develop rehearsal plans from these. What are the teaching points of this piece?
 - 1. The music will usually tell you how to conduct it (meter in 2 or 4; tempo; etc)
 - 2. If possible, look through actual parts to anticipate problems or to find assisting information
 - g. Know the seating chart or layout of your ensemble and practice choreography

Variations:

Alternative or Additional Score Study Procedures

Generally speaking, the above methods are quite useful. Here are some alternative options I have found to be effective. Score study can be a detailed and grueling process, but can also be enjoyable if shaped to how an individual learns best.

Spatial Cues and Memory

1. Sometimes publications are not visually helpful. Eulenburg Editions and Dover are examples of publishers that attempt to make the score visually easier to digest. Here is one way to do-it-yourself:
 - a. Photocopy the score. Splice each phrase and/or section; match the pieces together like a puzzle, and paste or tape onto a separate set of paper. This way, it is easier to recognize and remember musical form and occurring patterns rather than having to flip through several pages of information happening or split between them.
2. Try to recall an actual visual image of the score while practicing it. Learn a small section and then walk away and practice it while envisioning it like a film strip going through your mind. Go back and check your work.

3. On marking lengths of phrases and bars within a section *
 - a. Knowing the musical form can save a lot of time in marking spots that recur later or throughout the work.
 - b. When practicing conducting patterns, it is much easier to memorize larger sections than it is to remember every measure. Similar to muscle memory in fingers, the arms retain the memory of conducting phrase-patterns.
4. If you open yourself to listening to all of the parts simultaneously during rehearsals, you can hear the entire phrase or musical line being created organically and can worry less about trying to memorize phrases or get bogged down in details. Enjoy the music for what it is.

In the words of Markand Thakar, "Hear all of the notes, all of the time."

Logistical

1. Use graph paper to study. *
 - a. Each square can indicate one measure or unit of time.
 - b. Write/draw all the same markings you would in the regular score, less the notes: Major sections, tempo changes and meter, dynamics, important cues, etc.
 - c. In this way, you can add multiple layers of information and see what happens in any given measure or section of music over a period of time.
2. Do the same thing with a blank slate of paper, which produces the same outcome but with more freedom to sketch. It is easier to see longer sections this way. *
3. Challenge yourself to make sketches of a melody, rhythm, or other musical segment while away from your score, such as on a napkin or your travel itinerary. Unorthodox ways are sometimes the most helpful in ingraining something into your mind or memory.

Analytical as an Artist

1. Patterns and Relationships. These cannot be stressed enough. *
 - a. Patterns. Look vertically and horizontally:
 - i. rhythmic; motivic; harmonic
 - ii. changes in harmonies to create tension or energy such as gradual ascending half or whole-step patterns
 - iii. location in score
 - iv. Mark how many times patterns occur.
 - b. Relationships. Look for changes:
 - i. major section key; closely related keys or harmonies including enharmonic notes
 - ii. harmonies may be over a period of time rather than within one unit, such as broken arpeggio sequences or scale runs
 - iii. rhythmic or motivic alterations such as augmentation, diminution, change in actual rhythm using same notes or vis versa; meter or tempo changes
 - iv. recognize that small units may come from a larger unit rather than only just being perceived accompanimental patterns

- Utilizing creative thinking skills, which are how artists are disciplined and designed to do in the first place, to aid in analytical skills may become a very useful tool in learning and memorizing scores more quickly and thoroughly.

Symbols and Shortcuts, Other Ideas

- Again, symbols are processed more quickly than complete words. *
 - Use slashes or math (2+3) to indicate beats/conducting patterns or phrases
 - Use Lines, Circles, Hooks, Triangles, and Squares to represent conducting patterns: 1, 2, 3, 4
 - Use zig-zag lines between parts that alternate or are having a conversation
 - Interval reading vertically and horizontally, especially with transposition
 - Curly-cues for fermatas and cut-offs
 - Note with an attached arrow pointing upwards to indicate a stop-up prep ↓
 - Be aware of overlapping or incomplete phrases
 - When in doubt, work backwards.
 - Use brackets to show related musical units
 - Find 'check-points' in the music: Back away and see the larger picture rather than individual units; be able to zoom in or out: also relates to optical illusionary (kaleidoscopic/holography)
- Tools such as clef and key transpositions: Learn all of the clefs and also how to do key transpositions to think quickly about note transpositions of any given instrument.
- Download tools on your portable device that challenge you to study while you are away from or without your score, such as mobile metronomes and mini-keyboards. Never underestimate the benefits of singing or solfegging the individual parts.

