

Introducing Pre-Professional Training Orchestras to Austro-Germanic Orchestral Works of the Late Romantic Period: A Conductor's Perspective

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**Introducing Pre-Professional Training Orchestras to Austro-
Germanic Orchestral Works of the Late Romantic Period:
A Conductor's Perspective**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Music Research**

November, 2017

Abstract

This exegesis explores the rehearsal process that leads to performances with pre-professional symphony orchestras. At the heart of this study is my personal reflection as a conductor of orchestral training programs, through practice-based and reflective explorations of the central musical and educational challenges of rehearsing and performing major Austro-Germanic orchestral works of the Late-Romantic Period. Borrowing from aspects of autoethnographic practice, a case study methodology provides a detailed reflection on the rehearsal process of introducing Johannes Brahms *Symphony No. 4 Op. 98* to pre-professional musicians. Four performance projects of major symphonic works with four pre-professional orchestras conducted by myself forms the creative output portfolio of this study.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the exegesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the exegesis itself.



(Signed) _____

6 November 2017

(Date) _____

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Introduction

Art practice qualifies as research when its purpose is to broaden our knowledge and understanding through an original investigation. It begins with questions that are pertinent to the research context and the art world, and employs methods that are appropriate to the study. The process and outcomes of the research are appropriately documented and disseminated to the research community and to the wider public.

(Borgdorff, 2005, p. 8)

This paper examines my artistic practice as an orchestral conductor through the terms outlined by Borgdorff above. The role of an orchestral conductor is to provide artistic leadership of orchestral musicians in the preparation of musical works, through the rehearsal process that leads towards performances. As conductor Leon Botstein states: 'Conducting, like any other performing art, is contingent on the command of technique. But like playing an instrument, that technique must be linked with and adapted to musical ideas and specific musical contours.' (Faberman, 1999, p. ix) This relates to one of the key challenges for training musicians in a pre-professional context such as a university orchestra: that students may have good technical foundations on their instrument but often lack first-hand experience of playing major repertoire in a large orchestra on a regular basis. Therefore, they rely on the conductor to impart a much greater level of guidance than would be the case in the professional sphere.

The aim of this artistic research project is to critically reflect on my own practice as a conductor in such contexts. Drawing on a series of four concerts programmed to introduce pre-professional orchestral musicians to key Late-Romantic Austro-Germanic works, this project seeks to address the following primary research question:

How do I develop and implement rehearsal strategies as a conductor through the rehearsal process in order to achieve technically sound and stylistically informed performances?

The four concerts that I conducted with two university orchestras and two professional and student side-by-side orchestras between June 2016 and April 2017 constitute the creative component of the research project. They are discussed in more detail at the end of this introduction and video recordings of them are appended to this document.

This exegesis expands on the performances by providing written perspectives pertaining to the primary research question. The first chapter borrows some relevant procedures from the field of autoethnography that reflects on my own career path in orchestral music. I then articulate the development of my conducting practice, and the ways in which this has been informed by my experiences as a performer. The Case Study that follows draws on the reflective analysis of video recordings of rehearsals undertaken during this research process that provides a reflective discussion of the techniques I employ in rehearsals to address the challenges presented with training pre-professional orchestral musicians. These chapters are followed by a conclusion that summarises and draws together observations and findings made throughout the project.

Overall, I intend that this research will make a contribution towards understanding the artistic and educational challenges involved in the training of pre-professional orchestral musicians. Through a process of critical reflection of my work in the rehearsal room, the value of these outcomes will hopefully strengthen my work as an orchestral trainer and may also motivate other conductors who specialise in the area of advanced orchestral training to reflect on their own instructional processes.

The pre-professional orchestral setting

Throughout this document the term 'pre-professional' is used to describe a particular orchestral training context: student musicians who are mostly young adults undertaking a tertiary degree in music who are assumed to be approaching a professional standard of technical and interpretative ability on their respective instruments. 'Pre-professional' as a category is distinct to high

school orchestras or high-school-age community orchestras, which usually include musicians with a wide range of skill levels, where most would still be in a process of direct instruction. While 'youth orchestras' may be by definition 'pre-professional', I have elected to not use this term in this paper because 'youth orchestras' tend to run according to organisational criteria that reflect contextual factors, such as location, or being bound to particular events, such as a summer school or a weekend music program. The term 'pre-professional' has the advantage of being able to include 'youth' and 'university orchestras', as well as similar activities undertaken in any other independent capacity.

Despite the considerable literature that exists about music pedagogy in specific contexts (for example Lebler, 2008, Green, 2009, Kodály, 1974, among many others) there has been little written about the idiosyncrasies of training in the pre-professional orchestra context. As musicologist Margaret Kartomi identified a decade ago, 'Despite its size and significance, the youth orchestra sector of the music industry is a neglected area of research.' (2007, p. 19) This remains the case today. There is even less published about approaches to the direction of advanced training orchestras. Therefore, the potential differences between orchestral training as a part of a general musical education, and as a pathway to a professional career, are rarely addressed.

Additionally, the perspective of professional conductors who work with these musicians, and the particular skillset that they must possess, is largely absent from available literature. This research intends to address this gap by presenting a reflective account of my own experience as a professional orchestral musician, ahead of becoming a professional conductor working with training orchestras. Through this analysis I hope to determine some of the methods a conductor can employ to be an effective musical leader, and the necessary skills for training young musicians when introducing them to a major orchestral work for the first time. Specifically, what are the challenges and what strategies do I engage to address them?

Effectively, this is a study of ‘tacit knowledge’ as defined by Michael Polanyi in *The Tacit Dimension*. Polanyi states ‘we can know more than we can tell’ (1966, p. x), asserting that ‘tacit knowledge’ is that which cannot be verbalised and that all knowledge that one acquires over one’s lifetime stems from this intangible level of understanding. Additionally, in his paper, *Do Australian universities encourage tacit knowledge transfer?*, researcher Ritesh Chugh defines ‘tacit knowledge’ as ‘skills, ideas and experiences that people have in their minds’ which are, therefore, ‘difficult to access because it is often not codified and may not necessarily be easily expressed’ (2015, p. 128). Essentially it is the type of embodied knowledge that is not articulated through words and is thereby less than straightforward to communicate to another person. The necessary skills required for playing the violin, or how to conduct a Brahms Symphony, requires an understanding that is not always known explicitly, even by experts, and therefore difficult to explain to others. Nonetheless, even though much may be tacit, there are some tangible aspects that can be identified and these will be discussed in this paper.

The repertoire choice for this project

The creative output portfolio accompanying this exegesis comprises recordings of four major orchestral concerts of Austro-Germanic works from the Late-Romantic Period that I conducted in 2016 and 2017. To keep the scope of this research focused, the rehearsal process of only one of these projects will be examined in detail – a performance of Brahms *Symphony No. 4 Op. 98* with the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

Student musicians are usually introduced to Austro-Germanic works of the Late-Romantic period during the course of their training, as these works constitute what is regarded in the professional sphere as ‘standard’ orchestral repertoire – ‘The repertoire of major performing groups and performing areas, notably the symphony orchestra, opera, standard chamber ensembles, voice and piano. In practice it pertains mainly to music of the common-practice period and those

pieces performed most often.' (Citron, 1973, p. 27) The ability of students to effectively present this repertoire at a high level, however, is affected by their relative inexperience. This may be particularly acute for young Australian musicians who are far removed from the socio-cultural context of Europe and who may therefore lack a practical understanding of how to interpret the works. It is my experience that when young Australian musicians are introduced to a major orchestral work from the Romantic canon for the first time, there is an abundance of passion, enthusiasm, excitement and energy. Rarely, however, do these musicians possess technical and musical refinement to achieve a level of excellence in the early stages of the rehearsal process. Similarly, they possess little to no fluency in the German language vital to comprehending the musical instructions in the works of Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler. As an understanding of historically informed practice is, at the very least, desirable to perform this genre of music convincingly, the onus is therefore on the conductor – as artistic leader and orchestral trainer – to share as much relevant information with the musicians as possible by rehearsing these works effectively and efficiently within the time limitations of the rehearsal schedule. As Kartomi observes:

Highly complex works of the professional orchestral repertoire could well be deemed too sophisticated for a youth orchestra. While the players might be able to perform them adequately enough, that they could appreciate or interpret the broader significance and magnitude of such works has sometimes been questioned. Even students of twenty-four or twenty-five years of age may not possess sufficient life experience to facilitate works which demand an interpretation based on deep emotional maturity. (2007, p. 102)

The discussions that follow will reveal aspects of my own artistic practice that go some way to address the gap in knowledge and experience identified by Kartomi. They will examine and explain the rehearsal processes I implement largely intuitively, though informed nonetheless by leading conductors in the field. This body of knowledge aims to provide useful and relevant information required to produce effective methods of training pre-professional orchestral musicians.

