



**A Guide to
Musical Direction
in the
Amateur Theatre**

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Introduction

The role of a Musical Director (MD) in the amateur theatre is interesting, varied and rewarding. The laws of supply and demand come into play as with any other type of job. In times when there are few jobs and more MDs, then the experienced people are more likely to be approached to fill the role. At other times when there are MD posts but not enough experienced MDs around to take them up, people with less experience or even no previous experience of the job may be asked by the society committee to take on the job.

The ability to carry out the role effectively will depend on a number of factors. These include the background of the person concerned, the experience they already have in amateur theatre, possibly in a different role but where they have been able to observe the MD, and the willingness of the cast to accept and work with the person appointed.

This guidance note is aimed at anyone thinking of becoming an MD or those who may be new to the role. There are different ways of achieving the final outcome of a successful show and it is very much down to the individual MD to decide on how to progress, based on the ability and experience of the cast in the society with whom they are working.

I hope to identify the main issues an MD should be considering and outline different ways of dealing with the situations you may well be faced with as an MD. You should refer to specialised text books covering the technical aspects of topics such as singing, conducting and musical arrangement to further your knowledge.

Where I have outlined different approaches to a particular situation, it will be up to the reader to decide which approach to take in any given situation, or indeed having been informed of what to expect, develop their own approach.

CHAPTER 1

Who makes a good MD?

I approached the role of MD from a background of formal piano lessons and working as a piano accompanist for a number of years. Many of the MDs I have come across have been able to play the piano and have themselves acted in the role of accompanist for a society before moving up to the role of MD. This has the advantage of being able to observe the role of MD at close quarters but can result in a limited perspective of the role unless you get the experience of working with a number of different MDs. In that case you can see what works well and pick the best features from each situation.

The ability to play the piano, have an understanding of musical theory, and at least a basic knowledge of harmony, will stand you in good stead for dealing with the requirements of a musical score and also for preparing vocal and possibly instrumental arrangements for cabarets and pantomimes. It will also be helpful in dealing with other musicians when it comes to rehearsing the band or orchestra for the main shows.

I have found it quite common in smaller societies for the MD to be expected to also cover the roles of chorus master and accompanist. This may be due to financial constraints or an inability to find people to take on the roles. An ability to play the piano is obviously a prerequisite to gaining the MD role in these situations.

Another type of MD I have come across is someone who is a singer and who may well have performed for the society or other society in a principal role in shows. Provided they can read music and have the benefit of a separate accompanist this should not create a problem. As a singer they will have worked with MDs and observed how they operate which will give them a basis for carrying out the role. They can also call upon their own experience of singing in shows to coach cast members in vocal technique.

Finally, there is also the MD who is an instrumentalist but not a pianist. Sometimes people trained on instruments other than the piano have piano as their second instrument. If that is the case, and

subject to them being proficient, they should also be able to cover the role of accompanist if required. Otherwise, they are in the same position as a singer in that they will require a separate accompanist.

There are pros and cons of each type of background and it would be unfair to say which background creates the best MD, as it is very much down to the abilities of the individual concerned. I have personally come across far more MDs who are pianists than those with a singing or other instrumental background.

The main thing to understand is that people will have strengths in different aspects of the role, but should endeavour to learn about and work on the areas where they may not be as strong. Regardless of background, an MD does need to be able to read music in order to do the job effectively.

CHAPTER 2

Choosing a Show

One of the tasks of a society committee is to decide which show the society should perform. As an MD you may be called upon to give a view on the shortlist from a musical perspective. Your ability to inform this process will depend very much on how well you know the cast. If you have previously been involved with the society in some capacity, even if not as the MD, you should know the general strengths and weaknesses of the players. If you are new to the society, there are some key questions outlined below which you should be posing to the committee or show selection group before any decision is made.

The final decision on a show will be based on a number of criteria, such as how well it might sell, what it might cost to put on and whether it has recently been performed elsewhere in the area or is expected to be performed by another society at a similar time. It is not just a case of whether the society can cope with the show based on the players available to them, however, and for the basis of this chapter, I will concentrate on the issues to consider from a purely musical standpoint.

The MD should look at the content of the show from the perspective of chorus work, principal numbers and also be aware of the scope of the dance sections.

In terms of the chorus work you can establish firstly how many times the chorus are used and discuss if necessary with the producer/director whether they should and could be included in any other numbers in support of the principals if chorus work is limited. As an example, "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" has very little for the chorus and mainly involves them dressing the stage. As the MD you should draw attention to this point if it has not been picked up.

The other extreme is shows such as "Kismet", where there is much more chorus work including part-singing. You need to discuss in this situation whether the society has a strong chorus with singers in each part, mainly soprano alto, tenor and bass, who are able to hold musical lines. If not, you need to consider whether you are

able to simplify the arrangement to suit the available cast. You may well have to advise against selecting a particular show if you do not think the cast is strong enough to cope with the singing required.

In terms of the principal parts, you need to look at how many men, women or children principals are required and whether they are sopranos, tenors etc, but also look at the note range of the songs. Some shows have, for example, tenor roles which are well within the reach of an average amateur tenor, whereas others have high notes which some amateurs will struggle to reach. This can be the case with some of the more modern show releases.

If you know the society cast and their ranges you can see straight away if there are likely to be any problems. If you are not familiar with the cast, as you may be new to the society, you will need to take advice from people within the society with regard to voice ranges. If there is likely to be a problem filling roles from within the society, an option might be to advise filling parts through open auditions, or approaching someone who has played the role before and who you know can handle the voice range.

Below are the normal ranges of the four main voice types of Soprano, Contralto (often referred to as Alto), Tenor and Bass for reference:



These are not exact ranges as some singers will be able to reach beyond the ranges indicated and others may not manage the full range, however, it does show the general ranges of the different voices.

The soprano is the highest range of female voice. Sopranos have a bright tone to their voices and can sustain notes in the upper register.

The lowest female voice is the contralto or alto for short. The voice is darker and thicker than a soprano voice and sounds warmer.

The highest of the male voices is the tenor. Some tenors are referred to as "lyric" tenors. These are most comfortable with flowing melodies. There are also "dramatic" tenors, who have a heavier tone to their voice.

The bass voice is the lowest male voice and has a deep rich quality. It is important in harmony singing to have a strong bass line to give a good foundation to the sound.

Two types of voice not shown above are the mezzo soprano and baritone. A mezzo soprano voice range sits between the soprano and alto ranges and the tone of the voice is deeper and richer than the soprano. A baritone has a voice range between a tenor and a bass. The baritone voice is the most common male voice type.

As an MD you should also look at the amount and content of the instrumental dance sequences in the show and discuss with the director/choreographer whether these are to be included in full or cuts required. The MD role at this stage is really drawing attention to any difficulties in the music regarding unusual or numerous time changes, or the prevalence of difficult rhythms. It is later on when a decision has been taken on a show that the MD will need to work closely with the director and/or choreographer on how the music is interpreted and where any proposed cuts should be made so as not to spoil the flow of the music.

CHAPTER 3

Rehearsal Planning

The role of the MD starts well before the first rehearsal. The cast will be expecting the MD to turn up at rehearsals confident about what they want to achieve musically with a plan of action to achieve it. They do not want or expect someone who is unsure of themselves.

The MD should meet with the Director and Choreographer prior to rehearsals starting to discuss their ideas. The Choreographer or Director may also request recordings of the dance sequences and songs to allow them to plan the choreography. If you are a pianist you can make recordings yourself. If not, you will need to arrange with the accompanist to make the recordings to your agreed tempos.

It will be important to study both the principal and chorus numbers and decide how long you expect to require in rehearsals with the cast and then discuss with the Director and Choreographer a rehearsal schedule. Check how much part singing is involved in the chorus numbers and decide if you have a cast who can confidently sing harmony lines or if you need to simplify the numbers. If you decide to tackle the harmony as written, you need to build in sufficient time at rehearsals to achieve this. Have a plan B to fall back on in terms of a simpler arrangement if the cast fail to master the harmonies after a reasonable time, despite your efforts.

If you are new to the society it is important to discuss the capabilities of the cast with say the Director or one of the committee members before you plan your rehearsals.

As well as allowing the time you think you will need to cover initial rehearsals on the musical numbers, you also need to build in time to recap what you have done. Cast members will forget things about early songs once you have moved on to new numbers so you need to recap.

At this point I will assume that you have considered how much time you think you need for chorus rehearsals and principal rehearsals,

including time for recaps. You should now discuss your schedule with the Director and Choreographer who should also have considered the time they need for their respective roles i.e. setting movement to chorus numbers, staging principal script and songs, and setting dance sequences.

Many societies rehearse two evenings a week for around three to four months. Closer to show week, additional rehearsals are usually included if required. Given this rehearsal period for the show, you may find that there is not enough rehearsal time to go around. If that is the case, the first thing to consider is whether you can double up at rehearsals so that while you may be rehearsing the chorus, the Director could be working with principals on script. It is also worth considering making a CD of the dance sequences so that the Choreographer can work with the people required for the dances while other script or singing rehearsals are taking place at the same time. This will depend on whether there are separate rooms available at the rehearsal venue to allow this or whether singing rehearsals take place at a different venue to say the dancing rehearsals. This may be possible at the early stages but as the rehearsal period progresses, it is preferable for the society to be at the same venue. It is after all a hobby and people like to meet up at rehearsals to socialise.

If you have reviewed parallel working and still cannot find enough time in rehearsals to cover everything, you need to decide whether to introduce extra rehearsals. You could also consider simplifying the chorus work so that not as much part singing is involved and consequently it can be rehearsed in a shorter period and requires less frequent recaps. Equally if there are large sections of dance music, the Choreographer may wish to discuss the option of making some cuts which will reduce the time required at rehearsals.

The other thing you should bear in mind is the availability of the production team. If you or any other member of the production team cannot make a specific rehearsal, possibly due to pre arranged holidays, you should aim to schedule around this so that rehearsals can continue. If auditions have been held prior to the main rehearsals starting, you should also check the availability of the principals who have been cast and try to build this in to the

schedule. It is annoying to turn up for a principal rehearsal only to find that the principals you expected to work with cannot attend.

At the end of all these deliberations, you should be able to put together a rehearsal schedule which you can share with the cast at the start of rehearsals. As with all the best laid plans, you are unlikely to be able to stick rigidly to the schedule as there will undoubtedly be unforeseen circumstances which will conspire against you. However, it does give you a benchmark against which to measure your progress and ensure you complete rehearsals by the time show week comes around. If you start getting behind on the schedule, it is worth considering adding extra rehearsals or asking people to come earlier or stay later at some of the scheduled rehearsals to catch up. Don't leave things and hope it will work out as the options for additional rehearsals to catch up are obviously reduced the nearer you get to the show.

The aim should be to bring the cast to a peak just as the show week starts. Peaking too soon is a problem as the cast may get complacent and give a below par performance for the show itself, possibly leading to unforced errors. Peaking too late is also a problem as the cast are likely to be nervous and look under-rehearsed on stage.

Getting this balance right comes with experience. Remember to build into your rehearsal schedules enough time as the show week approaches to actually run through the different acts of the show and the full show more than once. Remember, "Poor planning leads to poor performance".

It is important for you as MD to be fully conversant with the score prior to the first rehearsal. If as the MD you are expected to double as the accompanist, you will also need to be able to play all the music with confidence, so plenty of practice before rehearsals start will be important. It is not helpful for the cast to have a hesitant pianist struggling with the notes when they are trying to learn new music.

CHAPTER 4

Auditions

Auditions are regularly held for shows to assist with casting the main parts. It is usually the responsibility of the production team, possibly supplemented by other members of the society not putting in for parts, to form the audition committee. The Director and MD will normally be responsible for selecting the dialogue and songs required for audition.

The size of the role being cast, and whether it is a singing or a non-singing part, will determine the scale of material required for the audition. For example, anyone auditioning for a major singing principal role would expect to have to sing a song or parts of a number of different songs, act out sections of the script and possibly perform some choreography if the role involves dancing. I will concentrate on the role of the MD here.

One issue to consider when selecting audition pieces is the type of role under consideration. Does the role require someone to be able to sing well or is it more a character role where the acting ability is paramount and the singing ability a more secondary consideration? An example of this would be Professor Higgins in "My Fair Lady". In situations like this you would be looking for the strongest actor for the role and not necessarily the best singer.

The other extreme is where the part involves a number of songs where the character needs to sing solo ballads and duets where the tune is important. Here you want a good singer who can master the range of the songs. As the MD you need to look at the songs involved and select an appropriate song or songs for the audition which will show if the singer can cover the musical range required. Look at the highest and lowest notes in the songs involved with the part in question and if they do not occur in the same song consider using parts of more than one song to ensure you can test the ability of those auditioning to master both the high and low notes.

You should also look at the types of songs involved and decide if you need to include a song or part of a song which may not be a problem in terms of musical range, but may require a lot of acting

and expression to put the song over. I have come across singers with good voices who can sing all the notes perfectly but are not able to express the sentiment of the song. Equally there are others who may not have the best voices but who are very good at putting a song over. A professional example of this is Judy Dench. It is worth watching her performance of "Send in the Clowns" on the DVD "Hey Mister Producer". She virtually speaks the lyrics but has the audience totally enthralled.

You also need to consider the blend of voices if duets are required. It is possible to have, for example, male and female singers with beautiful individual voices but who together do not blend. Depending on how many parts you are auditioning, you may wish to hear combinations of the leading man and leading lady together to check which pairings have the best blend.

So far you will have considered the roles in the show you are about to rehearse for and decided in discussion with the Director which roles should be auditioned. You have then considered the extent of the singing for each of these parts and decided which song(s) you require for the auditions to test vocal range, expression and possibly blend with other principals. You can now make the audition requirements available to the cast.

The lead up to the actual auditions can take different forms depending on whether you are casting from within the society or allowing people from outside the society to also audition, referred to as "Open Auditions".

One option is to run through the music at the first full cast rehearsal and explain which parts will be auditioned and the singing requirements. There is an opportunity at the rehearsal and the next few rehearsals to run through the audition pieces, either at the break in rehearsals or at the end of the main rehearsal. You can then set the auditions for say two weeks into rehearsals, which gives the cast members a number of opportunities at rehearsals to run through the music with you or the accompanist. You could also offer to put the backing onto a tape or CD if the cast member brings you a blank on which to record. They can then rehearse themselves.

Another option, depending on the length of the rehearsal period, might be to audition the principal roles prior to the main rehearsals starting so that you can hit the ground running. This might be the

option you adopt if you have decided to go for open auditions. In this case you need to be able to inform people about the audition pieces plus when and where the auditions will be held. You can set aside a session for people who are interested in auditioning for parts when they can come along to collect the audition material and ask any questions. They will also have the opportunity to run through the music with you, so you need to decide if you want to cover this or bring in the accompanist if you have one.

The society will have channels of communication to get in touch with their own members, but they will also need to put out some publicity in the local press or through local flyers if they want to go for open auditions. The society may well know of people who have played the part before who they may wish to approach to see if they want to audition. You have to remember here that you can often be dealing with delicate egos and people who have played the part before may not be interested if they are expected to audition, but would love to play the part if they were just asked to do it.

The society usually make arrangements for a venue for auditions and you would then attend along with the rest of the production team and anyone else co-opted onto the audition committee. A typical audition committee could be the Director, MD and Choreographer, together with possibly one or two experienced cast members who are not putting in for a principal role. Sometimes the auditioning committee will just be the production team.

If the society has an accompanist you should ask them along so that you can give your full attention to the auditions. You will obviously need to bring in an accompanist if you are not a pianist yourself. In certain circumstances, for example where the society does not have a separate accompanist and you are a pianist, you could be expected to play for the auditions. This does make it more difficult to judge the different singing performances, especially the way the songs are acted out, as you are also trying to concentrate on playing. The accompanist, or yourself, if you are accompanying the auditions, need to consider the abilities of the people auditioning. If the person is confident then you can follow them, but if they are a bit hesitant, it can be helpful to give them a lead from the piano in key places to help them along. It is helpful to ask everyone auditioning if they are happy to be considered for other parts. In this way, if they are not successful with the part they have

auditioned for, you may think they would be suitable for one of the other roles and can offer it to them.

