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What is the meaning behind the hand movements of a musical conductor?

I enjoy watching classical music being played but for the life of mine I can't figure out what's behind the conductor's hand movements.

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10 Answers



Claire Callahan, Violist, Chamber musician, Orchestra musician

Written Nov 14, 2015

It's all very well that conductors may be taught to do the things others have posted here. That doesn't mean they do them. Also, they use whichever hand is practical to indicate the downbeat, sometimes both hands. Some conductors are literally dance, others are very efficient in their motions - which can be very effective, because it forces musicians to look up more. From my position in the viola section, it is my peripheral vision which is taking in whatever the conductor is doing. I saw a documentary recently on eyesight, and your peripheral vision is very good for this purpose.

@Liam Xavier Arduino obviously studied some conducting though he doesn't mention it in his bio. This is wishful thinking. Coming down on the downbeat of each bar with the dominant hand is a rarity - because we all know where the downbeat is anyway. I would love to see a conductor who made downbeats look like downbeats! But they don't, and it doesn't matter anyway, because if you are playing a piece and don't know where the downbeat (one) is, you shouldn't be there.

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I do appreciate and unders

very understandable that people jump to the conclusion that the music coming to

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