Creative component of this project

The recorded performances constitute the central part of the research undertaken towards this project. They document orchestral concerts by pre-professional orchestras in which my role as conductor constitutes the locus of my creative practice. In order to reflect on how I approach conducting works in this particular context, other conducting contexts in which I frequently work are necessarily excluded from the scope of this project. Importantly, the scope of the study does not extend to the pedagogy of conducting, or the pedagogical practices associated with teaching young musicians, as to do so would constitute a different kind of project.

The performances I conducted towards this project were as follows:

Performance 1:

Richard Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*, Op. 40.

The Musician Project – Verbrugghen Hall, University of Sydney Conservatorium of Music, 19 June 2016.

The Musician Project is a Sydney-based orchestral training program comprised of student musicians who play with professionals from Australia's major professional orchestras in a 'side-by-side' project for the purpose of rehearsing and performing large-scale orchestral works – in this case an Austro-Germanic tone poem from the Late Romantic period. The students invited to participate were from the Sydney Conservatorium, Australian Youth Orchestra and Sydney Youth Orchestra. The professionals were members of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Australian Opera Orchestra. The project replicated a professional rehearsal schedule of four two-and-a-half hour rehearsal calls prior to the general rehearsal on the morning of the concert. This training model provided a rare opportunity for Sydney-based students to play alongside leading professionals who occupied the principal chairs and mentored the musicians of their respective sections.

Performance 2:

Gustav Mahler *Symphony No. 4* – Alexandra Ioan, soprano
University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Melbourne Recital Centre, 27 August 2016.

Performance 3:

Johannes Brahms *Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98*
University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Melbourne Recital Centre, 1 October 2016

The University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra is the flagship ensemble of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. I was engaged as its Principal Guest Conductor from 2013-2016. The orchestra was comprised of undergraduate and graduate music students, together with guest musicians from the Australian National Academy of Music to fill out sections where there were insufficient numbers in the violin, viola and double bass sections. In 2016, the orchestra presented four concerts throughout the academic year – two concerts per semester.

Performance 4:

Gustav Mahler *Symphony No. 6*
The Orchestra Project
South Melbourne Town Hall, 16 April 2017.

The Orchestra Project is a Melbourne-based training orchestra that I founded in 2002 while I was a member of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. The students invited to play in the project were from the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM), Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, Monash University, Sydney Symphony Fellowship, Australian Youth Orchestra and Melbourne Youth Orchestra. This too is a 'side-by side' model where students played alongside members of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra Victoria. The rehearsal period was held over the Easter

weekend and consisted of four two-and-a-half hour rehearsal calls ahead of the general rehearsal on the day of the performance.

Chapter 1: On becoming and being a conductor

In telling their stories of experience, teachers necessarily reflect on those experiences and thus make meaning of them; that is they gain an understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice. (Barkhulzen and Wette, 2008, p. 374)

The idea of 'being' a conductor is integral to this research project. It is through reflection on the practice of conducting that I am able to understand better how the creative choices I make and the training tools I employ impact upon the experiences of the pre-professional orchestral musicians with whom I work. This paper explores conducting through, firstly, a review of pertinent published accounts of the role of the conductor, and secondly, an account of my own experience in orchestral contexts: initially as an instrumentalist, and then as conductor.

Aspects of the process of autoethnography – a methodological practice widespread in the creative arts research and integral to this research-led practice – informs my personal reflection. Autoethnography is a method of articulating and reflecting upon a person's experience – 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.' (Ellis & Buchner, 2011, p. 1) By utilising this method of enquiry 'autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does - how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others as writers, participants, audiences, and humans.' (Bochner, 1994; Denzin, 1989, p. 282) It is also a method that has been employed effectively by musicians, notably in Bartleet & Ellis (2009).

Perspectives on conducting: A personal reflection

Esteemed conductor Lorin Maazel described his pathway to becoming a conductor as:

To lead, one has to follow.... I found myself having to learn how to follow [as a violinist in the orchestra]. We [Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra] had the world's most famous guest conductors and I learned my craft at the other end of other people's batons. I became a very good follower. All of this experience [including playing chamber music] taught me how to follow. I put all this experience to use later on and I could also understand the psychology of those who follow, what it is an orchestra musician wants from a conductor. (Inaba, 2014, p. 1)

My approach to conducting is grounded in a twenty-year career as a professional orchestral musician observing the hundreds of conductors that I worked with in the three Australian professional orchestras I held positions – Sydney Symphony Orchestra (full-time contracted Guest Principal Tuba 1987-1990), Orchestra Victoria (Principal Tuba 1990-1993) and Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Principal Tuba 1993-2007) – as well as all the other professional orchestras and ensembles I worked with throughout Australia and abroad as a guest musician. It is also informed by decades of watching live concerts of the world's great orchestras during my travels throughout Europe, America and Asia, as well as studying concerts available on video and, increasingly over the last twenty years, through the vast amount of concert and rehearsal footage available through the internet.

During my career as a professional orchestral musician I experienced the full gamut of conducting ability, from those who were relatively inexperienced and ineffective, to those who were amongst the very best in the world. I played under conductors who could conduct everything including concertos from memory, while there were others who never stopped looking at the score. Some conductors had impeccable rhythm but avoided dealing with intonation problems. There were those who were extremely musical but were a challenge to follow. Others loved the sound of their own voice and did more talking than we

did playing. In this regard, I concur with Lorin Maazel who asserted that 'Conductors are there to conduct, not to make speeches. And they are there to give a beat everybody can understand.' (Inaba, 2014, p. 1)

What qualities do effective conductors possess and how are these qualities transmitted to orchestras so as to maximise artistic and technical excellence as efficiently as possible? According to Leonard Bernstein:

The conductor must not only make his orchestra play - he must make them want to play. He must exalt them, lift them, start their adrenaline pouring, either by pleading or demanding or raging. But however he does it, he must make them love the music, as he loves it. It is not so much a matter of imposing his will on them like a dictator; it is more like projecting his feelings around so that they reach the last man in the 2nd violin section. And when this happens - when everybody shares his feelings, when 100 men are sharing the same feelings, exactly, simultaneously, responding as one to each rise and fall of the music, to each point of arrival and departure, to when all that is happening, then there is a human identity of feeling that has no equal elsewhere. (1959, p. 150)

Beyond drawing together such feelings, Sir Georg Solti asserted that:

You cannot be a first class conductor unless you really know the score. After all, a conductor must really be a teacher, first and foremost. How can you teach something you yourself do not know well? (1998, p. 215)

Further, Claudio Abbado, while being interviewed, said that understanding art in a wider context was crucial to interpreting music:

First, it's very important to know not just the music culture, but what is around the music, from literature, paintings and everything that is possible to understand. For me it was very important to understand Russian music to know about, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, or some modern Russian writers. The same thing with the German, or now with Vienna [sic]. Many years ago I didn't know about Klimt and Schiller and