Remember to make notes about the performance of each person auditioning so that you have something to refer to later when you are discussing whom to cast in which role with the rest of the auditioning committee. Making notes about the singing performance is difficult if you are also acting as the accompanist, as you will need to remember what you have seen and heard until you have finished accompanying the singer, then write all your thoughts down at once before the next person is called in to audition.

Some cast members may ask for feedback if they are unsuccessful in the auditions. Some people may have been genuinely close to getting the part and you will no doubt be able to identify which areas they need to concentrate on next time they audition. Some people apply for roles for which they are totally unsuited. Giving feedback in this case requires some tact as regardless of what else they did, they were never going to get the part. I would recommend you focus on how they can improve on their singing generally and if the opportunity arises, possibly suggest the sort of roles you think would suit their abilities.

CHAPTER 5

Singing Basics

To sing well you need to be able to express the sentiments of a song, but you also need good technique. The voice needs to be developed before you can get the best results.

Although some people are born with better voices than others, it is possible to train and develop anyone's voice to improve on what you were born with. If a singer purely concentrates on the tune and rhythm of a song without expressing the sentiment of the song it will be boring for an audience. However, a singer with good technique who can interpret the song lyrics, both in the tone of their voice and through their expressions, will provide a performance which an audience will find far more enjoyable.

The most important thing to remember when getting ready to sing is to try to be relaxed. If a singer is tense, then this will affect their singing and make it more difficult to achieve the best results. Here are some observations related to singing.

Posture and Relaxation

When you sing you are using a number of muscles. If these muscles cannot move freely because you have a poor body posture then it will adversely affect the singing voice.

There are a number of areas where a singer should avoid tension if possible. The first is when standing. Try to avoid having the feet tight together. This puts tension in the legs. If the feet are around six inches apart, the tension goes. It is also important not to lock the knees. When standing, the knees should be relaxed, not pushed back as though standing to attention.

How the arms are held is also important when singing. Slouching forward closes the chest and makes it more difficult to take in a deep breath. This applies whether standing or sitting. Equally, pushing the shoulders back as if standing to attention makes the

chest feel tight and again constrains the ability to take a deep breath. To experience this, try standing up straight and roll your shoulders before letting your arms settle naturally. You should feel relaxed with room for your chest to expand freely and be able to take in a much deeper breath than if you either slouch or stand to attention. Try breathing in with the three positions described above to feel the difference. Remember to keep your shoulders relaxed and avoid the temptation to lift your shoulders as you breathe in.

The head position is very important in terms of whether stress and tension are introduced to the neck and throat area. If the head is pointing down, the weight can be felt in the neck creating tension. When the head is raised up, the weight is taken directly through the body, releasing the tension. Try standing with your head down so that your chin is on your chest. You will feel the tension in your neck. Raise your head until you are looking straight ahead and you will feel the tension go.

You might think that people do not generally go around with their arms and shoulders tucked into their chest and their head pointing down towards their chest, but it is common in rehearsals to see cast members sitting on a chair with the score on their lap slouching with their head pointing down at the score. If the cast sit up straight with the score held up slightly they will have a much better posture, be able to look at the score and over it to see the directions from you as the MD. Pushing the legs back under the chair and crossing the feet, coupled with sitting up straight, helps to straighten the back and give a better posture.

The quality of the sound produced by a singer is affected by the throat, mouth and nasal cavities. The mouth needs to be opened more widely for singing than when speaking, so that the voice can be projected. To assess the amount the mouth needs to be open, place your fingers at the point where your ear joins your face and say a few words. You will feel very little movement. Now pretend to be biting something and feel the difference. There is now a much larger movement and the lower part of your jaw will move forward in its socket. This is the position you generally need for singing to achieve the necessary volume and projection. It will feel initially as though the mouth movement is exaggerated, however, it should become second nature with practice. The ideal position of the

mouth for singing with a rich tone is when it forms an oval shape. If the mouth is too wide towards a grinning position it can result in a restricted nasal sound. The tongue should also be lying flat and touching the back of the bottom row of teeth to avoid blocking the throat and constraining the sound.

Breathing Technique

Good breathing technique is essential for good singing. To sing well, a singer needs to be able to take in sufficient quantities of air for singing long phrases uninterrupted, grab a quick breath between phrases and control the rate at which they exhale. It does not take a large amount of air to sing, but the amount used must be supported and controlled.

When people are going about their normal everyday business, or just speaking to friends or family, they tend to adopt a very shallow breathing pattern with a small amount of air going in to the top of the lungs. This is not sufficient for singing as it would soon run out, requiring extra breaths at the wrong places in the piece of music being performed, thereby breaking up the flow. It is important to develop the technique of deeper breathing for singing.

To demonstrate this, try standing up straight with the shoulders loose and hands pressed into the side of your waist. Next take a long deep breath through the nose or mouth, and you should feel your body expand and your hands should be pushed out. Your stomach should also expand. You should not make the mistake of lifting your chest or shoulders while breathing in as although this will still allow your chest to expand, the extent to which it can expand will be constrained. You should not try to pull in your stomach while breathing in as this will prevent you from taking in a deep breath. Relax your stomach and allow it to expand.

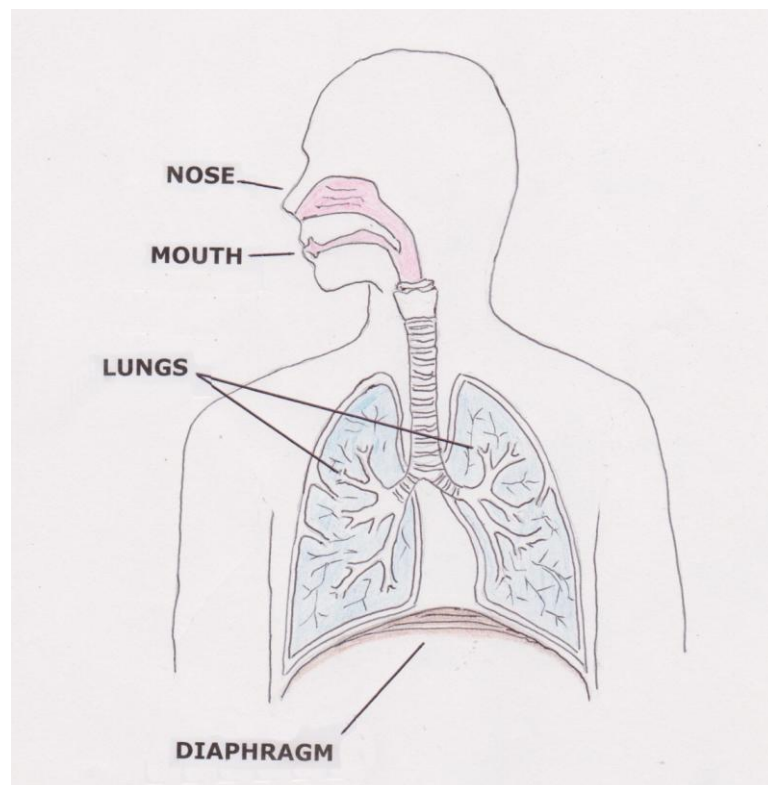
One question you may be asked by cast members is whether to breathe in through the nose or the mouth. There are advantages and disadvantages with both. Breathing in through the mouth allows more air to get down low into the lungs more quickly than breathing through the nose. It is therefore easier to start by breathing in through the mouth. Once the cast master the deep breathing, they may wish to try breathing in through the nose or

nose and mouth before deciding on what works the best for them personally.

Breathing through the mouth is harsher on the throat and can lead to the throat drying out. This can be a problem for the vocal chords, which require moisture to work effectively. Breathing through the nose humidifies the air and warms it up before it reaches the throat and vocal chords, but can lead to more shallow breathing where air is only taken into the upper chest area. This will make it more difficult to sustain long phrases.

If someone normally breathes through their nose and then as show week arrives they get a cold and blocked nose, they will need to change to breathing through their mouth. This may cause them a problem unless there is time to become accustomed to the different technique.

The diaphragm is a dome shaped muscle which lies across the bottom of the ribcage. It separates the lungs from the abdominal cavity as shown below. It moves down as you breathe in and returns to the original dome shape as you breathe out.



When a breath is taken, the diaphragm flattens creating an increase in pressure on the stomach area until the breath is released again. The cavity above the diaphragm becomes larger as you breathe in, allowing the lungs to expand. This creates a suction effect which helps you to draw air into your lungs. If you do not control your diaphragm as you breathe out it will spring back up and you will lose most of your air in the first surge leaving little left to sustain long phrases. You need to let the diaphragm rise more slowly to maintain the air pressure in your lungs. In this way you can extend the time it takes to breathe out and also control the pressure of the air as you exhale. This allows you to sustain long phrases and control the pitch of notes.

The way to control the diaphragm is to keep the chest high as air is exhaled. To practise effective breathing, try breathing in over a slow count of 1 to 5 seconds and out over the count of 1 to 10 seconds. The time to exhale should be extended with practice up to between 15 and 20 seconds. This will permit the singing of long phrases.

It is important that the chest and shoulders do not slump as the breath is released. The posture should be maintained, so that it is possible to grab a quick breath simply by relaxing the stomach muscles and breathing in. A longer breath can be taken at the natural breaks in the song.

Pay attention to how much noise is made when breathing in. If you can hear a noise, it is a sign of weak breathing. The aim should be to breathe in without making a sound. As well as perfecting a good breathing technique it is important to relax as mentioned earlier. If you can achieve both then the sound you make will be natural rather than forced.

It is important to get the right amount of air flowing up through the vocal chords. Not enough air will result in the sound being weak and shaky. Too much air and the vocal chords will tighten to resist the air and lead to a forced sound.

Vocal Warm Up

Vocal warm ups are very important at the start of rehearsals. Insufficient vocal warm ups, to the extent of charging straight into the rehearsal of songs without any formal warm up exercises is not good for the voice or the quality of the resulting singing. Going overboard with too many exercises which do not always achieve the desired effect is also counter-productive. The main thing to achieve is the greatest benefit for the time spent exercising the voice.

The voice is like an orchestral wind instrument. A flute or clarinet player, for instance, does not turn up and start playing for a show without warming up the instrument. Equally, you should not launch into singing rehearsals with the cast without people warming up their voices. The voice needs to be gently warmed up to work effectively. Ten minutes of exercises at the start of rehearsals should be enough.

There are different ways of doing this and it will be up to you to decide what works best for you and your cast. I will outline here what you should be trying to achieve and some ways of doing it. Some MDs have separate exercises to cover different aspects of the warm up, while others have a song which they run through at the start of each singing rehearsal which incorporates different warm up exercises. Consider using songs you have previously rehearsed as part of your warm up routine to help with the warm up and also to recap the song.

There are four basic aspects which should be covered as part of the vocal warm up as follows:

- Relax the body
- Exercise the mouth to loosen up the face muscles.
- Exercise the vocal range from low to high notes.
- Focus on diction so that words can be heard clearly.

Relaxing the body is important, as tension in the body will adversely affect the singing voice. The earlier section on posture and relaxation covered some dos and don'ts about the basic posture which should be observed. You should also include some basic loosening up exercises prior to your vocal warm up. The following are a series of gentle exercises you could use with the cast. Firstly,

tilt the head towards one shoulder until you can feel it stretching on the opposite side then repeat to the other side. Next with the head facing forward, turn the head to one side until you feel the neck stretching then repeat this movement to the other side. Roll the shoulders in both directions before letting the arms hang loose and shaking them. Finally bend down to flex the knees and straighten up before shaking each leg in turn. All this helps to relieve tension in the body.

An exercise to focus on warming up the face muscles is to sing up and down scales to "oo" and "ee". With "oo", the mouth is closed and lips are pursed. With "ee", the face should be stretched as if grinning. This is particularly effective if you sing between "oo" and "ee" slowly, exaggerating the different face positions. The face should be tingling afterwards if you perform this correctly showing that you have exercised the face muscles.

Exercising the vocal range is obvious and needs to cover the voice ranges outlined in Chapter 2. I would suggest for rehearsal purposes with the full cast that you start at G below middle C working up the scales to cover as far as G an octave and a fifth above middle C. When warming up the voice I recommend you start by asking the cast to sing to "ng" which is the end of the word "sing". You could start by working up and down the range using five note phrases e.g. C D E F G F E D C, D E F# G A G F# E D etc. Another exercise with the "ng" sound which is good for both warming up the voice and practicing breath control is the "siren". This, as the name suggests, is simulating an emergency vehicle siren sound. You need to start on a note singing "ng" and then slide up the octave and back down to the original note. You can then move up or down the scale to different starting points repeating the exercise.

It is important to focus on diction and practice singing consonants at different pitches. Some MDs use tongue twisters set to a tune. You could alternatively sing part of a song from the show you have previously rehearsed but slow it down and ask the cast to exaggerate their mouth movements to emphasise each word. This gives the muscles in the face a good work out and helps to improve diction. "Let's Face the Music and Dance" by Irving Berlin is an example of a song, which has a good selection of consonants and

vowels. It needs to be sung at a steady pace exaggerating all the consonants to get the most benefit.

An option to focus on both the voice range and diction is to sing a well known phrase in different keys. An example could be to sing the phrase "Follow the Yellow Brick Road, Follow the Yellow Brick Road" in the key of C making sure to emphasise each word clearly. Then move up the scale chromatically through C sharp, D, D sharp etc repeating the same phrase. Again it is important to take it at a steady pace and exaggerate the consonants to get the most benefit.

A good base exercise to check progress on voice control is to sing a single note to "la" or "na" starting quietly and building up to loud over 5 seconds before reducing the volume to the starting point over a further 5 seconds. The aim is to maintain the tone of the note and keep the transition from quiet to loud as smooth as possible. To start with you will probably find the voice jumps about but this should improve with practice.

A good exercise for the diaphragm is to sing notes a third apart to "hah" moving up the scale. If this is performed correctly the stomach should jump around as if you were laughing.

It should be possible for you to develop your own routine based on the ideas outlined above. It is not a good idea for the cast to drink alcohol before singing as this dehydrates the throat. It is best to drink water, which lubricates the vocal chords. It is also important for anyone with a sore throat to rest their voice, as trying to sing with a sore throat can damage the vocal chords.

CHAPTER 6

Rehearsing the Chorus

Standing up in front of a room full of people and conducting a chorus rehearsal will be daunting if you have not done it before. You need to show you are confident in what you are doing, explain what you are expecting to achieve at the rehearsal and conduct it in an efficient manner while trying to make it fun. I say show you are confident. As someone new to Musical Direction you may be a quivering wreck once you stand up in front of the cast for the first time but you need to at least try and exude calm. You will gain confidence as you go along and provided you have prepared well you should soon settle down to the task at hand.

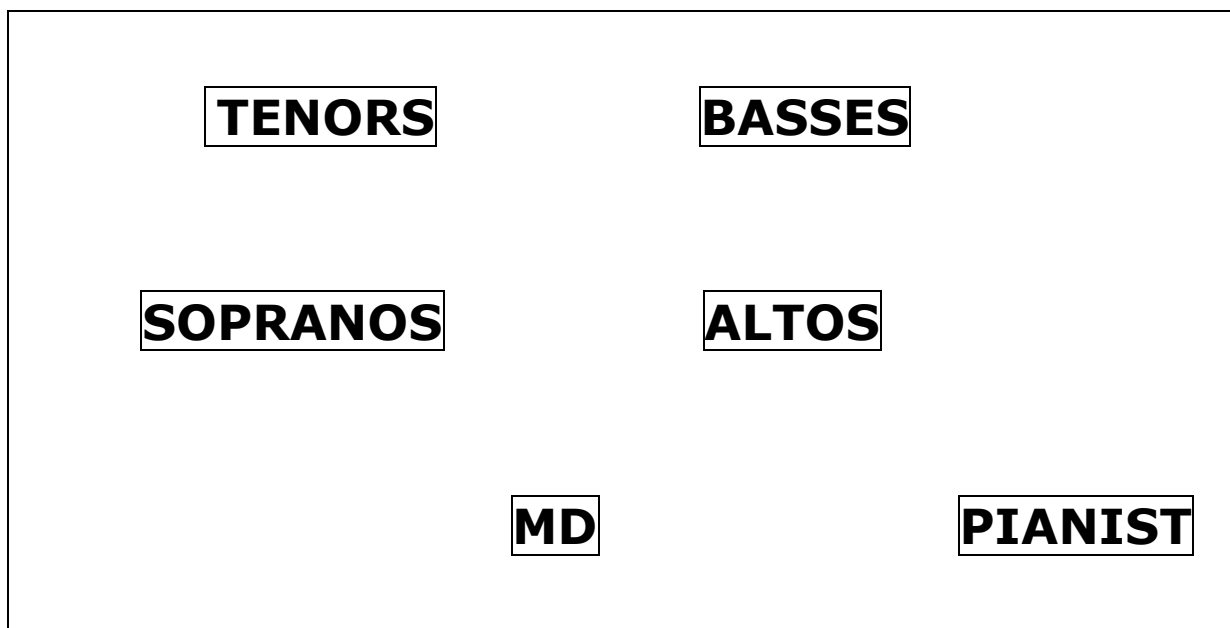
Some societies employ a Chorus Master in addition to the MD to rehearse the chorus. Even if you have the services of a Chorus Master, you as MD are still responsible for all matters musical and need to brief the Chorus Master on what you want from the chorus. You will also need to consider at what point you want to take over rehearsals from the Chorus Master.

