

From the Prologue

I have always been, as a good friend tells me, a “student of process.” Midway through my doctoral studies in music I seriously contemplated changing my major to educational psychology because I was fascinated (or frustrated) by observing how people function in learning environments, specifically the ensemble rehearsal. I had seen how musicians could achieve far beyond their innate talent level when the conductor set them up to succeed, but I had also seen how even the most gifted ensemble could suffer from low morale, lack of motivation, and flat-lined expressiveness because the conductor seemed oblivious to or simply uninterested in the idea of designing a creative, engaging, and edifying environment. I spent a lot of time studying, analyzing and experimenting with my own rehearsals to see how my teaching methods and ways of interacting with musicians affected the overall quality of the rehearsal and ultimately, the performance. As a supervisor and mentor for teachers, I have had the opportunity to sit in on and analyze hundreds of instrumental and choral rehearsals, and as a guest conductor, I have worked with every size and ability level of ensemble under good and not-so-good conditions, and always on a tight schedule. In short, I studied what made a conductor successful and taught what I learned to hundreds of students and teachers in undergraduate and graduate classes and conference workshops.

But it wasn't until I connected what I had read in that first serendipitous book to my own life as a conductor that I began to see what I really had been studying was *leadership*—specifically, *the way in which conductors use their skills, knowledge, and character to create not only a fine musical product, but also a meaningful musical experience*. More than technique, more than knowledge, more than talent,

more than personality—*leadership* is the key to great conductors and great ensembles.

Why a book about leadership for the conductor?

Because more and more conductors are learning that organizational life—the way people work together to accomplish a collective goal—is changing and, as leaders of organizations, we need to respond to this change. In recent years, the move has been toward a flatter hierarchical structure, where followers (in our case, ensemble members) take on more responsibility and provide more input into many aspects of operations. The leader functions more as a coordinator of efforts, an expert guide who helps individuals achieve a mutually beneficial goal. There is greater involvement by all participants in the organization and theoretically, more accountability, leading to a deeper, more meaningful experience. Followers own the process more and therefore, feel more invested. Put simply, the focus is much less on ME vs. THEM, much more on US.

You see, if I took everything I have learned about great leadership and boiled it down to one, overriding theme, it would be: “It’s not about me.” It’s not about what *I* can achieve or what kind of ensemble *I* can develop; it’s about gaining an awareness of *what needs to be done to develop the people whom I am given to lead*. There has been a fundamental shift in thinking, a shift from “ME” to “THEM;” from a focus on position and power to one of leading by serving.

In our defense, conductors are seldom trained to make this psychological shift. After all, we spend most of our youth and educational training focused on ME: *my* feelings, *my* thoughts, *my* lessons, *my* grades, *my* study habits, *my* talent, *my* artistic development. It’s all about ME. Then, almost overnight, we are

conductors: trustees, really, of the musical lives of those who sing and play in our ensembles. All of a sudden, it's not about ME, it's about THEM. This requires a huge psychological jump. Few of us make the leap gracefully; some of us, never.

Whether or not we make this shift in our thinking determines the quality and direction of our entire lives. As we think, so shall we be, it has been said. If we are focused on ourselves, self-preservation kicks in and we make decisions based on our ego most of the time. How will it feel to *me*? What will work for *me*? How will *I* look to my various publics? How successful will *I* be? But if we shift our focus to those we lead, who really are those we *serve*, everything changes. We now ask, "What does the ensemble need to be successful? How can *we* work together to get there?"

Helping you understand how to make this shift is why I wrote this book.

Using our influence to serve

Conductors who choose to use their position of influence to serve surrender to a higher calling. As servant leaders, this calling means serving our musicians and our organizations, but it also refers to "serving" our art—music. What we do in our rehearsals eventually leads to a performance, one that we hope will be glorious quite simply because the music deserves no less. My experience in talking to conductors is that all of them started on this career path because of their deep connection to and love of music. At some point in our lives we had an almost spiritual experience with music; it may have been as a performer or a listener, young or not so young, but whatever it was, it was powerful. Music became at that moment "other-worldly," taking us to a higher

place. Now, as conductors, we aspire to bring others with us to that higher place, but to do so means we must think outward, away from our egos and toward something greater than any one individual. When we commit to this kind of leadership, everyone—conductor, ensemble and audience—reaps the benefits.

Who Should Read this Book

The Conductor As Leader offers a comprehensive exploration of leadership and some practical ideas about how we can use our talents as conductors to be a significant part of a significant experience. This book is for any conductor who wants to better understand his role as a *leader* from the podium. It doesn't matter if you conduct university choirs or the community band, or if you conduct by default because you are the general music teacher and beginning orchestra was part of the job (and you needed one.) The principles in this book apply to all conductors and teachers who are willing to look hard at the way in which they live their professional lives. Regardless of your setting, these are fundamental principles that, when applied, can help you and the ensemble grow to the next level, to reach your goals and to accomplish this in a way that makes creating music in a community of musicians a rewarding experience—not just on “good days,” but every day. If you want to grow as an artist who leads, if you want to understand how to make a significant difference in the lives of those you conduct, and if you want to *enjoy* the process of developing excellent ensembles, then this book is for you.