Kokoschka. Now today I'm reading many things that are new to me. It's terribly important to understand all this culture and then to bring this culture around [to the music] (Abbado, cited in Duffy, 1985, p. xix)

In my experience, the most accomplished conductors were usually those who were the most effective communicators - both verbally and non-verbally. In the chapters that follow, I will aim to document key verbal and non-verbal techniques I often use when conducting training orchestras. Conductor Dr Carolyn Watson in her thesis, *Gesture as Communication: The Art of Carlos Kleiber*, states that:

The information professional musicians glean from conductors is thus not limited to, nor expressed via purely manual technical conducting gestures. Rather, a conductor uses a variety of communicative tools in addition to his hands. The art of conducting is therefore a composite one – an amalgam of various forms of physical movement and posture, facial expressions and manual conducting gestures, all of which are framed by the personality of the individual. (2012, p. 3)

Conductors have both an advantage and a disadvantage when working with a professional orchestra. The professionals have a great deal of knowledge and experience with most of them having played most of the standard orchestral repertoire many times over many years. As a consequence some orchestras may have a preferred or even habitual way they play a work and may resist a new interpretation. As conductor Dianne Wittry observed, 'Often people will not understand why a change is necessary, or why we need to deviate from "this is how we've always done it". Tradition is a formidable obstacle to change.' (2006, p. 85) Whatever the case, professionals possess considerable experience and are familiar with all the 'notes' from much of the standard repertoire, therefore the rehearsal period is considerably shorter than is the case with a student orchestra.

Conducting student orchestras has a specific set of challenges that will be examined in the following chapters. According to British conductor Christopher Seaman: 'Youth orchestras can attain amazingly high standards because there is

plenty of rehearsal time, so long as the students understand that the whole project is about excellence, not just bashing through big pieces for fun.' (2013, p. 21) How different should the approach be with pre-professionals as opposed to working with professionals? Whilst there may be plenty of passion and enthusiasm, young musicians don't have the experience of their professional counterparts to play in a refined, stylistically informed and technically developed manner – they are usually too busy dealing with the many 'new notes' they must learn how to play.

What methods do I employ to train young musicians as thoroughly as possible in the limited time available in the rehearsal period to achieve a cohesive and convincing performance? After every rehearsal and performance I conduct there is usually some form of reflection on what has transpired. However, this research project is my first undertaking to document a critical reflection on my method as conductor in the context of orchestral training, as opposed to simply thinking about what transpired in a rehearsal and formulating a strategy to take to the next rehearsal or project. According to Jane Davidson, 'For me, the process of documentation and then critical reflection re-enforces the research element of the rehearsal process.' (2004, p. 146) The data that will be studied for my reflection process is in the form of video-recorded rehearsals that will be documented in Chapter 2. The following section however reflects more broadly on my musical background and formative training.

'Music is not for you' – Pursuing an education in music

Like many children, my introduction to music was in the form of piano lessons, beginning at the age of six. Despite the fact that I loved learning the piano, coordination of the left and right hands was problematic and my teachers were challenged in finding a solution for me. I vividly recall one of my teacher's frustration when he impatiently stated that "music is probably not for you." Naturally this was disappointing as it would be for most children; however, I was determined to find a way to overcome whatever obstacles were inhibiting my progress.

I began to listen to LP recordings around this time and I suppose this was the start of my fascination with recorded music. I would listen to Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* repeatedly for hours and try to play excerpts of it on my piano. I wanted to be able to play that piece! Though I was not a gifted reader of sheet music I found it reasonably straightforward to take what I would hear and play it by ear on the piano. When I would show my teachers what I could do they seemed mildly bemused but usually somewhat disinterested. The valuable lesson I would learn from this, which would serve me well decades later, is the responsibility that we have as teachers and the damage to students that can result if our task is not carried out with skill and enthusiasm.

I relocated to a new school when I was ten years of age and during the first week of the term there was a recruitment drive for the school brass band. I remember being excited about this prospect when the announcement was made and I told the teacher in front of the entire class that I was a pianist, only to be ridiculed by the recruitment official for my ignorance that, 'unless the piano is made of brass there would unlikely be a position for me'. Despite this, I undertook the mandatory music aptitude test a few days later - it was an elementary set of music questions all of which I knew the answers to, since I had already been playing the piano for a number of years by this stage. However, due to illness I was absent from school the day when the band admission results were released. The following day I approached the relevant teacher about the test results only to be told 'sorry you weren't successful; music is not for you; and a big kid like you should go and play football anyway.' Naturally I was very confused and began to believe what I was being told – that I had no music ability. How was it though that I was able to play musical works on the piano that I had never seen the music to? Was I really completely unmusical?

I had to wait another year to join the school brass band. It was when my younger brother, who began studies at my school the following year, brought home a cornet on his first day and told me that he had joined the school band – the very band I had failed to enter when applying to join the previous year. He had never played piano and when I asked him if he had taken the music aptitude test, he

told me that he was not required to sit for such a test. I was shocked! The very next day I joined the band and was issued with a trombone. It was inside a diamond shaped case that I recall thinking at the time, resembled a baby's coffin. My trombone career was to be short-lived because within weeks I had made the switch to the euphonium. I had little in the way of private teaching and, like most of the students in the band, one just tried to keep up by following whomever one was sitting next to. Just as it had been the case with the piano, I quickly started learning new pieces that I listened to, prior to having seen the sheet music.

Over the course of the next six years and especially once I had developed a fluency in reading music notation, I flourished as a brass player and won approximately fifty solo competitions and prizes throughout Australia. During my high school years I devoted more time to instrumental practice than any other school subject. I received very little in the way of regular private instrumental instruction other than the occasional lesson, so essentially I had to teach myself, and that was usually by trying to imitate great musicians that I heard through recordings that inspired me.

I consumed an enormous amount of music either by practicing or listening to recordings, mostly of brass works. My first exposure to 'classical music', other than Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue* during my early piano days, was in the form of brass band arrangements of overtures by Berlioz, Lalo, Dvorak and Rossini. In these arrangements the euphonium parts contained material often from the cello parts of the original versions and, fortunately for me, this was an excellent way to develop a dexterous technique. Similarly, my sight-reading skills improved rapidly due to the large volume of repertoire that I was working through on a regular basis.

For me there was only one problem with playing the euphonium. I had an ambition to play in an orchestra one day, but apart from a handful of works, such as Gustav Holst *The Planets*, Richard Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*, *Don Quixote* and Mahler *Symphony No. 7*, the euphonium is not a regular instrument in the brass section of the symphony orchestra. During these teenage years, from time to time I would practice the tuba and realised that I could play most music on this

instrument as I could on the euphonium. The tuba would eventually be the path for me to achieve my orchestral aspirations.

In 1985 during my final year of secondary school, the college career adviser arranged for all students to undertake a vocational aptitude test on the school's one and only computer. I was advised that the results indicated that I would be best suited to a clerical position or "at best" a career as an accountant. When I mentioned that I wanted to pursue a music career, the career adviser advised me against having such 'stupid ideas'. As with previous experiences, his advice made me more determined than ever to prove the naysayers wrong.

I sought out and began occasional lessons with a number of excellent brass teachers throughout Sydney and, even though I had never played in an orchestra, I decided this was the path that I wanted to pursue. When I completed high school I opted for a gap year and practiced more than ever. I began to meet professional musicians and would accept every performance opportunity offered to me. In 1987 at the age of nineteen, just over a year following my completion of high school, I received a phone call that would prove to be life changing. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra (SSO) needed a tuba player urgently to work with them the following day. The brass musicians of the SSO knew that I had very little orchestral experience but, as no other tuba player was available, the SSO had little option but to hire me. Through this unforeseen stroke of luck I was booked for the engagement and, despite never having formally studied classical music, I performed my first concerts with one of Australia's finest professional orchestras. It proved to be a successful debut because shortly afterwards I was contracted as Guest Principal Tuba of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and would remain there for the next three years.