The cast are not being paid to take part in the show. They are there voluntarily because it is their hobby. If you bore them rigid or carry on as if you do not know what you are doing then they are likely to lose interest in the rehearsals and may consider leaving, or alternatively approach the committee to ask them to dispense with your services.

The first thing to consider is how you want the cast to sit. Depending on the number of cast members you need to decide if sitting in straight lines or a slight semi circle around you works best. It is conventional to have the sopranos to your left with the tenors sitting behind them and the altos to your right with the basses behind them. Try and leave some separation between the groups so that you do not have a soprano sitting immediately alongside an alto say. This will help when different singers are trying to concentrate on their own harmonies. Leave a space between the sopranos/tenors and the altos/basses with a central aisle. It is also

useful to leave a space behind the sopranos and altos before the tenors and basses. This will allow you to walk around both in front and behind the different groups when practising part singing to hear the separate harmonies.

You will often find that the most confident women singers sit on the front row. If you have enough women for two or more rows then it is better for the most confident singers to sit on the second or back row of the group if more than two rows. This is particularly useful for the altos who are trying to sustain a harmony line against the sopranos on the melody, as anyone sitting further forward will be able to hear the confident singers behind them. If your best singers are on the front row, the sound is directed towards you as the MD but does not help those sitting further back. This is not usually a problem with the men as it is a luxury if you have enough to form two rows. The diagram below shows a typical rehearsal layout for reference.



Some society members may come up to you and say that they do not know what voice type they are. It will be up to you to advise in which group they should sit. I outlined the main voice types in Chapter 2 which will give you a guide. While there are some voices you will hear and immediately be able to say, for example, that they are a soprano or a tenor, sometimes it will take an experienced ear

to detect what type of voice they have. The range of the voice is a guide. For female voices I recommend you test their range starting from G above middle C and asking them to sing a scale both up and down from this point. For male voices I suggest you ask them to sing up and down the scale starting at G below middle C. Also listen to the quality of the tone of their voice. For the female voice, is it bright suggesting a soprano, or is it darker and warmer sounding, suggesting a contralto? Similarly with the male voice, is it lighter for a tenor voice or rich and deep for a bass voice? This should allow you to place the cast members in an appropriate group.

I usually find that it is helpful to use the first rehearsal to run through the story of the show and play all the songs, explaining which songs are for principals and which are chorus numbers. You may want to do this in conjunction with the Director. The cast can get a feel for the show if they do not know it and if they have done the show before it is a useful refresher.

If you have decided to run auditions a few weeks into rehearsals, this is a good opportunity to point out which of the musical numbers will be required for audition for each of the roles being cast. You can also offer the opportunity for any of the cast who are thinking about auditioning to stay at the end of the rehearsal to sing through any of the audition songs. You need to decide when you can run through the audition pieces and inform the cast accordingly, for example, arrive early for rehearsals and have some time at the start, or finish a bit earlier and have a run through at the end. People often like a few attempts at the songs so you may want to offer this opportunity at all the rehearsals up to the auditions.

In terms of rehearsing the chorus it is usually best to rehearse the chorus numbers in the order in which they appear in the show so that if the director is rehearsing the dialogue in order, the musical numbers can be inserted as you start to run through the show. In some instances a director may want to set a big number from the show early on, so you need to agree your approach, which should be clear if you have a rehearsal schedule. Some companies want to run through all the singing before even starting to set any movement. This all needs to be agreed with the Director before rehearsals commence.

Each singing rehearsal should start with a vocal warm up before you move on to the particular musical number you plan to rehearse. Once you move on to a chorus number it is worth playing through the whole song first pointing out where the cast sing in unison and where there are any chorus parts. Breaking the song down into sections helps to make sure the cast understand the notes and rhythms required. Where part singing is involved take each part in turn, again in manageable chunks, and try different parts against each other before asking all the cast to sing together. For example you may want to rehearse the sopranos then altos then sopranos and altos together. You may also want to rehearse the men's parts in a similar way.

If say the altos are struggling to maintain their harmony against the soprano melody line, try the basses and altos together so that the alto line will be the highest phrase and emphasize the alto line on the piano to assist them. It is also worth considering using the "round" technique where you ask the basses to sing a phrase or two with their harmony line and keep repeating the phrase. When you are happy they have mastered it you ask the tenors to come in as well and so on until all the parts are singing together. Look for musical cues in either the accompaniment or the notes being sung by the different harmony groups to help the cast pitch in with their own harmonies.

Mastering the notes, rhythms and lyrics is only part of the work of mastering the song. Once you are happy the basics are in place you need to add the dynamics such as where to sing loudly, softly, smoothly or staccato say, and where you need to slow down, speed up or pause. You also need to be aware of the musical terms in the music to properly interpret the song. Appendix 1 shows the main terms you are likely to come across.

You need to ensure the cast understand the story they are trying to tell within the song. In some old musicals the song was just a break from the dialogue and didn't particularly move the story along, but in many shows it does form part of the story and needs to be delivered appropriately.

Projection and diction are important to work on. It is only fair that someone who has paid for a seat at the back of the theatre can

distinguish what is being sung as much as someone on the front row. Encourage the cast to sing out and form the words properly and not to mumble. Too often in modern productions the cast rely on the microphones to take care of the projection, especially if radio microphones are being used. Microphones need something to amplify and amplified mumbling is not going to be appreciated.

Technical equipment can go wrong, so if the cast project their voices, the amplification can be used to give the sound a boost. If the worst does happen and the microphones fail, there will still be a vocal sound from the stage and you can bring the orchestra volume down to compensate. If the sound technician has to boost the volume on the system to compensate for the cast not projecting, this can result in feedback, which is something to be avoided.

Breathing is very important to good singing, particularly breathing in the correct place. You need to tell the cast where you expect them to breathe in order to phrase the music correctly. Use the markings in the lyrics to guide you, such as commas and full stops. Speak the lyrics without trying to sing them and work out the most appropriate places to take a breath without spoiling the flow of the song.

Facial expressions are also important to work on in terms of selling a song and making the lyrics come to life. There is no point for example smiling while trying to deliver a solemn song. It is useful if the cast can practice outside rehearsals in front of a mirror to match the expression to the song.

As you progress through your rehearsals you should have built in time to recap earlier songs to make sure they are kept fresh. Try and get the cast to learn the song words as early as possible, and certainly before the director or choreographer starts to set the numbers. The cast will then not have to worry about carrying vocal parts around with them.

Be prepared for the singing to deteriorate when the cast move into floor rehearsals as they start to concentrate on learning their steps. Don't worry about this to start with. It helps if you can sing the lyrics to the songs yourself during movement rehearsals to help prompt the cast. Once the cast become more familiar with their

steps you will want to recap the singing and hopefully then the cast will improve with both their singing and movement.

It is worth discussing with the Director the option of keeping part singers together if possible to help with the harmonies, especially if the singers are not confident at holding a harmony line when surrounded by people singing the melody or other harmony line.

As you get closer to the show, an option worth considering is to run say Act 1 for the first part of the rehearsal then during the break to discuss with the rest of the production team which sections you would like to recap in the second part of the rehearsal. You may want to refresh some harmonies with the chorus or sort out some issues with a particular principal number. The director may wish to re-run a section of the script or a chorus number to tidy up aspects of the choreography.

CHAPTER 7

Rehearsing the Principals

Working with principals is a different discipline to rehearsing a chorus as you are working with a smaller group of singers and often on a one to one basis. In addition, principals have more freedom to put their own interpretation to the songs than a chorus, which needs to sing as a unit.

Rehearsing principals, as with chorus rehearsals, should start with a vocal warm up as previously described. The basic tune and timing of the song being rehearsed then needs to be covered. Proper breathing technique and good diction need to be considered and worked on so that what the principals are singing can be understood by the audience.

Listen for pitch problems as it is not uncommon for people to sing sharp or flat rather than perfectly in tune. It is also important to introduce light and shade into the singing. Singing a song at one level all the way through can sound boring to the listener. Look at the expression marks and musical terms in the music and ensure the principal understands how to interpret these. Expressions all add to the tonal quality of the song. Once the basics are covered it is important to then help the singer bring their own interpretation to the song and not just copy the professional version. Remember that the singer will need to use a combination of their voice, facial expressions and body movements to effectively deliver a song.

Don't despair if the principal is not the most brilliant singer. They may have been picked mainly for their acting ability. In this case it is your job to use that acting ability to get them to express the song, even if the singing is not perfect.

Build in opportunities to recap songs, as discussed earlier for the chorus. Principals are also likely to lose the qualities of the performance when they are trying to remember movements they are being set, so again don't worry initially. Once the movement is set and is becoming more familiar build in some time to recap the singing.

With principals, any problems with the singing voice are going to be more obvious than with a chorus of voices singing together, where individual problems can be masked. It is important, therefore, to listen during rehearsals with the principals and try to correct any bad habits before they become ingrained. The next section covers a number of potential voice problems and options to deal with them.

CHAPTER 8

Voice Problems and options for dealing with them

As you sing up a scale the space between your vocal chords gets narrower. As the air from your lungs passes through your vocal chords it keeps them apart, but then creates a suction effect which pulls them back together again. This causes them to vibrate. The pitch of the note is directly related to the rate of opening and closing of the vocal chords. The faster the vocal chords vibrate, the higher the pitch of the note.

Intonation

Intonation can be an issue with some amateur singers. This is the ability to sing in tune. If someone has good intonation they are singing in tune. If they have not, they are either sharp or flat. The big issue here is that the singer often does not realise that they are singing out of tune. This can sometimes be down to nerves and you therefore need to reassure the singer and build up their confidence as well as trying to get them to relax.

If they are not suffering from nerves and are still out of tune you need to assist them to develop their musical ear. Playing notes on a piano and then getting the singer to repeat them and listen to try and match the pitch will help but it will need regular practice. Poor breath control and not opening the throat can lead to singing flat. The breathing needs to be supported and sufficient breath is required to sustain the true pitch of the notes. Alternatively, using too much breath and forcing the sound with the mouth not properly shaped can lead to singing sharp. The singer should relax, use proper breath control and open the mouth.

Too much Vibrato

Vibrato, where the voice wavers around the pitch of the note, can be important in some songs, but too much vibrato can spoil the song. This is caused by not using proper breathing techniques.

Practicing the breathing method described earlier in Chapter 5 will help to address this.

Weak and nasal singing

If not enough air is getting to the vocal chords and it is not supported properly, the result is a weak sound. Chapter 5 covers basic breathing techniques. To avoid a nasal sound, it is important to ensure the mouth is open more like when you are yawning to let the sound flow out.

Forcing the sound

Following on from the weak sound effect above, the opposite is forcing the sound too much. In this case too much air is hitting the vocal chords, causing them to tighten too much. This leads to the voice sounding harsh and it can damage the vocal chords if done on a regular basis. The singer should develop their breathing techniques to address this. Again refer to Chapter 5.

Vowel issues

Some singers develop a bad habit of focussing on the consonant at the end of the word when sustaining a note rather than the vowel in the word. It is important to remember to sing on the vowels not the consonants. For example, in the word "now" the "o" should be held with the "w" sounded just before the note finishes. (i.e. noooooow) Avoid singing on the consonant "w" as this is poor technique. (i.e. nowwwwww)

Throaty sound

This is a problem which occurs when the tongue moves back towards the throat when singing. This traps the sound in the throat and makes it sound muffled. Being tense can also contribute to a throaty sound. The way to avoid this is to keep the tongue flat in the mouth. You also need to make sure the throat, neck and shoulders are relaxed.

Poor diction

As I have mentioned earlier, it is very frustrating when you see a musical not to be able to hear the words being sung because of poor diction. Chapter 5 covers points to note regarding diction. Forming the words on the tip of the tongue between the lips will help to improve diction, as will opening the mouth and projecting.

“Scooping”

Some singers seem to have difficulty in pitching notes. They therefore slide up to the note they need from a slightly different starting point. They may also slide up or down between some of the notes in a song rather than singing them as separate notes. While this may be a technique used in some country songs to good effect, it should generally be avoided in musicals. Working on the intonation, as mentioned above, should help to address this.

“Pillar-boxing”

This is where singers fail to open their mouths properly and end up singing through their teeth. Their mouths form a wide narrow slot like the hole for posting letters in a pillar-box, rather than an open oval shape. Singing with the mouth mainly closed in this way leads to muffled singing and poor diction. The singer should be encouraged to open their mouth and project.

CHAPTER 9

The Orchestra

A Guide to the Orchestra

Most people will be familiar with the standard orchestral instruments. In this section I will briefly describe the main instruments you are likely to come across in a show orchestra/band. A number of instruments play at concert pitch, like the piano, but others are transposing instruments which are written in different keys. This is explained further in this chapter.

Strings

The instruments in the string section are the violin, the viola, the violoncello (or cello for short) and the double bass. They are all played by using a bow or plucking the strings, causing them to vibrate and create a sound which is then amplified by the body of the instrument. The player holds their fingers against the finger board to change the length of the strings affected by the bow and hence the pitch of the note. There are no marked finger positions for the notes. The player has to listen and judge the correct pitch.

Violin

The violin is the smallest string instrument in the group and plays the highest notes.



It has four strings and the range is shown below along with the notes to which the open strings are tuned. The notes sound at the concert pitch written on the music.

Violin Range

Open Strings

G D A E

Viola

The viola is slightly larger than the violin. There are four strings which are longer and thicker than the violin strings, giving it a warmer tone. The viola is generally used to fill out the sound with harmony parts or sometimes double the notes played by the cello.



The range is shown below along with the notes to which the open strings are tuned. The notes sound at the concert pitch written on the music. Note that viola music is often written on the Alto Clef, where the clef sits on the middle line of the staff representing middle C. The open strings are therefore shown below on the Alto Clef, together with the more familiar Treble and Bass Clefs for reference.

Viola Range

Open Strings

C G D A C G D A

Open Strings shown on the Alto Clef used for the Viola

Violoncello (Cello)

The violoncello is usually referred to as the cello. Players sit down to play the cello and hold the instrument between their knees. There is a spike on the bottom of the instrument to allow it to be rested on the floor. There are four strings which are longer and thicker than the viola, which means it plays lower notes. In older scores you may find that the cellos are scored to play the bass line along with the double bass but more recent scores often have the cello playing some melody lines.



The range is shown below, along with the notes to which the open strings are tuned. The notes sound at the concert pitch written on the music. Cello music can sometimes be written on the Tenor Clef where the clef sits on the fourth line up of the staff representing middle C. The open string notes are therefore also shown represented on the tenor clef below for reference.