At the Piano: Making it Less Daunting *

- Practice playing one line.
- Add in and play the chordal accompaniment (this is why you analyzed the score beforehand, or are doing so during this step) as close to original as possible.
- Try adding in additional parts, one line at a time (this is where it is helpful to know if anyone doubles), including any transposing lines.
- The more you practice, the easier it will become. There are also both practice manuals and reductions available for some scores for the purpose of study and practice at the piano.

Conclusion

You might wonder why we should go to such great lengths to analyze and learn these scores. Besides that it is the artistic responsibility of the conductor to help recreate a live version of the composers' works, the reason actually comes to benefit the conductor, and in turn, the ensemble (and ultimately, the audience). How will it improve your current routine? By making many trips through the score solving all kinds of puzzles, the conductor is better prepared and more intimately knows the work even to the point

of inevitable memorization. S/he is then able to be more available to the needs of the ensemble, such as problem-solving on the spot. It saves time in the long run: With careful study you can recognize related parts throughout the score, improving your comprehension of the whole, and ultimately change your approach to a piece in rehearsal.

~Fine~

JoAnna Cochenet is an Artist Faculty at the Omaha Conservatory of Music as a conductor and viola/violin teacher, and is a freelance conductor and clinician. She holds a M. M. in Orchestral Conducting and Viola Performance from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a B. M. in Instrumental Music Education and Viola Performance Certificate from Coe College. In addition to her recent participation in conducting workshops with conductors, teachers, and authors Diane Wittry and Markand Thakar, JoAnna's formal conducting studies were with Margery Deutsch, Dr. William Carson, the late Richard Hoffman, and Dr. Marc Falk. Her formal viola studies were with Lewis Rosove and Dr. Michael Kimber. She also performs with the Omaha Symphony and is a co-founder and violist of the Kronberg Ensemble, 501(c)3.

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Helpful Resources

- Adler, Samuel. *Study of Orchestration*. 3rd Edition. W. W. Norton & Company, 2002.
- Battisti, Frank. *On Becoming a Conductor: Lessons and Meditations on the Art of Conducting*. Meredith Music, 2007.
- Daniels, David. *Orchestral Music: A Handbook*. 3rd Ed. (1996) or 4th Ed. (2005). Scarecrow Press.
- Girsberger, Russ. *A Manual for the Performance Library*. Scarecrow Press, 2006.
- Meier, Gustav. *The Score, the Orchestra, and the Conductor*. Oxford University Press, USA 2009.
- MOLA – Major Orchestra Librarians’ Association: <http://www.mola-inc.org/>
- Read, Gardner. *Music Notation: A Manual of Modern Practice*. 2nd Ed. Taplinger Publishing, 1979.
- Thakar, Markand. *Counterpoint: Fundamentals of Music Making*. Yale University Press, 1990.
- Wittry, Diane. *Beyond the Baton: What Every Conductor Needs to Know*. Oxford University Press, USA 2011.

Score Extractions

Selections from the scores listed below will be used for examples and activities during this seminar, and are located on the next several pages.

Beethoven, L. v. – Symphony No. 4 in Bb

Mvt. III. Allegro Vivace (mm. 1-90, 173-268)

Mvt. IV. Allegro ma non troppo (mm. 91-178)

Brahms, J. – Variations on a Theme by Haydn

Var. VII. Grazioso (mm. 293-321)

Finale (mm. 361-397)

Copland, A. – Appalachian Spring (Rehearsal 35 -37)

Kilar, W. – Orawa (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16; examples extracted from the thesis by JoAnna Cochenet)

Mozart, W. A. – Serenade No. 13 in G, “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik,” K525

Mvt. I. Allegro (all)

Sabra, D. – Elegy (all)