It was clearly an unconventional path towards receiving a contract position with a major professional orchestra. For anyone to be in such a position it was simultaneously exciting and daunting. Each week in the SSO I was playing a new work for the first time and a large proportion of this repertoire was Austro-Germanic works of the Late Romantic Period. As I was so far behind everyone

else in the orchestra in terms of age and experience, and completely lacking in the type of formal music education that professional orchestral musicians usually attain, I therefore had to be thoroughly prepared before every program.

This preparation, as it turned out, extended to the studying of full orchestral scores. I would borrow a copy of the score for every work I was to play and study it with various recordings. Reflecting on this period now, this score study was the beginning of my interest in conducting that inspired a fascination with musical compositions in a whole new way. Every new work that I discovered would teach me something new about the many instruments of the orchestra as well as the various music elements including form, harmony, counterpoint, phrasing, sound, texture and orchestration. It was, and remains for me, a fascinating and inspiring process.

Over the next twenty years I would be fully employed as an orchestral musician that commenced with the contract position with the SSO. After those three years and following a six-month period of study in the USA in 1990 I was appointed to the position of Principal Tuba of Orchestra Victoria performing with Victorian State Opera, The Australian Opera, and The Australian Ballet. My last professional instrumental appointment was Principal Tuba of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, where I would remain for fourteen years until 2007.

During my orchestral career, I became immersed in three other areas of music activity: chamber music, solo performance and instrumental teaching. I was invited to join the Sydney Brass Ensemble, comprised of members of the SSO in 1987. When I started working in Melbourne in 1990 I would begin playing in a touring ensemble for Musica Viva Australia, the Melbourne Brass Ensemble. As a soloist I would perform solo recitals every year at various universities and numerous brass conferences throughout the country. There were also a number of concerto appearances with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra Victoria. I was one of the few Australian tuba players to ever be a finalist in the ABC Young Performer of the Year concerto competition.

At the age of 22 I received an Instrumental Lecturer appointment at the University of Melbourne Victorian College of the Arts. I continued to teach at the University of Melbourne over the next 25 years in numerous capacities that included chamber music coaching, brass and wind ensemble direction, contemporary music performance, and the area that I would eventually specialise in – orchestral conducting.

‘Where did you study conducting?’ The transition from player to conductor

In 2000 I was asked to conduct a wind, brass and percussion rehearsal on Mahler Symphony No. 5 with the Melbourne Youth Orchestra as a last minute replacement. This would be my first time conducting a large-scale symphonic work. From this starting point I received more invitations to conduct sectional rehearsals including string sectionals. The many years of playing in professional orchestras was advantageous because I had first-hand knowledge of the repertoire and had learnt how to rehearse by observing many very fine conductors. I had learnt especially how important it was to be thorough yet efficient in the rehearsal room in order to maintain the musician’s energy and interest. I have memories of conductors who simply talked too much and wasted time while relating unnecessary information, or when focusing on minutiae for an excessive amount of time, thereby boring the musicians. One of the most important lessons I learned throughout thousands of hours in the rehearsal room was the importance of being thorough without being excessively punctilious.

Over the next two years I was invited to conduct many more rehearsals with youth orchestras. Essentially this provided me with a great deal of practical experience towards becoming an orchestra trainer. In 2002 with the support of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra I founded a new training orchestra – The Orchestra Project. The purpose of this initiative was to provide high calibre students with an opportunity to play alongside members of the MSO, who would occupy the principal chairs and adopt the role of mentors to the students in their respective sections. In simulating a professional setting we would rehearse and

perform a major orchestral work in a much shorter time frame than students would normally be accustomed to. My aim was to replicate a professional rehearsal schedule that was distinctly different to the extended rehearsal season typical of a university or youth orchestra. Training pre-professional musicians utilising such a 'real-life model' proved to be popular and highly successful by providing high-level practical experience that bridged the gap between youth orchestras and the profession.

Subsequently, I took the decision to retire as an orchestral musician in 2007 to specialise in orchestral training. I held various conducting positions with a number of pre-professional programs including Melbourne Youth Orchestra (Principal Conductor and Artistic Director), Monash Academy Orchestra at Melbourne's Monash University (Associate Professor, Principal Conductor and Artistic Director) and University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Guest Principal Conductor and Acting Head of Orchestral Studies). Since 2004 I have conducted the Australian Youth Orchestra in twenty-four seasons as their Associate Conductor.

I began to learn my craft from the vantage point of my position in the professional orchestras that I worked with. Throughout each year the orchestras that I played with would encounter a new guest conductor on most weeks. During my time at SSO, we would play under approximately forty conductors during any given year. Over my twenty-year orchestral career, I played under more than six hundred conductors, each of whom provided me with insights for better or worse through observing and analysing what they did. There were unforgettable experiences working with some of the world's finest conductors including Sir Georg Solti, Charles Dutoit, Neeme Jarvi, Hiroyuki Iwaki, Mariss Jannsons, Yuri Temikarnov and Stanislaw Scrowacewski.

In reflecting upon the hundreds of conductors that I worked with, I learnt valuable lessons from most of them: what to do, and sometimes, what not to do. After years of experience following conductors, orchestral musicians develop an understanding of what constitutes good rehearsal technique. For me, the conductor who manages time efficiently, possesses a thorough knowledge of the

work at hand, has excellent personal skills and is able to shape a sound with clear and meaningful gestures will usually gain the confidence of the musicians he or she is conducting in most orchestral contexts. In this I concur with the conductor and composer Gunther Schuller who writes in his book *The compleat conductor*:

Every conductor, after all, thinks of himself/herself as embodying the highest moral artistic integrity and possessing all the requisite skills to interpret the great masterworks of our literature. We must therefore consider more precisely the specific core skills with which the conductor can effectively respond to – and achieve – the stated challenges. A simple definition of the art of conducting could be that it involves eliciting from the orchestra with the most appropriate minimum of conductorial (if you will, choreographic) gestures a maximum of accurate acoustical results.’ (1997, p. 9)

Conclusion: Relating this background to my conducting practice

My approach to preparing the works programmed for this study reflects my experience as a musician both as instrumentalist and conductor. For example, Richard Strauss’ *Ein Heldenleben Op. 40* was a work I had played on no fewer than twenty performances with five different conductors. I had also conducted the work on two previous occasions with The Orchestra Project – 2006 and 2008. As this was the third time conducting the piece with a professional and student side-by-side orchestra, I studied recordings of my two previous performances of the work, which in itself was part of my preparation through a process of reflection for this practice-led-research. The other part of my preparation and the most relevant was revisiting the score that I began studying twenty-eight years earlier, when I first played the work with the SSO in 1988.

Meanwhile, Gustav Mahler’s *Symphony No. 4* (Performance 2) was a work I had conducted on two previous occasions. My preparation for revisiting the work included study and reflection of one of my previous recordings from two years earlier with the Monash Academy Orchestra at Melbourne’s Monash University. It is the one symphonic work by Mahler that I had no first-hand performance

history during my playing days, as it is the only Mahler symphony that does not contain low brass. However it was a piece that had always fascinated me since hearing it in a live performance in Berlin with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Claudio Abbado in 1995. It was at this time that I first obtained a score of the work and had studied it for many years prior to conducting it for the first time. I had however accumulated decades of experience playing all the other Mahler symphonies including *Das Lied von der Erde* under numerous conductors. Additionally I had also conducted most of the symphonies including *Das Lied von der Erde*, with the exception of the Seventh Symphony and the Eighth Symphony. Along with my recording of the Fourth Symphony I drew upon other experiences having conducted and recorded the Fifth Symphony on two previous occasions, as well as recordings I had made of the Sixth Symphony and the Ninth Symphony.