Violoncello (Cello) Range

Open Strings

Open strings shown on the tenor clef

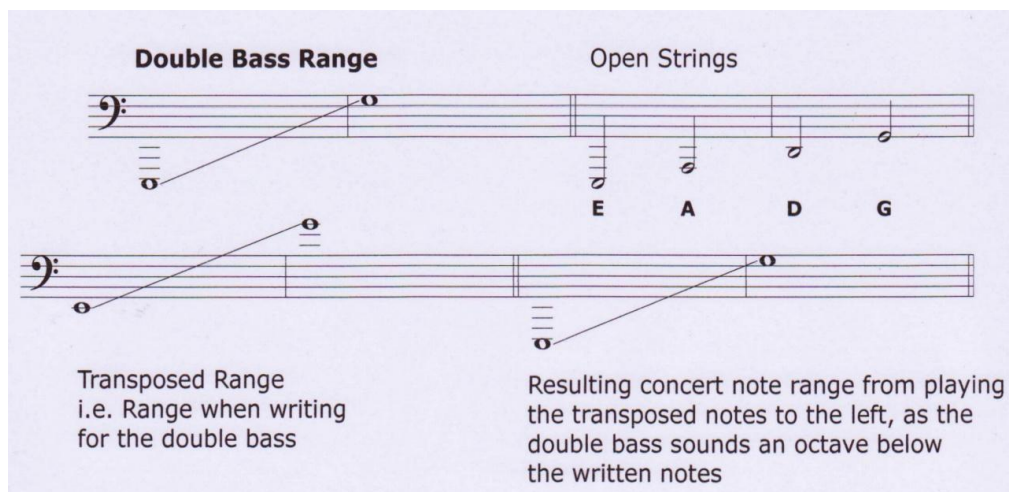
The image shows musical notation for the cello. It includes a bass clef staff with a range of notes indicated by a bracket. Below the staff, the notes C, G, D, and A are listed under the heading 'Open Strings'. To the right, the same notes C, G, D, and A are shown on a tenor clef staff, with the heading 'Open strings shown on the tenor clef' below it.

Double Bass

The double bass is the largest member of the string family. The player either sits on a high stool or stands up to play the instrument. There are normally four very thick strings, although occasionally you may see five strings. Double basses generally play the bass part as they rarely get solos to play. The instrument sounds an octave below the concert pitch of the music. If the double bass is playing the same written notes as the cello, the cello will be at concert pitch and the double bass an octave below.



The strings are tuned to E, A, D and G. The range is shown below.



Double Bass Range

Open Strings

E A D G

Transposed Range
i.e. Range when writing
for the double bass

Resulting concert note range from playing
the transposed notes to the left, as the
double bass sounds an octave below
the written notes

Woodwinds

The standard woodwind (or reed) instruments you are likely to come across are the flute, piccolo, oboe, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet and bassoon. I am also including the saxophone in here as although it is not a conventional orchestral instrument, it is widely used in bands and uses reeds to produce the sound as do many of the woodwind instruments. Woodwind players are often expected to double on for example clarinet and saxophone.

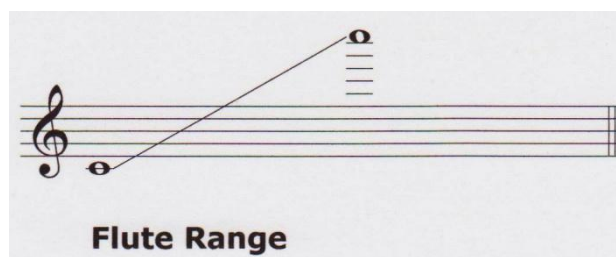
With woodwind instruments the sound is produced by creating a vibrating column of air inside the instrument. The pitch of the note depends on the length of the vibrating column of air with the longer air columns producing the lower notes. The player therefore covers and uncovers the different holes in the instrument to create the different notes. There are also additional small holes which when combined with the player "overblowing" allows them to create notes at higher octaves.

Flute

The flute player holds the instrument at right angles to their body and blows air across the side hole at the top of the instrument to set up the air vibrations inside the flute to create the sound. This is a bit like blowing across the top of an open bottle.



The notes from a normal concert flute sound at the concert pitch of the music and the range is indicated below.

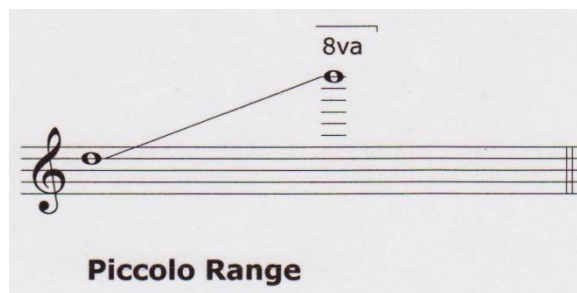


Piccolo

The piccolo is like a flute but half the size. It is played in the same way as the flute but sounds an octave higher. It plays the highest notes in the orchestra.



The notes from the piccolo sound at the concert pitch of the music and the range is shown below.

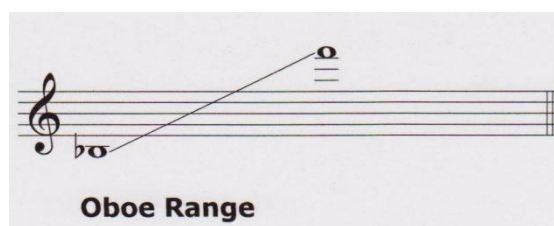


Oboe

The oboe is a double reed instrument. The player puts the double reed into their mouth and by forcing air between the reeds causes them to vibrate against each other to make the air in the tube of the instrument vibrate, thereby creating the sound. The notes from the oboe will be at the concert pitch of the music.



It is convention for the orchestra to tune to the oboe. More common in show bands is for musicians to use their own electronic tuners or tune to the keyboard if there is no oboe. The range is shown below.



Cor Anglais

The cor anglais, or English horn, is really a large oboe which has a corresponding lower voice. It is easily distinguished from the oboe as the instrument has a narrow curved metal tube section at the top between the main part of the body and the reed (shown separately below) as well as a bell shaped lower end.



The cor anglais is what is known as a “transposing” instrument. With transposing instruments, the notes they play, as written at concert pitch on the music, sound at a different pitch. The notes from a cor anglais sound a fifth lower than the concert pitch written on the music. Cor anglais music parts are therefore written a perfect fifth above concert pitch. The range is shown below.

Cor Anglais in F
Written Range
(Up a perfect fifth)

Resulting concert note range
from playing the transposed notes
to the left as the Cor Anglais in F
sounds a fifth lower than the
written notes

Clarinet

The sound from a clarinet is made by the player forcing air into the mouthpiece which has a reed fixed over it. This makes the reed vibrate and sets up a column of vibrating air in the instrument to create the sound. The normal clarinet you will come across is the Bb clarinet, although you may also find music for the A clarinet. The Bb and A clarinets are both transposing instruments and do not sound the same as the concert pitch of the music. The more common Bb clarinet will sound a tone lower than concert pitch.



The range for the Bb clarinet is shown below.

Bb Clarinet
Written Range
(Up a major second)

Resulting concert note range
from playing the transposed notes
to the left as the Bb Clarinet
sounds a major second lower
than the written notes

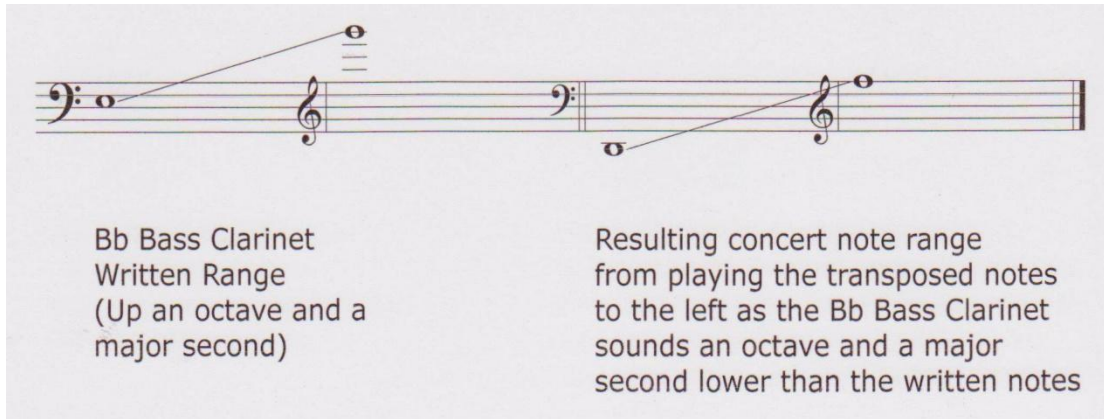
The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef. On the left, a note is written on the first line (F4), and on the right, a note is written on the second line (G4). A line connects these two notes, indicating a major second interval. Below the staff, text explains that this is the written range for the Bb clarinet. To the right, another musical staff shows the same two notes, but the right note is now on the first line (F4), indicating that the concert pitch is a major second lower than the written pitch.

Bass Clarinet

The bass clarinet is twice as long as the normal clarinet and therefore produces notes which are an octave lower. The bottom of the bass clarinet looks like the curved end of a saxophone and the top is also bent round like the top of a tenor saxophone so it is easily distinguished from the standard clarinet. It is also a transposing instrument, usually in Bb.



The range for a Bb bass clarinet is shown below.



The image displays two musical staves. The left staff shows a written range for a Bb Bass Clarinet, with a note on the bass clef staff (Bb) and a note on the treble clef staff (Bb) connected by a line, indicating an octave and a major second. The right staff shows the resulting concert note range, with a note on the bass clef staff (B) and a note on the treble clef staff (B) connected by a line, indicating an octave and a major second lower than the written notes.

Bb Bass Clarinet
Written Range
(Up an octave and a
major second)

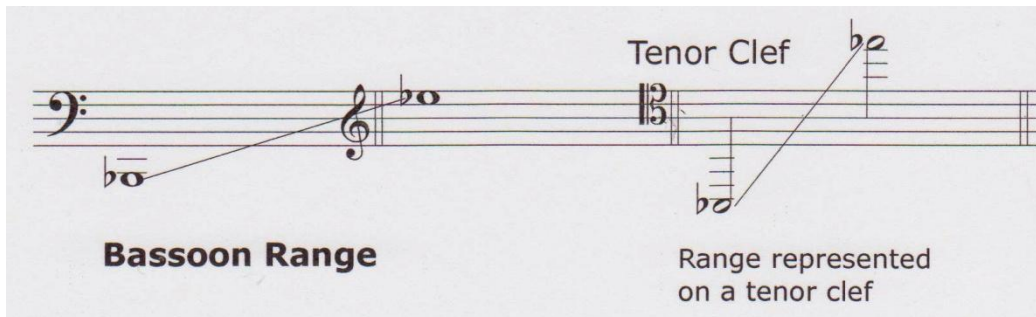
Resulting concert note range
from playing the transposed notes
to the left as the Bb Bass Clarinet
sounds an octave and a major
second lower than the written notes

Bassoon

The bassoon is also a double reed instrument like the oboe. The reed is on the end of a small metal tube linked to the main body of the instrument and the player supports the bassoon using either a sling or a spike from the bottom of the instrument so that it can rest on the floor. It is the bass of the woodwind family but the upper register is often used for expressive solos. The notes sound at the concert pitch of the music.



The range of the bassoon is shown below. Music for the bassoon can sometimes be written on the tenor clef as with the cello described earlier, therefore the range is also shown on the tenor clef.



Saxophone

The saxophone is commonly used in show bands. Tone wise it forms a link between the clarinets and brass instruments. The saxophone is a reed instrument and is fingered in a similar way to the flute and clarinet. You will often find parts written for the musician to double on clarinet and saxophone with some parts also tripling with clarinet, saxophone and flute.

The most common members of the saxophone family which you are likely to come across are the alto, tenor and baritone.



Alto Sax

The alto saxophone is an Eb transposing instrument. It sounds a major sixth lower than concert pitch. The range is shown below.

Eb Alto Sax
 Written Range
 (Up a major sixth)

Resulting concert note range
 from playing the transposed notes
 to the left as the Eb Alto Sax
 sounds a major sixth lower
 than the written notes

The tenor saxophone is a Bb transposing instrument.



Tenor Sax

It sounds an octave and one note lower than concert pitch. The range is shown below.

Bb Tenor Sax
 Written Range
 (Up a major ninth)

Resulting concert note range
 from playing the transposed notes
 to the left as the Bb Tenor Sax
 sounds a major ninth lower
 than the written notes

The baritone saxophone is an Eb transposing instrument.



Baritone Sax

It is pitched an octave and a major sixth lower than concert pitch. It is an octave lower than an alto saxophone. The range is shown below.

The image shows a musical staff with two systems. The first system is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It contains a single note on the second line, which is a Bb. A line connects this note to a second system, which is a bass clef staff with a key signature of one flat (Bb). This second system contains a single note on the second line, which is a Bb. A line connects this note to a third system, which is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (Bb). This third system contains a single note on the second line, which is a Bb. The text below the staff explains the relationship between the written notes and the resulting concert notes.

Eb Baritone Sax
Written Range
(Up an octave and
a major sixth)

Resulting concert note range
from playing the transposed notes
to the left as the Eb Baritone Sax
sounds an octave and a major
sixth lower than the written notes

Brass

The brass instruments you are likely to come across for musicals are trumpets, trombones and horns.

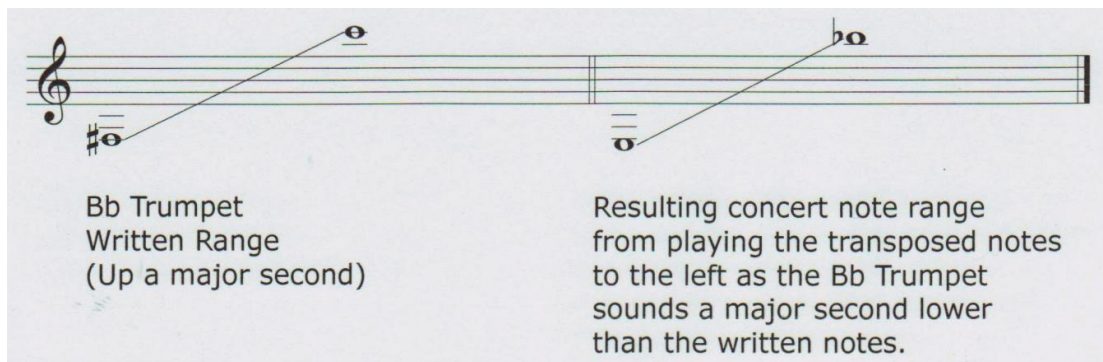
Trumpet

The trumpet is a brass tube where the player makes the sound by pursing their lips against the mouthpiece to create a column of vibrating air. The combination of how they adjust their lips together with the use of the valves on the instrument to adjust the length of tube along which the air can vibrate creates the different notes. The

trumpet is a “transposing” instrument and therefore does not sound at the concert pitch of the music unless it is a C trumpet. The most commonly used trumpets are Bb and C, but you may come across D and Eb trumpets. Trumpets have a bright sound, but can be muted to create different effects. The mutes are cones which are pushed into the bell of the instrument. The Bb trumpet sounds a tone below the concert pitch, that is, if the trumpeter plays a concert C it will sound as Bb.



The range of the Bb trumpet is shown below.



Bb Trumpet
Written Range
(Up a major second)

Resulting concert note range
from playing the transposed notes
to the left as the Bb Trumpet
sounds a major second lower
than the written notes.

Trombone

The trombone player makes the sound by pursing their lips against the mouthpiece to create a column of vibrating air like the trumpeter. This time the combination of how they adjust their lips, together with the use of a sliding tube to change the length of the air column, affects the pitch of the note. As with the trumpet, mutes can be placed in the bell of the instrument for different effects. You will normally come across the tenor and bass trombones. Although it is common to find Bb instruments or double instruments in Bb and F, the trombone is not a transposing instrument.

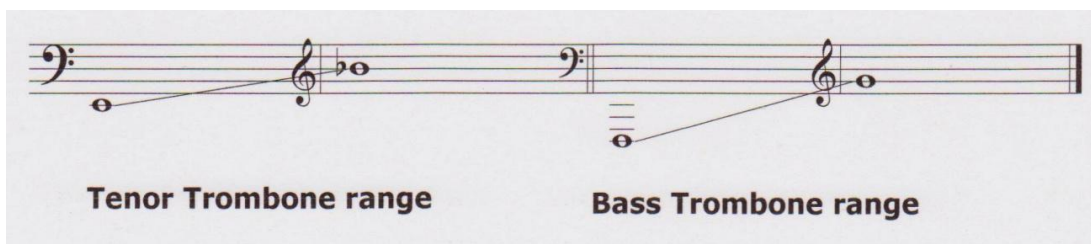


Tenor Trombone



Bass Trombone

The ranges for both the tenor and bass trombones are shown below.



Horn

The horn is often informally referred to as the French horn. The player again blows into a mouthpiece and uses valves to adjust the length of the effective tube available to the vibrating air column and hence the pitch of the note. The player sometimes uses a mute, but can also move their hand into the bell of the instrument to adjust

the tuning or create various effects. The horn is a transposing instrument and can be a combination of two horns in one covering both an F based horn and one built a fourth higher around Bb. There are also single horns pitched in Bb or F.



The horn has a smooth mellow quality which helps it bridge the gap between the brass and the woodwind. The F horn is one of the more common horns. This sounds a fifth lower than concert pitch and the range is shown below.

The diagram consists of two musical staves. The left staff shows a note written in treble clef on the second line (G4) and a note written in bass clef on the second space (C3). A diagonal line connects these two notes, indicating a perfect fifth interval. Below this staff is the text: "Horn in F written range (Up a perfect fifth)". The right staff shows a note written in bass clef on the second space (C3) and a note written in treble clef on the second line (G4). A diagonal line connects these two notes, indicating a perfect fifth interval. Below this staff is the text: "Resulting concert note range from playing the transposed notes to the left, as the Horn in F sounds a perfect fifth lower than written".

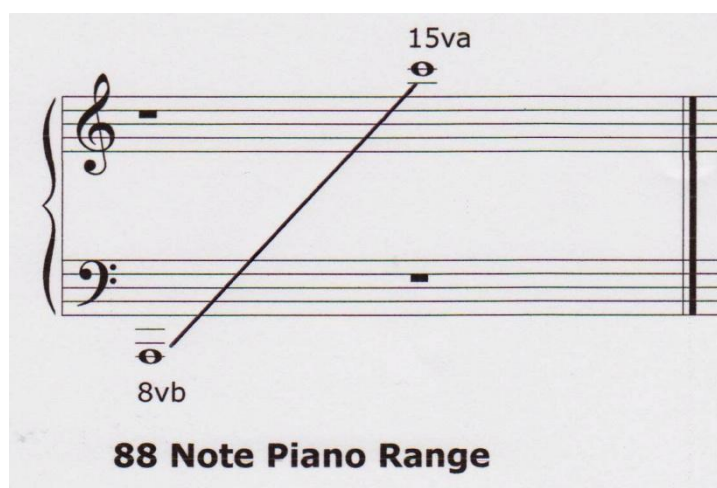
Rhythm Section

In this section I am including the instruments which form the basic rhythm section. These are the piano or keyboard, lead/rhythm guitar, bass guitar and drum kit.

Piano

The piano should not require any introduction as it has formed the staple accompaniment instrument for amateur societies for many years. A number of societies have now opted for electric keyboards, particularly for the show bands, given the problem of maintaining and tuning conventional pianos. Although the piano can be a solo instrument in its own right, it is often used in bands to play chords and provide a strong rhythmic foundation to the song.

A full 88 note keyboard is shown below along with the range. The piano plays notes at concert pitch.



Guitar

There are different types of guitars from acoustic through electro acoustic and semi acoustic to electric. The player plucks the strings either with their fingers or a triangular shaped plectrum to cause them to vibrate. With an acoustic guitar, the body of the guitar amplifies the sound. The electro acoustic looks like an acoustic guitar and can be played as an acoustic guitar. It can also be wired to an amplifier and played as an electric guitar. The semi acoustic is a hollow bodied electric guitar. It can be played without amplification for practice purposes but requires an amplifier for public performance. Electric guitars have solid bodies and require amplification. Electric guitars and semi acoustic guitars are more

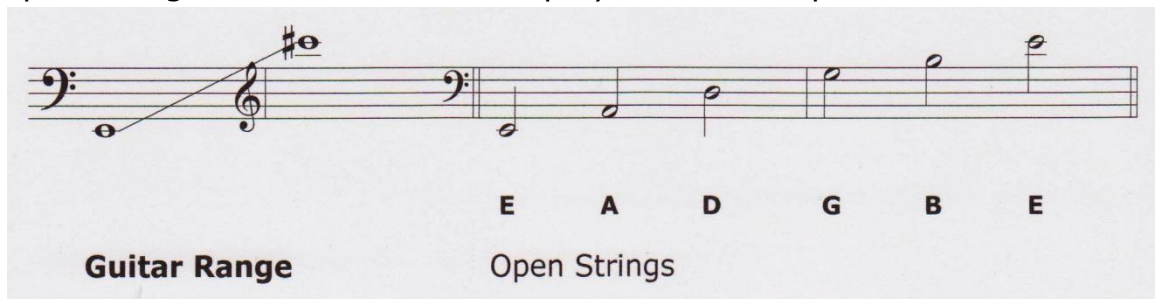
common in show bands, used in both a rhythm role or for selected lead lines.



Acoustic Guitar

Electric Guitar

The guitar usually has six strings and the range and tuning of the open strings are shown below. It plays at concert pitch.



You may also come across 12 string guitars. The additional strings can either be tuned in unison giving six open notes as above for the six string guitar, or alternatively the pairs of strings can be tuned an octave apart.

Bass Guitar

It is not uncommon these days to substitute a bass guitar for the double bass when you are using a band. If there is a string section, however, it is usually preferable to keep the double bass.



The standard 4 string bass guitar has the same range as the double bass and the open strings are E, A, D and G as shown below. The bass guitar sounds an octave below the concert pitch written.

Bass Guitar Range

Open Strings

E A D G

Transposed Range
i.e. Range when writing
for the Bass Guitar

Resulting concert note range from playing
the transposed notes to the left, as the
Bass Guitar sounds an octave below
the written notes

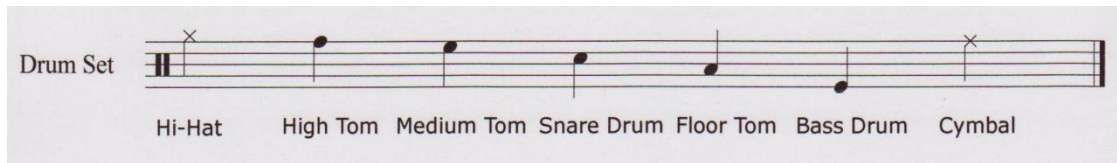
There are 5 string bass guitars which include an open B string below the E of the 4 string guitar, but these are less common. There are also some 6 string bass guitars which in addition have a C string above the top G string of the 5 string guitar, but these are rare.

Drum Kit

No rhythm section is complete without a drum kit. The basic set up usually consists of a bass drum, floor tom, top toms, snare drum, cymbal and a hi-hat (i.e. the two small cymbals mounted together on a stand on the picture) as shown below. The hi-hat cymbals can be played with a stick or clashed together with a foot pedal.



The player can use different types of drum stick or brushes to create the desired effect. The different parts of the drum kit are notated on the music as shown below.



The drummer can often have other items as part of the kit and these can be notated on the staff as an "x" with a stem like the cymbal and marked for confirmation (e.g. cow bell). A number of common additions to the basic drum kit are additional cymbals, a cow bell, a wood block and a tambourine as shown below.



Tuned Percussion

Percussion instruments are those which are struck in some way or shaken. Tuned percussion instruments play actual notes at different pitches, for example timpani, xylophone, marimba and vibraphone. Often the tuned percussion is left out of an amateur show band, either because of lack of space or lack of budget. They do, however, add tonal colour to orchestrations and if you have both the space and funds it is worth including them in your band set up. Below are a few of the larger tuned percussion instruments you are likely to come across.

Timpani

Timpani are normally tuned using a pedal on the side of the instrument, although some older instruments require the skin to be adjusted by manually tightening or loosening the handles around the circumference. It may not be possible to fit timpani into many of the smaller theatre pits and if you can it is more likely there will only be space for one or two at the most. Consequently, timpani

sounds are often covered on electronic drum pads or a keyboard where space is limited.



Xylophone

The modern Xylophone has tuned wooden bars with tubular resonators suspended underneath and is played with two wooden, rubber or plastic mallets. Modern xylophones are built in various sizes and can play up to four octaves. The wooden bars are arranged in two rows and look like a piano keyboard.



Marimba

The Marimba is similar to the xylophone, in that it has wooden bars arranged in two rows like a piano keyboard, but it is pitched an octave lower and can be played with four mallets instead of two to produce soft deep chords. It again has a range of around four octaves.



Vibraphone

The Vibraphone looks like a xylophone, except that it has aluminium alloy bars rather than wood and the tubular resonators are fitted with spinning lids run from an electric motor which give the sound a throbbing effect. The vibraphone has a foot pedal which opens and closes the resonating tubes. The alloy bars are again laid out in two rows like a piano keyboard. It has a range of around three octaves.



Layout of the Orchestra/Band in the pit

To some extent the layout of the musicians in the pit will depend on the shape and size available to you. The following are suggestions based on my experience both from the MD and playing perspective assuming a rectangular space along the front of the stage, with or without a pit:

- String section to the left of the conductor
- Woodwinds/Reeds in a line with their backs to the stage facing the conductor or to the right of the conductor in front of the brass if space permits.
- Brass and Drum Kit to the right of the conductor
- Keyboard immediately to the left or right of the conductor depending on how the space balances out with the other instruments.
- If percussion is being used, you may often find the percussion at one end of the pit and the drum kit at the other. There is nothing to stop you putting them both together if space permits.

Sometimes because of budget constraints, keyboards are used to cover certain orchestral instruments, for example the strings. In this situation, I would recommend putting the keyboards to the left of the conductor in place of where the strings would have been.

Appendix 2 gives some examples of pit layouts I have used with different numbers and permutations of musicians for reference. I have also included an unconventional arrangement where the band is split, with some at one side of the stage and the rest at the other in gallery areas above the wings. You may be faced with this situation in smaller venues without a conventional pit or space for the band at the front of the performing area.

Deciding on the musicians you need

Different societies work in different ways. Some hold budget meetings and ask the MD for advice on orchestra costs, while others may specify a budget for the orchestra to the MD. There is usually some scope for negotiation over the final cost but it is important for the MD to have considered the options from a number of perspectives.

Before taking a decision on how many musicians you want to go forward with, you as MD need to be aware of the orchestrations available for the show and consider the pros and cons of each. For example, there may be a small combo arrangement in addition to the full orchestration or even a two piano version. The standard orchestration is sometimes listed in the score where it may also suggest a basic orchestration and which instruments can be added and in which order if funds are available. If not then the information can be obtained from the rights holders for the show. It is always worthwhile checking with them for the latest position. Different combinations will obviously sound different in terms of the fullness or tonal quality of the sound. One decision might be to go for a larger number of players, space permitting, if they accept a nominal fee or opt for a smaller number of musicians, possibly using a combo arrangement, if you need to pay a higher fee.

Another consideration is to use keyboards to replace sections of the orchestra, such as one or more keyboard players to cover the string sounds. This can save money and reduce the numbers of musicians you require but the sound will be different. You need to consider if you need a true string sound or if a synthesized sound will be acceptable or even more appropriate for the show concerned. Sometimes having a good keyboard player covering strings is better than a poor string section.

You also need to consider the space available at the venue where you will be performing the show. Does it have a pit which limits the space available? If you are performing in a hall, will the orchestra be along the front of the stage area and if so how many rows of musicians can you fit in or do you have to squeeze into a space at one side or other of the stage? In some shows, the orchestra/band can be on stage, such as Godspell. If a decision is taken to have the

band/orchestra on stage, you need to discuss with the director how much space is going to be available and plan accordingly.

The other thing worth considering is the strength of the cast in terms of singing and the quality of amplification you will have at the show venue. An MD will not be thanked for having a superb orchestra if they drown out the cast on stage. If the cast do not have particularly strong voices or you are likely to have limited amplification, for example no radio microphones just stage microphones, the preference would be for a small number of musicians.

In order to fit with the budget for musicians you need to know how much to pay each musician. This depends on a number of factors, including the number of calls you require. For instance, a show from say Tuesday to Saturday would involve a band call, dress rehearsal and 5 or 6 show calls depending on whether there is a matinee performance on the Saturday. If the show is to be performed in a professional theatre and you intend to use professional musicians, you will need to pay musician's union (MU) rates. It is worth checking the MU website for the most up to date rates. NODA has also produced a factsheet on MU rates, which is available from the members' area of the NODA website. This covers the rates for professional theatres and venues other than theatres and cinemas.

If you are in a professional theatre but using semi-professional/part time players, you can offer lower than MU rates and the level is best pitched at what they would be paid by other societies using their services in the same theatre. You can set your own rate and then it is up to the musicians to decide if they want to play for you. If you offer less than the going rate offered by other societies in the area, you may find musicians turn down your offer. Alternatively, they may initially accept if they have no other work on, but then ask someone to deputise for them if they can later get a booking elsewhere for more money. The replacement musician may or may not be as good as the person you thought you were getting. Occasionally they may even be better.

Rates can vary between areas if you are not paying MU rates so it is worth contacting other MDs in your local area to discuss what they

are paying, especially if you end up hiring some of the same musicians.

Booking musicians

There are few things worse for an MD than having to conduct a poor orchestra, either in terms of keeping together or playing in tune. One way of getting to know who the competent musicians are is to visit shows in your area and pay particular attention to the orchestra/band. If the programme gives the names of the players you can make a note of the ones you are impressed with and it might be worth going to speak to the MD at the end of the performance, introducing yourself and exchanging contact details. You can then contact the MD later to ask if they will pass on the player's details if you decide you would like to approach them about a show.

I have always found other MDs very helpful in terms of contacts for players. Also, if you contact a musician and they can't do the show for you, they can often recommend one of their contacts to you. In this way you start to build up a list of suitable players for the future and will then be in a position to help out the MDs who have previously helped you.

Another source of musicians is the local music college if you have one. If you have a contact or know someone who has a contact at the college, there may be capable music students who would be interested in gaining the experience and some money by playing for your show.

Finally, existing members of the cast may have friends or relatives who are musicians and who would be interested in playing for the show. You need to ask about their experience and/or playing level to decide if they are likely to be able to cope with the music. As I said at the start, it is no fun to be conducting an orchestra who are not very good, even if they do come cheap. It will make your life a misery during show week and could adversely affect the success of the show.

Rehearsing the musicians

Show musicians usually have a separate band call with the MD, play in on the dress rehearsal, and then go straight into the show. For difficult shows you might want to consider an extra band call or more than one dress rehearsal before you launch into the show.

It is probably worth defining at this point what I mean by band and orchestra. Most show backing is by a band, which is a rhythm section of keyboards, guitar(s) and drums, supplemented by brass and reed players, plus possibly tuned percussion. If there is also a string section it is then referred to as an orchestra. For the rest of this section I will refer to a band, which can be read as orchestra if you are also including strings.

The first thing to consider is the band call. The band parts are normally on hire for 4 weeks including show week. You should aim to get the parts to the musicians at least a week before the band call date to give them time to look over the parts if they are not familiar with them. Some musicians who have played the show before may be happy to turn up at the band call without having the part in advance. Regardless of whether you send out the part or not, you should still send details to the musicians of the date, time and venue for the band call and how long you expect it to last.

You may wish to check the band parts before you send them out or mark up any changes yourself. This will save time at the band call and avoid any problems resulting from inaccurate parts, but is time consuming.

The standard approach is to send out the band part with a list of the musical numbers indicating any changes, for example Song 2, no repeat at bars 7 and 8, cut from bar 20 to bar 42 etc. It is then the responsibility of the individual musicians to mark up their own band parts. Parts should only be marked up with soft pencils so that they can be easily cleaned at the end of the show. If the musicians have chosen not to receive the band parts in advance, this can waste time at the band call. I would always recommend sending the parts out to the musicians in advance.