The process of reflecting on my playing and conducting experiences through my previous recordings of Mahler symphonies made a significant contribution to my preparation for introducing Mahler *Symphony No. 4* to the musicians of the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Performance 2), as has been the case with most of the works I have introduced to the numerous training orchestras I have worked with. Similarly, the reflection of my instructional technique when introducing Brahms *Symphony No. 4* (Performance 3) to this same University orchestra through the rehearsal process constitutes the practice-led research and research-led practice documented in the following two chapters. The following chapters not only use personal self-reflection and critical writing but also illustrate aspects of autoethnographic methodology. I am seeking not just to recount these experiences but to analyse them via a focus on my self-awareness as a developing musician and how my experiences on the podium relate to those that I have learned from other conductors. I thus seek to understand my own experiences within a culture of 'conducting' as both a profession and a vocation.

Chapter 2: Case Study – Rehearsing Brahms Symphony No. 4

To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan and not quite enough time. (Bernstein, cited in La Fave, 2014, p. 4)

Conducting pre-professional orchestras presents a particular set of challenges that are considerably different than is the case in the professional sphere. It is my intention in this chapter to tease out, firstly, what these challenges are, and secondly, what specific practices I employ in my conducting to help address them, or to minimise their occurrence in the first place. As others have articulated, the conductor in a pre-professional setting has to be proactive in solving technical problems as well as shaping the music. For example, conductor Christopher Seaman states: ‘For a conductor to describe a musical effect [to students] isn’t enough; he [or she] may have to tell them exactly how it’s done or it won’t happen.’ (2013, p. 21) Conductor and violinist Christopher Adey goes further: ‘The conductor of youth, student or amateur orchestras, needs to be able to draw upon a far deeper understanding of the technical solutions to musical problems than would be the case were he or she working with professional players.’ (2012, p. 16)

The analysis presented in this chapter stems from a sequence of two full orchestra rehearsals of Brahms *Symphony No. 4* with the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra that occurred in the early stages of the rehearsal schedule in September 2016. My reflective analysis of these rehearsal videos revealed consistent patterns when identifying problems and the solutions that were implemented to guide their performance.

The following begins with a description of the early rehearsals ahead of identifying the challenges posed and the strategies I employed to address the various issues.

The rehearsal context

The rehearsals and concert with the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Concert 3) occurred from 25 September until 1 October 2016. All rehearsals took place in Melba Hall at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and consisted of ten two-and-a-half hour calls followed by the general rehearsal on the morning of the concert on 1 October 2016. The full program was Katy Abbott *Introduced Species* (2014), Benjamin Britten *Violin Concerto, Op.15* and Johannes Brahms *Symphony No. 4 Op. 98*. The edition of the score and parts for the Brahms was Breitkopf und Härtel, Critical Edition, edited by Robert Pascal. Half of the rehearsal time was dedicated to the Brahms and the remainder to the Britten and Abbott works. The video footage of Rehearsal 3 and 4 of the Brahms symphony will be the focus of the analysis presented in this and the following chapter I chose to analyse only Brahms Rehearsal 3 and 4 as this early period would cover many of the technical aspects that would usually be focused on during a rehearsal period with this level orchestra. To analyse all rehearsals would necessitate a much larger exegesis, beyond the scope of this paper.

The rehearsal sequence

The first rehearsal call on 25 September was a tutorial and sectional rehearsal. To ensure students were given an expert introduction to the technical aspects of their respective parts, principal string musicians from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra were engaged to lead separate tutorials for first violins, second violins, viola, cello and double bass. While these tutorials took place I conducted a full wind, brass and percussion sectional rehearsal.

The following day was the first opportunity to rehearse full orchestra (Rehearsal 2). Being a single two-and-a-half hour call my intention was to play through the entire program in reverse program order thereby beginning with the Brahms, which was assigned one hour. After experimenting with numerous rehearsal plans over the years, my rationale now is the same for almost every program when I commence rehearsals. Having been involved in thousands of concerts throughout my career as either an orchestral member or conductor, my experiences have convinced me that it is preferable that the orchestra,

particularly a student orchestra, plays the piece in its entirety at least once and preferably twice during the rehearsal period. I prefer that the work not be fully played through at the general rehearsal particularly on the day of the concert as it may be played like a performance with far too much energy expelled. This is especially dangerous if you are performing an extended work such as Mahler *Symphony No. 5* for example, where despite all best intentions to not 'perform' the work at the general rehearsal, it can be a distant memory when the full orchestra plays the big A Major chord after the introductory trumpet solo. In other words, conserving energy at the general rehearsal is good policy for ensuring the orchestra is fresh for the performance. After all, the symphony is gruelling enough and to play it twice in a single day can be exhausting.

By playing through the work at the first full rehearsal without stopping, a sense of accomplishment can be achieved when the young musicians complete a full run of the work without pause. On the assumption that many students will not have been working on their parts in advance – a sad fact of life – it is excellent sight-reading practice and an efficient use of time when you only have an hour to rehearse the work that day. At the beginning of the rehearsal process confidence has been built just by being able to get to the end. For as long as I can remember I have held the view that when one is sight-reading, one's intention should be to get to the end of the piece without stopping, no matter what. If a student aspires to become a professional musician, then highly competent sight-reading ought to be a mandatory facet of one's musical skills.

Upon completing the play-through of the work it was now forty-five minutes into the rehearsal. I had fifteen minutes remaining on the Brahms before we would have the scheduled break. At this point what would make the best use of the remaining time? There would not be enough time to begin detailed work on the symphony. Therefore, in my view it was time efficient to again play the most complex part of the piece for the whole orchestra – bearing in mind that not all of the musicians play in every movement, such as the contrabassoon and the trombones. The best use of everybody's time – with the exception of the Third Movement triangle player – would be to play the Fourth Movement *Passacaglia*

once again – the music that is freshest in everyone’s memory from the full play through that we had just completed.

The second play-through of that movement was substantially improved from the first reading. Confidence was sustained if not increased and the students could then go to the orchestra break feeling that it might just be possible to deliver a convincing account of Brahms *Symphony No.4* – a significant achievement for a pre-professional orchestra playing this major work for the first time.

It is not always possible or even sensible to play every work from beginning to the end without stopping at the first rehearsal. Examples of this would be the more complicated works particularly of the 20th Century and contemporary music, where such an approach would be counterproductive. If the orchestra were playing, for example, Gyorgy Ligeti *Violin Concerto*, the daunting complexities of such a work would limit how far one could progress because so much detail would need to be explained to the orchestra such as beating patterns and the highly complex metric modulations throughout. The difficulties of the virtuosic passagework would also be an impediment to playing through the entire work as well. However with respect to rehearsing Austro-Germanic works from the Late – Romantic period it is possible, and I believe good practice, to treat mature young musicians as young professionals ‘in training.’

Similarly my experience has taught me that it is sensible to employ my performance tempi from the outset of the rehearsal period with pre-professional orchestras. The exceptions here would be for extremely fast sections, where taking a few ‘clicks’ off the ideal tempo is sensible, so that it is at least playable with some accuracy by most of the musicians. I do not advocate playing these fast sections at half tempo at the orchestral read-through, for example, because the abilities of the musicians that I work with are usually mature enough to not warrant a speed that would be necessary for a very young ensemble. Similarly when the music is extremely slow, I find it helps to move it a little to keep it flowing so as to avoid it dragging at the early stages of rehearsals. The detailed work began at the next rehearsals that followed. These calls were videotaped

and the content provided the data that will now be analysed in the following section.

Challenges of rehearsing pre-professionals in Brahms *Symphony No. 4* – Rehearsal 3 and 4 – Overview

Analysing a video is also a useful way to observe the effect of one's conducting on the orchestra. However, as Panula himself reminds, watching the video is a skill in itself and requires practice. Training to observe oneself critically while conducting – a skill that is not self-evident, even for professional conductors and one that develops with experience – at its best leads to self-evaluation and awareness. (Konttinen, 2008, p. 124).