Be aware that the parts are not always written out in the same way. One part may have for instance an 8 bar section repeated with first

and second time bars, whereas other parts may have the 16 bars written out in full. This can lead to some confusion when you are dealing with cuts if you say, for example, delete the first time bar and go straight to the second, as not all the musicians will have a first time bar. You need to bear this in mind when indicating cuts to bars or repeats.

If you are new to the job of MD you may wish to give yourself a bit more time to sort out the band parts, especially as you will probably have a full time job. If you feel it is necessary, you could ask the society to hire the parts for an extra week to give you more time to prepare. This will cost the society more money, so only do this if you really need the extra time.

For most shows I have found that band calls can be covered within a 3 hour period if you stick to the business in hand. It is customary to hold them on the Sunday if the show starts on the Monday or Tuesday. This allows you to also have a dress rehearsal the same day for shows starting on the Monday, or alternatively the dress rehearsal will be on the Monday evening for shows starting on Tuesday evening.

Keyboard players and drummers/percussionists normally like to arrive early to set up so you should arrange to have the venue opened up at least 30 minutes before the band call to allow for this. It is also helpful to have a break mid way in the session, usually between rehearsing Act I and Act II numbers, so if anyone from the society can come along and make some teas/coffees for the band it always goes down well.

I mentioned in Chapter 6 under rehearsing the chorus that standing up in front of a room full of people to conduct a rehearsal for the first time will be daunting if you have not done this before. Standing up in front of a group of musicians for your first band can be even more daunting, as you are now dealing with semi-professional or sometimes possibly professional musicians who generally know their instruments far better than you do. The key is to prepare in advance so that you can fulfil your role as the conductor. You need to use your people skills to make the rehearsal enjoyable for the musicians and if possible inject a bit of humour into the proceedings.

Decide in advance of the band call how you propose to conduct the different musical numbers. If you have had the luxury of an accompanist you may well have worked this out during rehearsals, but if you have been doubling as the MD and accompanist, you will need to work through the music in advance of the band call and try out options to see what works. This can be done at home away from rehearsals by singing through the score in your head and trying out conducting ideas. Some songs will naturally lend themselves to being conducted in 2, 3 or 4 to the bar but others may need extra thought. You may have a 4 in a bar song which is fast and works better conducted as 2 to the bar unless you want arm ache. This is discussed further in the next section on conducting.

I always found it useful to ask at least the principal singers to come along for the band call and sing in. This helps them as they will have previously become familiar with the piano backing and the orchestration will be very different. A singer may have been accustomed to expecting a particular cue note from the piano, but in the orchestration this may now be on a flute or a violin. It can throw the singer if they are not expecting this, so hearing it at the band call will help. It is also helpful for the musicians to link what they are playing to the singer.

I would usually also open up the band call to the chorus if they wished to attend on the basis that they sat quietly and did not disrupt the session. Remember at the end of the day, the band call is a session for you as MD to hear what the orchestration sounds like, sort out the conducting elements and make sure the musicians know what is expected of them and how you are going to conduct the music. It is not a show run through as this will come at the dress rehearsal.

An important consideration is the role of the rehearsal accompanist from the band call onwards into show week. Most, if not all, of the music played by the piano accompanist during rehearsals will now be covered by the instruments of the band or orchestra you have employed, so the piano accompanist may to all intents and purposes be redundant. If the accompanist continues to play the full piano score at a band call and subsequently for the show, they will inevitably be covering the parts played by other instruments. This

can be detrimental to the sound of the orchestration, but can also lead to arguments between the musicians if someone feels that their star solo is being spoiled by the piano accompanist playing along with it.

There are different ways of dealing with this, depending on the capabilities of the piano accompanist you have available. If the piano accompanist has an electronic keyboard and there is a keyboard part in the orchestration, they should switch to playing the keyboard part from the band call onwards. There can be difficulties if the pianist is not experienced in playing from a keyboard band part, as they will initially find it unnerving not having the song words for reference. On one particular show I was involved with, I did not feel that the piano accompanist was up to the standard required to deal with the keyboard part in the orchestration, so I discussed this with them and agreed that I would bring in an experienced keyboard player for the band call and show. Another alternative if you are using a reduced orchestration or are using a standard orchestration but do not have all the players required, possibly for reasons of keeping costs down, is to ask the piano accompanist to cover missing instruments on an electronic keyboard playing from the piano/conductor score, which is normally cued for the other instruments. It is very rare these days to see anyone playing the full piano score on an acoustic piano in a show band.

An important issue worth raising at the band call is pit discipline. Depending on the venue, and whether the band is in a pit, on stage or at floor level in full view of the audience, you need to mention a few ground rules. I request that musicians do not eat or drink during shows, other than possibly having a bottle of water. I think it looks unprofessional for musicians to be eating or drinking between musical numbers and will inevitably distract the audience from the performance. In some shows where there are large sections of script between songs, it can be quite boring for the musicians to have to just sit quietly and wait. Some like to bring a magazine or book to read and provided they are hidden from the audience and the musicians do not miss their cue, this should not be a problem. You need to use your discretion depending on the circumstances. Remember at the end of the day that you are paying the musicians to play for the society and "he that pays the piper, calls the tune".

Conducting

It is important to have the correct posture when conducting. You should hold your arm out in front of you with your elbow away from your body in line with your hand and slightly bent. The hand should be at an angle of around 45 degrees up from your wrist.



The right hand is used to conduct the beat of the music, or alternatively the left hand if you are left handed. It is important not to wave your elbows around as this might confuse the musicians. They will be sitting lower down than you and may take their cue from your elbow if it obscures your conducting hand. Your beat is very important to keep the orchestra together and in time. Musicians inevitably listen to each other as well as watching the conductor and in a theatre pit they are usually quite close together. It is common, however, for musicians at one end of a pit not to be able to hear those from the other end of the pit, so your beat is crucial to keep everyone in time. This becomes a major issue with large orchestras in concert venues as the percussion for instance are at the back of the orchestra. If they listen to the violins and try and stay in time with them they will be out of time because of the delay in the sound from the violins reaching them. If everyone plays to the conductors beat the orchestra will stay in time as light travels faster than sound.

Your left hand is used to bring people in and cut them off. This applies both to the musicians and the cast on stage as the MD is responsible for directing both groups. It is also used to signify expression, such as indicating you want the orchestra to increase

the volume or decrease the volume. To increase the volume you would cup your hand palm up and raise it up. To decrease the volume you would start with your hand high, palm down, and bring it down. You may also be asked to cue certain musicians at key points such as instrumental solos and the left hand can be used for this. Use your arms smoothly if you want the music to be played smoothly and joined up. Use sharper stabs with your arms to denote staccato passages. Large movements of your arms can be used to signify you want the musicians to play loud and smaller movements to play soft. Again if you are left handed you may wish to reverse the use of the arms and conduct the time with your left hand and add the expression with your right hand.

The most common time signatures for musical numbers are 2/4, 3/4 or 4/4 as shown below, meaning they have 2, 3 or 4 beats in the bar respectively.



These are called "simple" times. The top number on the time signature tells you how many beats are in the bar and the bottom number tells you the type of beat, for example 4/4 means 4 quarter beats in the bar, the quarter beat being a crotchet as shown above.

Sometimes older music written with four beats in the bar has a "C" in place of 4/4, which denotes "Common" time. The "C" is not, however, a capital letter for "Common" Time. In early music, 3 beats to a bar was represented by the circle sign "O", representing a symbol of perfection. Music in 4 beats was shown as a "C", an incomplete circle, representing an imperfect time. You may also come across a "C" with a vertical line through it. This is called Split Common Time and represents 2/2 time, that is two minims to the bar.

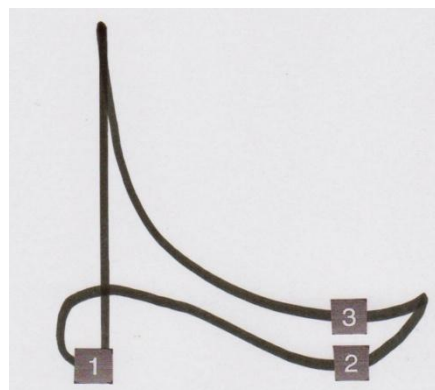


To beat time, imagine you are looking at a circular clock face and you only need to think about the top half of the clock i.e. from a line between the 9.00 o'clock and 3.00 o'clock positions up to 12.00 o'clock. If we now refer to the line between 9.00 o'clock and 3.00 o'clock as the base line, you will be using this together with the 3.00, 9.00 and 12.00 o'clock positions to beat time. When the music is fairly quiet the 3.00 and 9.00 o'clock positions could be in line with your shoulders, but if the music is louder you may want to make larger sweeping movements so the 3.00 o'clock and 9.00 o'clock positions will be at some point between the line of your shoulders and your outstretched arm position. You will need to decide what is comfortable for you.

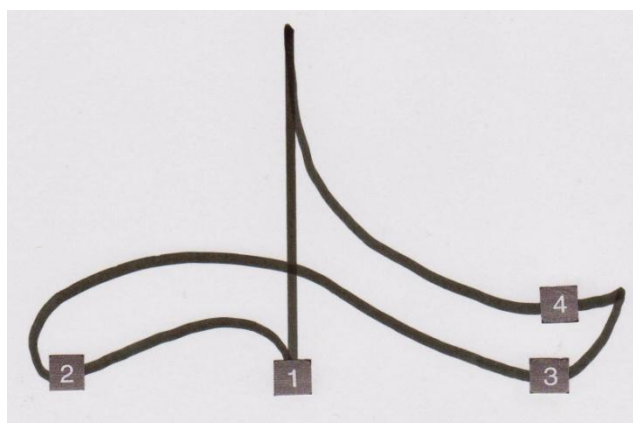
For 2/4 or 2/2 start at 12.00 o'clock and move your hand down to the baseline and slightly to the right at the bottom of the movement. This is beat one. For beat two, move your hand back up to the starting position.



For 3/4, start at 12.00 o'clock and move your hand down to the baseline for beat one. Move your hand to the right to 3.00 o'clock for beat two and finally sweep your hand up in an arc from 3.00 o'clock back to 12.00 o'clock for beat three.



For 4/4 or "C" Common Time start at the 12.00 o'clock position and move your hand down to the baseline for beat one. Move your hand to the left to the 9.00 o'clock position for beat 2. Move left to right from 9.00 o'clock to 3.00 o'clock for beat three and finally sweep your hand up in an arc from 3.00 o'clock back to 12.00 o'clock for beat four.



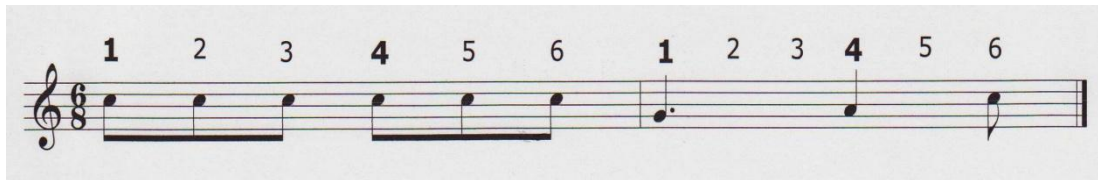
You may wish to use both hands for conducting at the start of a song or to emphasise a change, such as a change in time signature or key signature. To do this in 3/4 you start with both your hands at shoulder width apart. You then bring them both down for the first beat. For the second beat, the left hand goes towards the 9.00 o'clock position and the right hand towards the 3.00 o'clock position, before sweeping them both up to the starting point for the final beat. For a 4/4 song you bring both hands down for beat one, towards each other for beat two, away from each other for beat three and back to the starting position for beat four.

Remember that you do not just start with beat one as you need to cue the orchestra. To do this you need a sharp upbeat just prior to beat one. Start with your hand at the baseline and imagine that the baseline is a hard surface and your hand bounces up from it to the 12.00 o'clock position. You are then ready to start beat one.

The speed and feel of the music can influence how you conduct it. For example, a song like "Matchmaker" from "Fiddler on the Roof" is written in 3/4. For the slower parts of the song it is appropriate to conduct each of the beats i.e. conduct 3 to the bar. However, when the speed increases it is more appropriate to change to conducting just the first beat of each bar i.e. **1** 2 3, **1** 2 3 etc by beating in 1

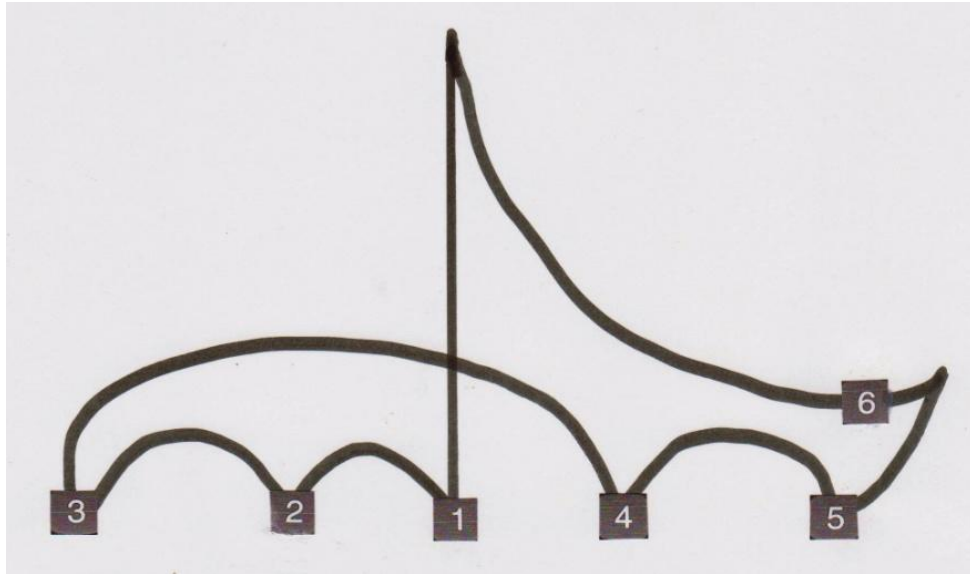
rather than 3. To do this move your hand down from the 12.00 o'clock position to the baseline for beat one and bounce it back up to the 12.00 o'clock position for beats two and three. This will help to keep a consistent tempo and save you having arm ache at the end of the song. Similarly, sometimes quick songs written in 4/4 can be conducted in 2 to the bar, as described earlier for conducting say 2/4, by conducting the first and third beats of the bar i.e. **1 2 3 4**, **1 2 3 4** etc.

There are other time signatures called compound times, e.g. 6/8 and 9/8. A song in 6/8 is based around six quavers to the bar in two groups of three as shown below.



The feel of the music is, however, based on two beats to the bar, with each of the three quaver groups accounting for a beat i.e. **1 2 3 4 5 6** etc. 6/8 is called compound time because a bar is made up of a mixture (or compound) of two and three. Each bar has two main beats and each beat has three subdivisions. You would therefore beat this in the same way as a 2/4 bar.

The exception would be where the music was slow and you needed to emphasize each of the six beats separately. In this case you would start at the 12.00 o'clock position and move your hand down to the baseline for beat one. You would then make an arch like a bridge to the left, returning to the baseline for beat two. You then make a similar arch, again returning to the baseline for beat three. You should now be in the 9.00 o'clock position. For beat four you need to make a longer arch to the right, crossing over the centre position and moving part way towards 3.00 o'clock and finishing on the baseline. Beat five is formed by making an arch to the right similar in size to the ones you made to the left but moving to the baseline at 3.00 o'clock. Finally you need to sweep up your arm back to the 12.00 o'clock position for beat six as shown below.



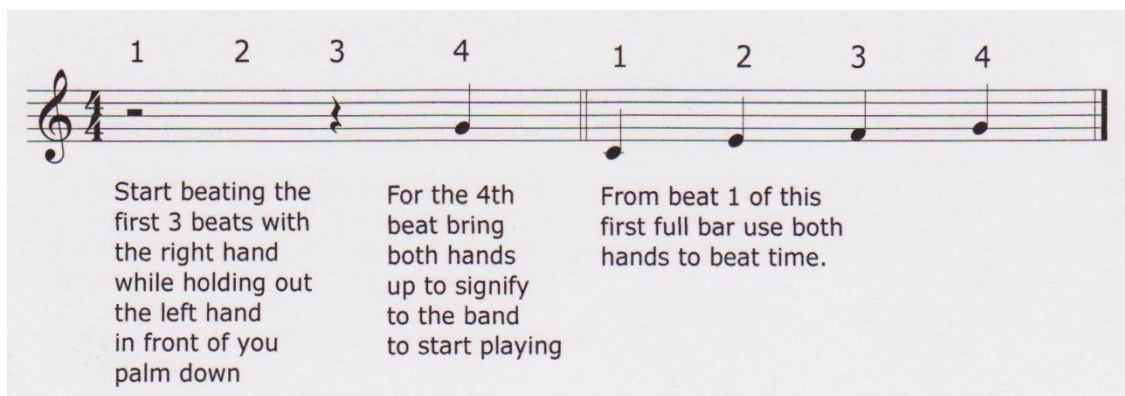
There are also more difficult time signatures that you need to consider like 5/4, 7/8 etc. Examples of these can be found in music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Stephen Sondheim. These can be conducted by modifying the method for 6/8 above to create the number of beats you require.

For the 5, 6 or 7 beats in the bar you can alternatively give a down beat for beat one then make all the other beats to the right hand side, rather than first going left then right, before returning to the starting point for the last beat. Find a method which is comfortable for you and which the musicians can follow.

Another consideration is how you are going to bring the band in at the start of the musical number. Your options are to come straight in or beat a bar or part of a bar for nothing. Whichever you decide you are comfortable with, you need to make sure the orchestra are clear about what you are going to do to avoid any confusion. You do not want some to start playing as you beat the bar for nothing and others coming in after that bar. You can make this clear by beating the bar with your right hand while holding out your left hand in front of you palm down and then using both hands to mark the first beat of the music for the musicians to start. I stress again that you should make it clear to the musicians that this is what you are going to do. Whatever you do there needs to be a definite downbeat to signify the start of the number.

Consistency is the key, so beating a bar in on some numbers and going straight in on others can also lead to confusion. Whatever you decide, make sure you do the same thing each time with the particular musical number so that the musicians know what to expect. It is advisable to ask them to mark in their score where you are giving a bar in e.g. mark "2 in" or "3 in" etc.

I prefer to bring the musicians in on the first downbeat, unless the first bar is a pick up bar (e.g. it may start on the last beat of the bar) when I would beat a full bar with my right hand and emphasize the beat when they needed to come in by using both hands. The first full bar and next few bars should be conducted with both hands, after which you can decide when you revert to just one hand when you are sure the tempo has been established.



1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Start beating the first 3 beats with the right hand while holding out the left hand in front of you palm down

For the 4th beat bring both hands up to signify to the band to start playing

From beat 1 of this first full bar use both hands to beat time.

Remember that musicians need time to pick up their instruments and get ready to play so you need to cue them in advance of a song coming up. The approach to use is that you as the MD stand up slightly in advance of the song. This gives the musicians a visual cue to get ready and pick up their instruments. Just prior to starting to conduct you then lift up your arms as the cue for the musicians to bring the instruments up to their mouths, or put their hands on the keys as appropriate, ready to play. You then give them the up cue as described earlier before bringing your hand down for the first down beat to start.

Don't bring your hands up too early as the musicians won't thank you for having to hold the instruments up and waiting an eternity to start. Equally don't leave it so late that you effectively have to lift up your arms and come straight in with the first beat as they probably won't be ready. Also be aware that how you give the up

cue is important in signalling to the musicians how you expect them to play. For a loud piece of music, you would give a larger up cue and conversely for a softer start you would use a smaller movement.

It is important to empathise with the breathing of wind players when deciding on your conducting style. If you are conducting a slow piece of music with pauses, then the wind players will need to take a breath at various points. Be aware of this so that, for example, you may need to perhaps pause slightly before a down beat to give them chance to breath.

Remember that the musicians should be noting your face as well as your beat to establish what you want from the music. It is important, therefore, that your facial expression matches the mood of the music e.g. you should not be smiling if you are conducting a solemn piece. Just as a singer interprets a song using their voice, facial expressions and body movements, you as the MD are trying to coax a performance from the musicians and cast through your beat, facial expression and body movement. You are not just there to be a human metronome.

As you are running through the music at the band call it is worth checking with the musicians to make sure they are happy with the way you are conducting the numbers. If they are having any trouble following you, consider changing how you are beating the song to make it clearer. Some musicians may have difficulty counting through sections where they have numerous bars when they are not playing after which they play one or two notes. They may ask you for a cue at the appropriate point which you should mark into your score so you do not forget.

Another option is to let the musicians know about some key vocal cues to listen for to reassure them they have not miscounted. You should always be careful with isolated vocal cues as the cast may not always sing what you expect them to sing and the vocal cue may not materialise. However, if the music has a vamp bar and moves on when the cast or soloist starts to sing, it is helpful to tell the musicians so that they can mark up their scores. This gives reassurance about moving on at the correct time and helps to keep everyone together.

An option for beating a vamp bar is to beat with your right hand and hold your left hand out in front of you palm down to signify "wait". When it is time to move on you then use both hands to mark the first down beat of the bar after the vamp.

There is also the question of whether to use your hands to conduct or use a baton. This is a matter of personal taste. I prefer to use a baton as I think in a show situation where the lights are down it is easier for the musicians to see than just using your hands, especially as in some of the more modern shows you may be wearing a black shirt as opposed to say a white jacket for more conventional shows. Your arms will not be as clear as a white baton. The baton also gives a clear indication of the start and end of the beats which might not be as obvious if you are just using your hand.

There are different batons with varying grips so if you decide to use one, try a few out in the music shop to find one you are comfortable with.

CHAPTER 10

Dress Rehearsal

Assuming you have done your job properly, by the time you reach the dress rehearsal, the cast should be at their peak singing wise and know what is expected of them. The band will have had their band call and should also know what is expected. Your job now is to bring it all together and ensure that the cast and band perform the musical numbers by staying together and for the band to enhance the performance by accompanying the singers, not drowning them.

Remember that for the chorus numbers you will be directing the cast on stage and the band keeping them together. With some principal numbers, where there is scope to vary the tempo and introduce pauses, you will be following the principals, allowing them to put their own interpretation on the song, and keeping the band in with them. Be aware that there will be some performers who are quite disciplined in rehearsals but who then become completely star struck when they get on stage and go off on tangents. You will need to try to keep the musicians with them the first time they do this, before taking the opportunity after the show to raise any issues with them and try to rein them in for the remainder of the run.

Depending on how the amplification system is set up, you as the MD may find it very difficult to judge the overall balance between the volume of the singing from the stage and the volume of the orchestra. You will be relying on feedback from the director and/or the sound technicians as to whether the orchestra are at the right level. Make sure you get that feedback and note how you need to change things if necessary for the opening night. Time wise you are unlikely to be able to keep repeating numbers as you need to run the full show to check the continuity and for the cast to know how long they have for costume and scene changes.

Where funding permits, the band/orchestra can be amplified and balanced through the main sound system with the vocal microphones so that the sound technician can control the overall balance. This is more common where you are using keyboards, bass guitar and drums than when you have a full band or orchestra,

although quite a number of societies now try to amplify all the musicians to include in the sound mix where funds permit. Where the full band or orchestra is amplified through the sound system, the sound technician can also feed the sound through speakers onto the stage for the benefit of the cast. This is particularly useful where the cast are relying on solo instrument cues for songs, as it is not always easy to hear the instrument directly from the pit area. Make sure in these circumstances that you find time before the dress rehearsal starts to have a sound check with the band or orchestra. This will involve each musician playing in turn to ensure they are being picked up by the microphones. It is then useful to play one of the musical numbers from the show where the full band is involved to get an overall balance between the instruments.

In the scenario where the musicians are being routed through the main sound system, it is particularly important for you to keep the overall volume of the band down so that it can be boosted through the sound system if required. If the direct sound from the pit is too loud then even taking all the sound of the band out of the mix may not reduce it enough to be able to hear the cast. You can regularly read reports of shows where there is a comment that "the band was too loud". It does not matter how good the musicians sound, if you do not control their volume to complement the singers you will get no thanks.

It is worth mentioning at this point that depending on the venue you are performing in, or the show you are performing, you may not be in front of the stage with direct eye contact with the cast. An example of this could be "Godspell" where it is usual to have the band at the back of the stage. In this instance, you may have a camera trained on you so that a live feed can be sent to monitors in the auditorium for the cast to see your beat and cues. This can be unnerving the first time as you feel as if you have lost some control. Provided the technology works and the cast are well rehearsed this should not present a problem. It is wise to check that all the technology is working and the cast can see you on the monitors before launching into the dress rehearsal.

Once you start the dress rehearsal, make notes yourself after each musical number regarding anything you are not happy with either from the cast or the musicians so that you can draw attention to these matters at the end of the rehearsal. This is a skill you will

need to develop. Unlike the director or choreographer, who does not take part once the show starts, you are an integral part of every performance. You are directing both the cast and musicians for the musical numbers and can make or break a show based on how well you perform. I recommend you go over any Act 1 issues with the band in the interval before running Act 2, and cover Act 2 issues immediately after the second act has finished. You can then let the musicians go and focus on issues you want to raise with the cast regarding any musical numbers from the show in one go.

Remember that the director and choreographer will also no doubt have notes to go over with the cast together with possibly the stage manager and the technical manager. It can all get a bit hectic at the end of the dress rehearsal when it is late and the hall or theatre crew are waiting to lock up and there are all these points to get over. The cast will also be tired and may not be taking everything in. You need to decide what are the key points you need to make there and then and what can wait until just before the cast go on at opening night.

CHAPTER 11

Show Week

Eventually show week arrives and you have come to the opening night. The adrenaline will be pumping along with the nerves. As MD it is important that you exude calm yourself in the hope that some of this will rub off on the cast. You should also ensure that the cast warm up their voices prior to the show. It is preferable if you can arrange for them to get to the theatre before the doors are open to the public so that you can run through the warm up exercises you would normally do at rehearsals on the stage. If this is not possible you should arrange for them to warm up back stage.

Just before the cast take their places, it is customary for the production team to give the cast a back stage pep talk and cover any final issues. This is your chance to pick up on any issues which you noticed from the dress rehearsal and did not get chance to say directly after the rehearsal. Be positive and try and boost the confidence of the cast. You then need to check that all your musicians are in place before you go out to the pit and take your place ready for the cue to strike up the overture.

How you get to the pit varies between societies. In the past all the lights went down and the MD walked out to the pit under a spotlight to the applause of the audience. This is becoming less common. More often these days, the MD enters the pit while the lights are still up and waits for a cue to strike up the overture. Sometimes a red/green light box is used, where the red signal tells the MD to get ready and the green signifies everything is ready back stage and the MD is clear to start the show. Sometimes the MD is given a headset so that the stage manager can communicate with them to indicate when everything is ready and they can start the show. Make sure that the band/orchestra tune up prior to starting each act of the show.

At the end of the show, it is customary for the MD and orchestra to be acknowledged by applause after the cast have taken their bows. As the MD you should discuss what is going to happen with the director.

After the show the cast are likely to be on a high. It is not the time to start picking fault with things that may have gone wrong. You should note any issues as the show progresses and then decide how you raise these. If it is a general issue of the cast not projecting while singing, this can be raised at the pre show pep talk before the following night's performance. If it is an issue related to a particular principal, it may be better to see them separately to save time at the pep talk before the next performance. If they have gone wrong they will no doubt know themselves so your job is to offer positive encouragement on how best to make sure it does not happen again.

It is very easy to get complacent as the show week progresses and the cast think they know the show and start to relax. When doing a full week run the danger nights can often be Wednesday or Thursday. Try not to let the cast rest on their laurels. Mention things at the pre show pep talks where they can improve their performance to keep them thinking and on their toes. This applies even right up to the final performance. Don't forget to apply this same principal to the band, as they too can get complacent part way through a run. If the performance is slipping let them know and get it back on track.

Things do not always go to plan so always expect the unexpected. In order to cue the orchestra you will be following your script to be able to stand up in good time and bring in the musicians. It is not unknown, however, for the cast to forget lines and sometimes jump a whole page or more of script, especially if very similar lines are repeated in different parts of the script. You need to be ready in case the song comes up sooner than you thought. In the best-case scenario, the cast will recover and work their way back to the original script so panic over. The worst case may be that they miss the song altogether because it was part of the page they jumped.

One thing to remember during the final show is to ask the musicians to clean off any pencil markings from their scores. Some choose to do this song by song as they go along. This is not usually a problem when there is a band pit, but can be distracting in a hall without a pit. They should certainly not be cleaning band parts if the musicians are in full view on stage. One option is to ask them to clean up all the music for Act I in the interval and the rest at the end of the show. Rights holders can fine societies for sending back bands parts with pencil markings still in them. With popular shows,

the parts may arrive back from one society and be almost immediately sent out to another society. You as an MD would not thank them if the first thing you had to do on receiving the band parts was to rub out someone else's pencil markings.

CHAPTER 12

What Happens Next?

Hopefully if you have done your job well, you will have had a successful show and will be asked to stay on as MD for the next production. You will now have the added benefit of the experience you have gained from the show you have just completed. Once the euphoria has died down it is worth going over how things have gone and where you experienced issues so that you can make positive changes next time around.

However many shows you do, you never stop learning. There is always going to be something new or unexpected which arises. I hope this guidance note has helped to draw your attention to what you might be expected to deal with and given you some tips to help you.

Good luck for what will hopefully be a very rewarding pastime which will allow you to use your skills to the full as well as making it possible for many other people to enjoy the amateur theatre because of your efforts.

APPENDIX 1

Common Musical Terms

A Cappella	Unaccompanied vocal music
Accelerando (Accel.)	Gradually faster
Adagio	Slow
Agitato	Agitated
Allargando	Slower with a larger tone
Allegro	Fast, lively
Allegretto	Rather lively, but not as much as Allegro
Andante	Moderate pace
Andantino	Alternatively faster or slower than Andante
A Tempo	In time - return to the normal speed after a change.
Attacca	Go on at once
Brio	With vigour
Coda	A passage added at the end of the music to finish it off
Colla voce	Follow the solo instrument or voice
Con	With
Crescendo (Cresc.)	Gradually louder
Da cap (D.C.)	From the beginning
Dal segno (D.S.)	From the sign
Decrescendo (Decresc.)	Gradually softer
Diminuendo (Dim)	Gradually softer

Dolce	Sweetly
Dolcissimo (Dolciss.)	Very sweetly
Espressivo (Espr.)	With expression
Fine	The end
Forte (f)	Loud
Forte piano (fp)	Loud then soft
Fortissimo (ff)or(fff)	Very loud
Forzando (fz)	A sudden accent
Grandioso	Grandly
Grave	Very slow and solemn
Grazioso	Gracefully
Largo	Slow
Legato	Smoothly
Legatissimo	As smoothly as possible
Leggiero	Light and delicate
Lento	Slow
L'istesso tempo	Same speed i.e. the speed of the beat is the same but the type of note on which it is based changes.
Loco	Notes to be played at their normal pitch. Seen after an indication to play an octave higher or lower
Lunga pausa	A long pause
Ma	But
Maestoso	Majestically
Marcato (Marc.)	Accented
Meno	Less
Mezzo forte (mf)	Moderately loud

Mezzo piano (mp)	Moderately soft
Moderato	Moderately
Molto	Much
Morendo	Dying away
Mosso	Movement
Non	Not
Passionato	Passionately
Pesante	Heavy
Piano (p)	Soft
Pianissimo (pp)or(ppp)	Very softly
Più	More
Pizzicato	Plucked. Used in string music
Poco	A little
Poco a poco	Little by little
Portamento	Glide smoothly from one note to the next
Prestissimo	As fast as possible
Presto	Very fast
Quasi	As if or like
Rallentando (Rall.)	Gradually slower
Ritardando (Ritard)	Gradually slower
Ritenuto (Rit.)	Held back
Rubato	Robbed i.e. taking some of the duration of one note and adding it to another which maintaining the normal length of the phrase
Scherzando	Playful
Segue	Carry on with what follows