The video material revealed a considerable amount of information regarding the major challenges that were evident at that stage of the rehearsal process. The following observations cover some of the issues that were encountered with respect to sound, intonation, rhythm, expression, phrasing, balance and specific issues relevant to each section of the orchestra. While I was aware of most of these issues during the rehearsal process, the video material was a useful reminder when documenting the challenges that were encountered and the solutions I then implemented.

The orchestra was comprised of seventy-four musicians who displayed an abundance of enthusiasm and energy as is often the case with student orchestras. When I asked for a show of hands at the first rehearsal of who had played the work previously, it was clear a large majority were playing this piece for the first time. For many it was their first experience playing any Brahms symphony. Given this, it was understandable that the orchestral sound was immature. While the louder sections were played with energy and considerable determination the overall intent was quite aggressive. There was a distinct lack of warmth in all dynamics. The *piano* sections, which were virtually non-existent, were over-played as most musicians were competing to be heard. There were few musicians playing *piano* and even fewer playing *pianissimo* where it is scored. Players were focussing on their own part, trying to play all the notes but

they clearly lacked the experience of listening simultaneously to other sections of the orchestra. As most of the musicians had little experience with the piece, understanding how each part related to the overall tapestry of the composition proved to be a significant challenge. The melodic and harmonic strands were blurred and the texture sounded muddy and harsh. There were occasional moments where they started to play beautifully but soon we arrived at another section where it started to sound forced and unrefined once again.

Many of the issues with the overall sound were due to approximate intonation of many of the musicians. It should go without saying that when all musicians are playing perfectly in tune and together an orchestral sound is at its best– and this is what high level musicians for the most part are able to do – but it only takes a few to play with approximate pitch for it to affect the orchestra tone in a negative way. This is usually another substantial challenge for pre-professional orchestras. There is, additionally, the refined concept of ‘relative intonation’ where a note’s pitch must be altered slightly, depending on its harmonic and chordal context in order for the maximum resonance to be achieved. These issues were to be addressed throughout the rehearsals as they arose.

This was not a group of musicians who played together regularly. Most of the personnel were sitting next to someone for the first time, as is often the case with university orchestras. Many of them played out so that they could hear themselves and this created a chain reaction of aggressively loud playing throughout most sections of the orchestra that affected its ability to achieve a warm, rich and beautiful sound that also had clarity. Articulation was variable throughout the various sections of the orchestra so the lines were once again blurred. There was undisciplined rhythm right throughout the ensemble that required me to conduct with far more metronomic rhythmic precision than my preferred method of employing flowing gestures to shape phrases. As is often the case with orchestras, I had to counter the tendency for the tempo to gain pace as the volume increased and, correspondingly, when the tempo slowed down as the volume decreased.

Because of the difficulties of the work many musicians were just playing the notes as best as they could. The areas of expression and phrasing would take some time to develop. We were still in the early stages of rehearsals so technical aspects were still the main focus.

My tempi were deliberately chosen to train the musicians to be flexible. While I was trying to keep the ensemble focused on rhythmic accuracy through precise clear beats, I was also trying to inject at times a degree of gentle push and pull with the phrasing that Brahms himself favoured. In a letter to violinist Joseph Joachim, Brahms said, 'I often cannot do enough pushing forward and holding back, so that passionate and calm expression is produced more or less as I want it.' (Dyment, 2016, p. 16)

Balance problems typical of a student orchestra were apparent. Strings played nearly everything *forte*; the sound of the wind section, except for the Principal Oboe, was often 'drowned out' by the rest of the orchestra; the horns were unbalanced as a section; timpani was thunderous and rarely blended with anything.

I was aware at the time of many issues I needed to address and these were confirmed by the video recording. For example in the string section some of these included: an obvious lack of unanimity as to which part of the bow to play in; varying vibrato styles; varying degrees of bow pressure; again very little in the way of *pianissimo*; in some cases, even by this third rehearsal, little evidence of advance preparation of their individual parts; a harsh sound that was quite out of tune; a distinct absence of non-verbal communication between the front desks; and a general lack of awareness of the other sections of the orchestra.

At my request the trumpet section played German conical bore rotary valve instruments. These are significantly different instruments from the brighter sounding American trumpets that they normally play. As a consequence sound, intonation and articulation would take time to settle, as they had little to no experience playing these types of instruments. The horns were challenged in producing the type of refined, warm sound necessary to play Brahms beautifully.

Their individual attack was generally far too pronounced and intonation was problematic. However, the trombones in the Fourth Movement played quite well. The chorale in the Fourth Movement was well balanced and the sound homogenous.

There were clear strengths and weaknesses in the wind section. A number of individuals produced a less than mature sound and the degree of projection was variable. Others did very well such as the Principal Oboe. Through much of the First Movement thematic interplay between the winds and other sections was disjointed. I elected to include an extra flute, oboe and clarinet to the section, as is common practice in European orchestras. It was helpful to reinforce the wind section with extras because we had a large body of fifty string musicians and it is typical for a nine-player wind section to be 'drowned out' in the *fortissimo* sections. Intonation was problematic and the tone colour was not homogenous; the balance within the section was uneven. The timpani player may not have played Brahms timpani parts before. What was apparent was a lack of tonal refinement and regular lateness of entry. Most entries were substantially late to begin with but the player improved quickly.

As evidenced by the above observations, I was aware that there were many challenges to address in the limited rehearsal time. Observations regarding my conducting from the video revealed to me some matters that, ideally, I would have judged differently. For example, in order to avoid the opening from dragging, I pushed the tempo a little too much. As a result, the First and Second Violins released the value of all minims in the opening statement too soon, which caused the crotchet rests to be closer to minim rests. In retrospect, the tempo seemed to be too urgent at times, thus affecting the natural flow of the music to be expressed with an appropriate degree of elegance. As the musicians played louder, they began to rush and I appeared to allow myself to be pulled along with them. There were other examples where I was not clear enough in my gestures for this level of orchestra. I was relying on them to instinctively listen to each other and had to regularly remind them to do so. Sometimes my beat was too large in *piano* and then at times it was too small in *forte*, at this stage of the

rehearsal process. I also appear to be rehearsing with my eye on the clock and moving through sections far too quickly. However, despite these matters, overall the rehearsal nonetheless achieved many of the things I had hoped it would.

Strategies apparent from my rehearsal technique

The major challenge for me was how to effectively transmit a rich understanding of the work to the students. In preparation I had studied not only the score but also various esteemed recordings as well as literature on Brahms and the performance practices of his day. The eight recordings I studied are listed in the Discography on page 51. Unfortunately, discussing my responses to each of them lies beyond the scope of this paper but they all contributed useful interpretative ideas that I considered. While it is valuable to study why and how extraordinarily beautiful I believe Brahms *Symphony No. 4* can sound (with the Vienna Philharmonic under Carlos Kleiber for example); or for what musical reasons the critics responded so glowingly about Fritz Steinbach – a conductor most admired by Brahms himself (Dyment, 2016) – it is another matter to convey such information about the great conductors and orchestras in rehearsals where many students were playing this symphony for the first time. Unless I dedicated a few hours of rehearsal time to a lecture with recording examples of the work, I would still only be able to share a small fraction of my new knowledge of Brahms and the legacy of recordings of this work to the musicians. Realistically, how much can actually be achieved in one week with student musicians of varying ability who are, for the most part, novices with this repertoire? I concluded that the best course of action, as is usually the case, would be to share my knowledge primarily through conductorial gestures plus the occasional anecdote of historical information. It was therefore critical that whatever I did say was pertinent and useful, as should always be the case in the rehearsal studio. Therefore, the major challenge was, what do I prioritise? The following is an overview of my strategy in addressing some of the challenges presented to me in these rehearsals.

I didn't come into rehearsals with a rigid preconceived plan because I believe it is always important to respond directly to what the players are doing. Nonetheless

I had a clear idea of the range of issues that would need to be addressed. At this stage of the rehearsal process, the issues identified, as set out above, were not dissimilar to the very many student orchestras I have conducted. Varying levels of instrumental skill and limited experience of playing in a large ensemble were some of the factors that contributed to the challenges I encountered.

Orchestral Sound and Line

Technical refinement and maturity of orchestral sound comes with experience but I found that it made a positive difference when I regularly reminded the winds about the concepts of 'warm air/warm sound'; 'projection without force'; and 'blowing from the solar plexus'. To the string section, I suggested for the louder sections that they use more bow with less pressure. I also reminded the strings to avoid their habit of 'down bow' diminuendo and 'up-bow' crescendo and to always keep breathing (as I often had the feeling that many of the strings appeared to be holding their breath during difficult passages). For the softer sections I suggested playing with less bow and at times, more 'air in the bow'. I reminded the strings to be vigilant as to 'what part of the bow to play in', and to always take this lead from the principal players. I encouraged the front desk players to communicate with each other far more often. My most regular comment to the whole orchestra was to encourage everyone to listen more closely to one another and to strive for more warmth and richness of sound. Sound, sound, sound! I am well aware of Snell's advice that 'Good listening is always the first step in the process that creates technique and capability'. (Snell, 2006. p. 33)

An absence of careful listening to one another was apparent and as a result the interaction of the various thematic fragments and how they influenced each other was often confusing. For example, the interplay between winds and strings proved to be problematic. I rehearsed only those string and wind players that pass the single bar melodic fragments back and forth without those who play sustained semibreves, so they could understand the larger line that Brahms composed.

Example 1. Brahms *Symphony No. 4*, First Movement, mm 227-246. Breitkopf und Härtel, (1926).

The image displays three systems of a musical score for Brahms's *Symphony No. 4*, First Movement, measures 227-246. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in A (Klar. (A)), Bassoon (Fag.), Horn in E (Hr. (E)), Horn in C (Hr. (C)), Violin I (1. Viol.), Violin II (2. Viol.), Trombone (Br.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Double Bass (K.-B.).

The first system (measures 227-234) is marked with a box containing the letter 'K'. It begins with a *p dolce* dynamic. The strings are marked *arco*. The second system (measures 235-242) is also marked with a box containing the letter 'K'. It features a *dim.* dynamic and includes *pp* markings. The third system (measures 243-246) is marked with a box containing the letter 'L'. It features a *p dolce* dynamic and includes *ppp* markings.

We rehearsed this passage for approximately five minutes in the first half of Rehearsal 4. One of the problems was that the last note of each fragment would

end too abruptly thereby interrupting the flow of the larger phrase. After several minutes the musicians understanding of the phrasing improved markedly and the larger line became much more connected both here and in other comparable places.

Intonation

As I was working with musicians who had varying abilities to play in tune, it was my duty to identify and repair the most serious intonation problems as they arose. This needed to be balanced within the limited rehearsal time available to us. It was critical when tuning chords that the musicians, as a starting point, knew exactly what the chord was. The musicians needed to be reminded when they were playing, for example, the *dominant* or the *mediant* of a chord and whether it was in root position or inversion. When they became aware of their position in a given chord there was usually a marked improvement.

When repairing intonation problems in the string section I would rehearse a section significantly slower without vibrato until improvement occurred. One such place is in the Coda at mm 401-406 of the First Movement where the First Violins have to navigate a nasty minor 10th leap to a high C and back down again. We revisited this section many times over the course of the rehearsals. The advice that I provided emphasised the importance of hearing the pitch of the note before playing it, otherwise one is just taking a stab in the dark, so to speak.

Example 3: Brahms *Symphony No. 4*, First Movement, 127-132. Breitkopf und Härtel, (1926)

Tuning wind chords regularly (while not holding up the rehearsal for an excessive amount of time) and requesting the string sections to rehearse sections without vibrato so they could focus on exact pitch proved to be helpful in improving intonation and purifying the sound. Another useful reason for rehearsing without vibrato was so much of the expression was achieved with the bow rather than simply vibrating for expressive purposes. According to First Principal Viola of the Berlin Philharmonic Máté Szúcs during a videotaped masterclass at Carnegie Hall: 'If you cannot play beautifully without vibrato, you will not be able to play beautifully at all. The bow must provide variation.' (2016, p. 1)

To encourage a warm, rich sound that was in tune, I found that there was a marked difference when I encouraged the musicians to sing their respective parts. As Richard Wagner said, 'The human voice is really the foundation of all music; and whatever the development of the musical art, however bold the composer's combinations, however brilliant the virtuoso's execution, in the end they must always return to the standard set by vocal music.' (Wagner, cited in Koopman, 1994, p. 1). Some years ago with the Australian Youth Orchestra I was conducting Edward Elgar *'Enigma' Variations Op. 36*. Every day I had the entire

orchestra sing their parts in *Variation IX Nimrod*. After a week of doing this every day there was a significant improvement with the sound and pitch of the orchestra. Similarly when we rehearsed the second movement of the Brahms symphony in one of the later rehearsals I had everyone sing their respective parts. It made a substantial difference to the pitch and sound quality of the orchestra. Singing and instrumental playing are highly compatible musical companions. According to academic and author Robert Rawlins:

Singing is closely linked to hearing and hearing is the essential skill of musical performance...A performer conceives of a musical passage, complete with dynamics, articulation, pitch, tone and all relevant musical parameters, and then endeavours to recreate this aural image with the aid of an instrument...Singing requires an instrumentalist to relinquish the direct association between note and fingering. It forces the student to hear the pitch of the upcoming note without the help of an instrument. (1999, p. 1)

Rhythmic Precision

There was one example of substantial rhythmic complexity from the First Movement that proved to be another major challenge.

Example 2: Brahms *Symphony No. 4*, First Movement, 127-132. Breitkopf und Härtel, (1926)

Composer/conductor Gunther Schuller describes this section as ‘one of the most remarkable rhythmic passages ever written in the entire symphonic literature. It is also another passage which, as far as I know, is never played correctly.... a multi-layered structure of such complexity that I dare say there is nothing like it even in *The Rite of Spring*; one has to turn to Ives’s *Fourth Symphony* to find a parallel.’ (1998, p. 387-388) I attempted to solve this problem by breaking down the rhythmic cells and isolating the respective duplet and triplet figures to show the musicians exactly what happens. It was not until later on as we approached the concert when their performance of this section became more convincing. As conductors, we need to realise that not all issues will be solved immediately but may require some time to be absorbed.

I favoured the occasional use of “my metronome” to remind students about rhythmic precision. (My metronome is a very loud ‘tocking’ or ‘slap-tongue’ sound that I can make with my tongue striking the roof of my mouth. It is a sound that resembles a percussion wood-block and is loud enough so that everyone can still hear it while they are playing. How I am able to do this I have no idea but it generally surprises musicians when I am working with them for the first time.) The students immediately responded to this by playing much better together than they previously were. Although I didn’t want the orchestra to play the Brahms with mechanical rhythm throughout, it was a tool of my

training technique to make the musicians mindful of internal pulse necessary for rhythmic precision.

Unity of Ensemble

I also regularly requested that they play various sections of the work uncondacted so the onus of internal pulse was now fully on the musicians. Making an orchestra play uncondacted proved to be very helpful in developing the musician's mindset about playing in a symphony orchestra as though it was a large chamber orchestra. It also encouraged closer listening and visual communication between the principals and those in their sections. 'As soon as effective listening takes place, the ear identifies what needs to be done and guides the techniques search for a solution. (Snell, 2006, p. 16)

However, as the notes themselves became more familiar to the musicians, my focus shifted to encouraging the musicians to become more aware of creating micro and larger phrases that would help to shape the overall architecture of the work. This occurred about half way through Rehearsal 4.

At this stage of the rehearsal process, we played through larger sections of the symphony again. I wanted the orchestra to play these extended sections with minimal gesture on my part to encourage a higher degree of listening to each other. It was at this point that the orchestra began to grasp this chamber music concept of playing in a large orchestra that I alluded to earlier in this chapter. It was a pivotal moment.

One of the main revelations throughout this study – indeed a reminder for me – is how important it is to adopt a chamber music approach in an orchestral context. Whenever I encouraged a chamber music mindset and then had the orchestra play uncondacted, there was an immediate change in the full ensemble's intent. When musicians are not following a conductor they must more fully communicate with each other both visually and aurally. Careful listening to one another is crucial to developing a unified ensemble. As Snell reminds us, 'The underlying aim of practice is to create certainty through the development of high-quality listening' (2006, p. 33).

Conclusion

The video material reported on above was the halfway point of the rehearsal period. I have attempted to cover some of the challenges that I encountered and the strategies that I implemented to address the various issues. These challenges included tone quality, dynamics, intonation, ensemble awareness, rhythmic discipline, balance, issues of each section of the orchestra, uneven skill levels across the ensemble and passages of particular difficulty. My strategy for dealing with many of the problems focused on addressing a myriad of technical issues that had to take priority when working with the level of musicians at this level.

The remainder of the rehearsal period towards the concert fine-tuned many of the issues that arose during the early rehearsal period, particularly with regard to warmth of sound, phrasing, refinement and ensemble awareness. I regularly reminded the musicians to play Brahms with 'loving attention to detail' (Berrsche, cited in Dymont, 2016, p. 29) in striving for as much refinement as possible.

As conductor it was imperative that the information I transmitted utilised the clearest, most meaningful gestures that conveyed as much intuitive and explicit musical and technical understanding as possible. What was verbally transmitted needed to be brief, relevant and incisive. As the main point of the exercise was to introduce this music to pre-professionals, I will expand on this in the exegesis Conclusion that follows this chapter.

I have found it a highly useful exercise to articulate and describe a snapshot of my rehearsal process within the pre-professional orchestral context. As a conductor and educator it has enabled me to identify my assumed or, indeed, 'tacit' knowledge and the ways in which I implement this understanding on both a conscious and subconscious level. Through this research into my own rehearsal processes, I have developed an increased awareness, which will allow me to continue to evolve in a way that I hope is beneficial to the education of pre-professional musicians.

Conclusion

The aim of my artistic research has been to critically reflect on my conducting practice through the preparation of the works that were selected to introduce to pre-professional orchestral musicians. I sought to answer the primary research question as to what techniques were employed through the rehearsal process to strive towards achieving technically sound and stylistically informed performances. Though, within the scope of this paper, the discussion was necessarily brief and focussed on the early rehearsals, the guiding principles of my rehearsal methods have been identified and illustrated.

The responsibilities of the conductor in the pre-professional setting are considerable. I have often told musicians in the final rehearsal before a performance, that we as musicians are enormously privileged to have the opportunity to participate in a setting that brings a great work of art to life through sound. I believe that the conductor and orchestral musicians must exhibit the highest artistic integrity by doing all that we can to perform a musical work as flawlessly and as beautifully as possible. I feel very fortunate as a musician and teacher to be able share these profound works with young musicians many of whom are on a pathway to becoming professional musicians themselves.

I have documented my pathway as an orchestral musician towards becoming a conductor and looked closely at the work I do in the context of training orchestral musicians. The process of autoethnography I utilised to articulate my vocational journey has been a useful reminder about my own career path in countless ways. The exposure to Late-Romantic repertoire I received as a professional orchestral musician was invaluable to me in gaining first hand practical experience of the repertoire. It was here that I first learnt about rehearsal technique from the hundreds of conductors I played under, together with the thousands of hours I spent in the rehearsal studio.

In Chapter 2 the study of my instructional process was perhaps the most beneficial exercise throughout my research. Analysing video footage of one's self can be a very confronting exercise. I proactively sought to assess the work I did as orchestral trainer by firstly, identifying some of the challenges in the early rehearsals of the Brahms Symphony, and then attempting to articulate various solutions that I instinctively provided. The areas discussed pertaining to the challenges of conducting pre-professionals in the early rehearsals highlighted specific areas, such as regularly reminding the musicians to strive for warmth and beauty of sound; and to approach playing in a large ensemble as if one were playing in a large chamber orchestra. The importance of musicians 'listening to one another' is something that cannot be reminded often enough to young musicians – it is one of the most important skills when playing in any ensemble.

Each of the four performances that I conducted By Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler and Johannes Brahms were the culmination of years of study and the application of the knowledge I have acquired throughout my career. For the young musician who is introduced to one of the great symphonies for the first time, my work as conductor is successful if I can influence a life-long fascination and love of that musical work of art. Thereafter each time he or she revisits the piece, the knowledge taken from that first encounter, deep in the depths of their memory bank, may in some way assist with their future performances of that particular work, and perhaps influence other works they may play in the future. If I can in some way inspire a young musician to strive for artistic excellence when playing one of the great works of art, what more could I ask for?

Rehearsals, university lectures, academic conferences and scholarly papers contain a considerable amount of technical detail. In pursuing this practice-based research paper, the question I sought to answer gave rise to even more questions to contemplate. While I attempted to answer the primary research question I found that my attention focused on technical details, as is the expectation for writing an exegesis. And now at the end of this paper it is probably worthwhile that I remind myself about the bigger picture – Art. I will draw upon conductor Leonard Bernstein's words about music as art. Through his *Young People's*

Concerts during the 1950s and 1960s with the New York Philharmonic, in the episode, What Does Music Mean?, Bernstein had this to say:

There's no limit to the different kind of feelings music can make you have. Some of those feelings are so special they can't even be described in words. Sometimes we can name the things we feel, like joy or sadness or love or hate or peacefulness. But there are other feelings so deep and special that we have no words for them, and that's where music is especially marvelous. It names the feelings for us only in notes instead of words. (1970, p. viii)

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Creative Output Portfolio – Recordings

1. Strauss, R. *Ein Heldenleben Op. 40*. The Musician Project, Fabian Russell, conductor. Verbrugghen Hall, Sydney Conservatorium of Music. 16 June 2016. 52 mins <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQ9I0Rr1oHU>
2. Mahler, G. *Symphony No. 4*. University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Fabian Russell, conductor, Alexandra Ioan, soprano. Elizabeth Murdoch Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre. 28 August 2016. 60 mins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLh0Etv-XqM&feature=youtu.be>
3. Brahms, J. *Symphony No. 4 Op. 98*. University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Fabian Russell, conductor. Elizabeth Murdoch Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre. 1 October 2016. 42 mins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OM4ABnKX7W0&feature=youtu.be>
4. Mahler, G. *Symphony No. 6*. The Orchestra Project, Fabian Russell, conductor. Australian National Academy of Music, South Melbourne Town Hall. 16 April 2017. 84 mins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5xELNvr1l4&feature=youtu.be>

Appendix – Recordings of Rehearsals

1. Brahms, J. (2016) *Symphony No. 4 Op. 98*. Rehearsing the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra – Day 3. [Video Recording A] Fabian Russell, conductor, 27 September 2016.

<https://youtu.be/S3T1WIGKWHg>

2. Brahms, J. (2016) *Symphony No. 4 Op. 98*. Rehearsing the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra – Day 3. [Video Recording B] Fabian Russell, conductor, 27 September 2016.

<https://youtu.be/ZAFxZQcxcqo>

3. Brahms, J. (2016) *Symphony No. 4 Op. 98*. Rehearsing the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra – Day 4. [Video Recording] Fabian Russell, conductor, 28 September 2016.

<https://youtu.be/Xjn1O9F9Ph4>