Sempre	Always
Senza	Without
Sforzando (sf)or(sfz)	Forcing the sound
Simile	In a similar manner
Sordini	Mutes
Sostenuto	Sustained
Staccato (Stacc.)	Detached
Staccatissimo	Very detached
Stringendo	Gradually faster
Subito	Suddenly
Tacet	Silent
Tempo	The speed
Tempo giusto	In a strict time
Tempo primo) Tempo I)	Resume the original speed
Tenuto (Ten.)	Held
Tremolo (Trem.)	Rapid repetition of a note or alternation of two notes
Troppo	Too much
Tutti	All
Un, una, uno	One
Vibrato	Vibrating
Vivace) Vivo)	Quick, lively
Vivacissimo	Very lively
Voce	Voice
Volti subito (V.S.)	Turn the page quickly

APPENDIX 2

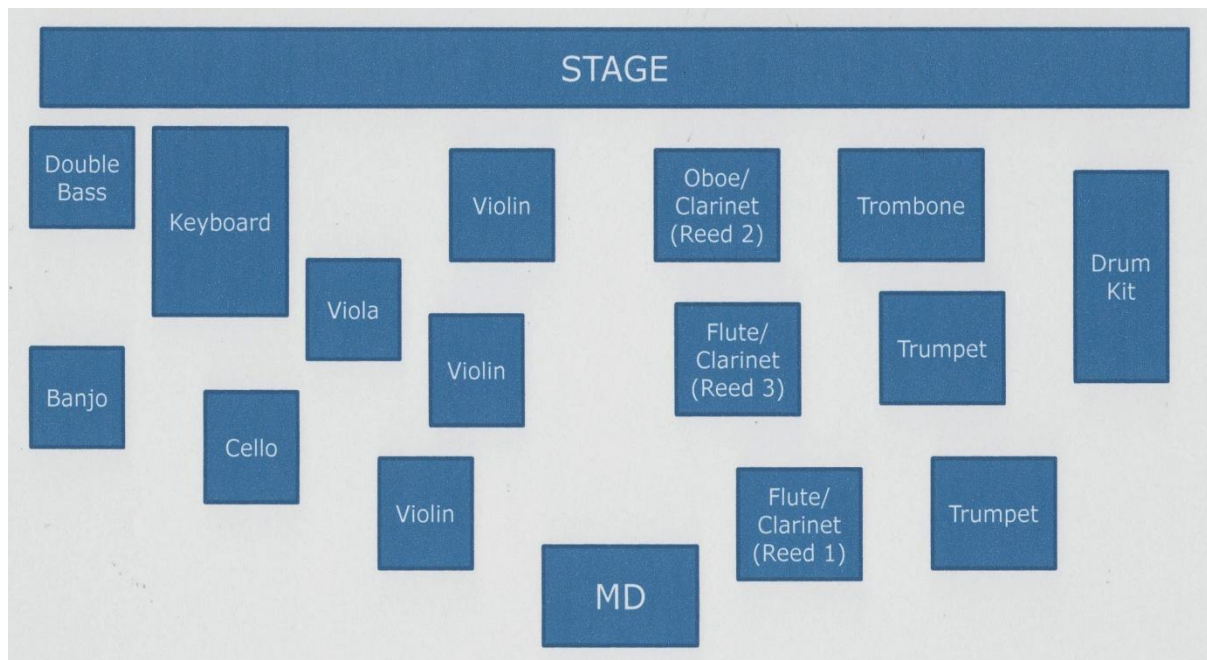
Examples of Orchestra Pit layouts

Four examples of band/orchestra layouts are shown covering a conventional orchestra with strings, a band set up where keyboards have replaced the strings, a large orchestra set up including a rock band within it and an unconventional set up where the band are split.

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers

Below is the layout I used for the orchestra for Seven Brides for Seven Brothers. The performance was in a civic hall without an orchestra pit, so I had more flexibility about the layout than if I was constrained to a set orchestra pit size.

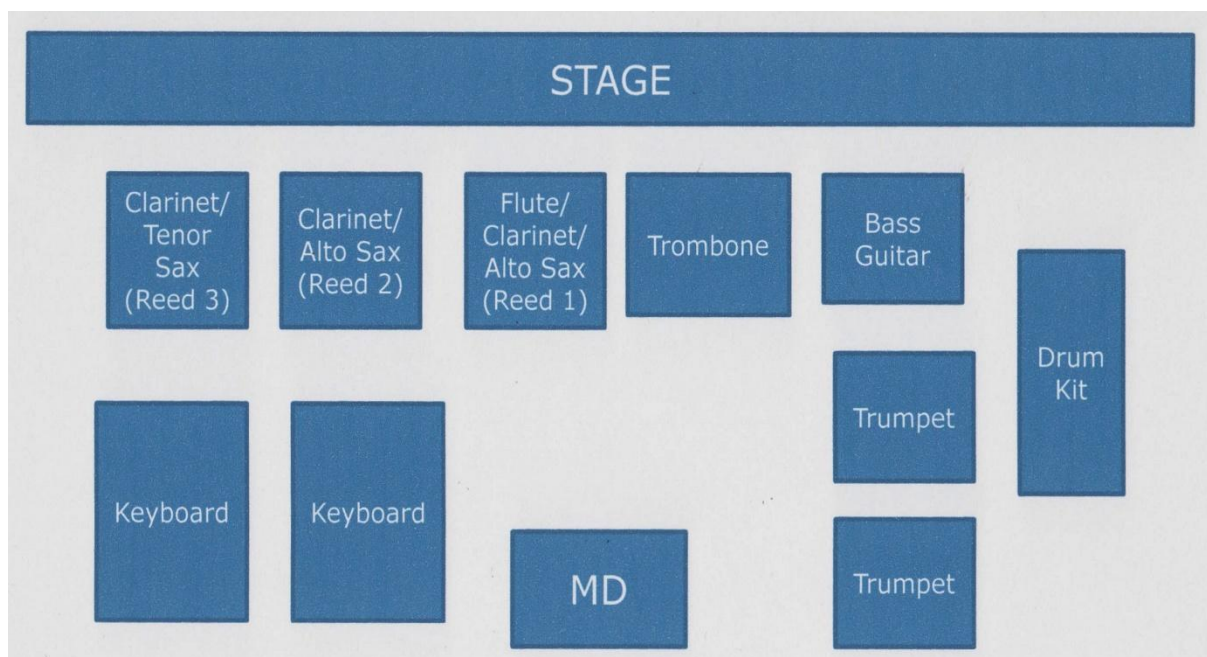
The layout shows strings, keyboard and banjo to the left of the MD and reeds, brass and drum kit to the right, which is common when working with a rectangular orchestra area.



Guys and Dolls

Below is the layout I used for Guys and Dolls in a small theatre pit. The full orchestration was 5 reeds, Horn, 3 trumpets, trombone, 4 violins, cello, bass and percussion, 17 musicians in all. Budget constraints and limits on the pit size meant that I needed to work with a smaller number of musicians. I omitted Reeds 4 and 5, the horn, trumpet 3, the violins and the cello. I included 2 keyboards to cover the strings and any key lines from the instruments omitted. Given that I was not using the string section, I also used a bass guitar to play the bass part rather than the double bass.

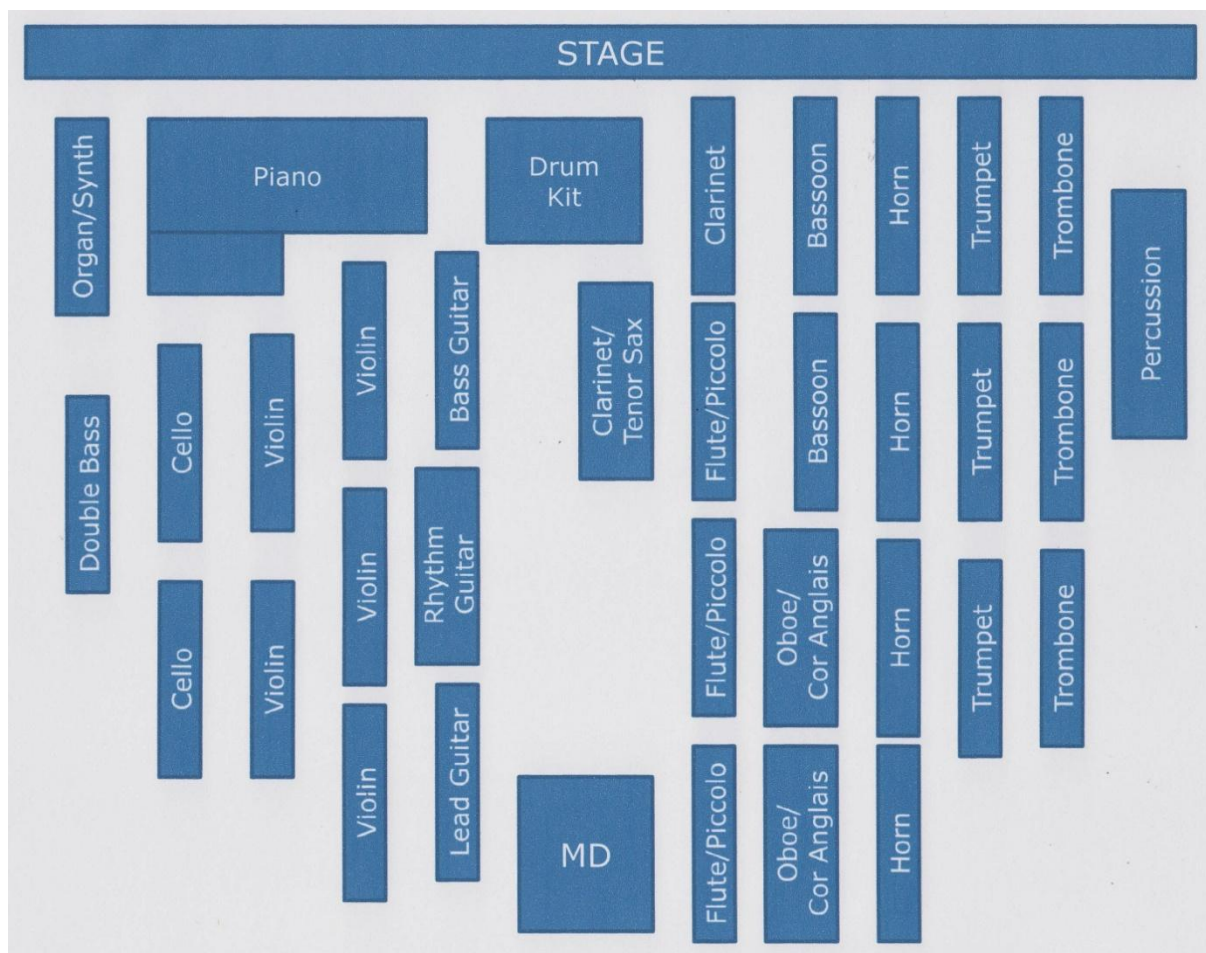
The layout below is similar to the one shown for Seven Brides for Seven Brothers except that the keyboards are to the left of the MD in place of the strings and the reeds are in front of the MD position because of the limits of the pit area. There was not enough space to have the reeds and brass together with the percussion to the right of the MD.



Jesus Christ Superstar

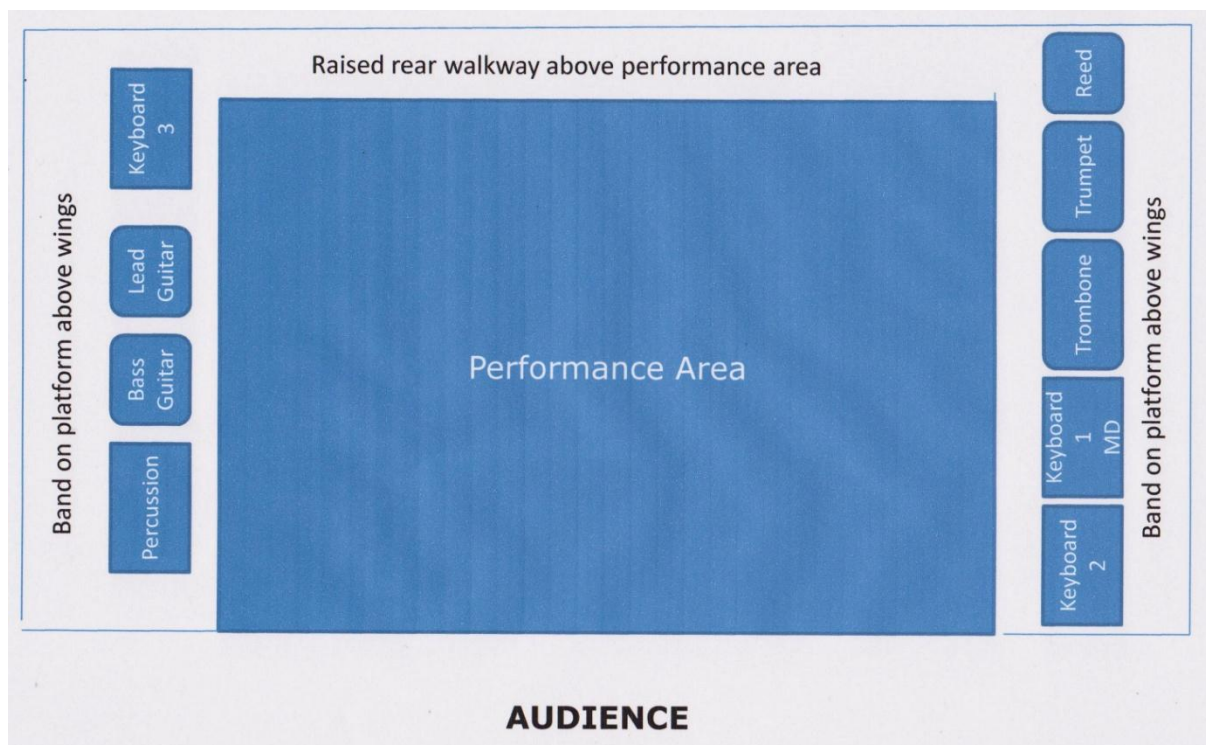
Below is the orchestra layout I used for Jesus Christ Superstar. This was performed in a civic hall without a pit, so there was the opportunity to both use a larger number of musicians and have more flexibility over the layout. The orchestra was different in that it had the conventional string, reed, brass and percussion sections, but also embedded within it was a rock group of guitars and drums.

The layout follows the same convention as the one shown for Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, in that the strings are to the left of the MD and the reeds, brass and percussion are to the right. However, because of the size of the orchestra and the need to keep everyone together with a tight beat, I placed the rock section in the centre around me. The orchestra was comprised of 34 musicians in all.



Split Band Layout

Below is an example of the set up in a theatre I have performed in on a number of occasions. The cast perform at floor level within a few feet of the front row of the audience, so there is no room for the band in front of them. Even if there were space, the band would block the view of the performers. The band is therefore sited on raised platforms at both sides of the stage above the wings. A camera is trained on the MD to give a live feed to a monitor in the auditorium for the cast to see the MD's beat. There is also a monitor for the band members on the opposite side to the MD, as their view of him is often obstructed by curtains or scenery cloths. The band is amplified and fed through the sound system so that it can be balanced with the performers.





David Gilson has over 25 years experience as a musical director in the amateur theatre working in the North East Region of NODA. His credits include the standards Hello Dolly, Oliver, Half a Sixpence, Seven Brides for Seven Brothers and Guys and Dolls. He has also been MD for rock musicals, including Joseph, Godspell, Rock Nativity and Jesus Christ Superstar, together with numerous cabarets and pantomimes. This has involved conducting musicians from small rock groups for shows such as Godspell, through to a combined orchestra and rock group of 34 players for Jesus Christ Superstar. He was also guest conductor for the finale number to a gala concert, Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March No 1, "Land of Hope and Glory", with six societies on stage at the same time involving around 200 people. This included a choral society, male voice choir, Gilbert and Sullivan society, amateur operatic society, a concert brass group and a young musician's band and choir.

He holds the Associate Diploma from the London College of Music for piano (A.L.C.M.) and has had formal training on both pipe organs and electronic organs.

He is an individual member of NODA and holds the NODA Commendation award for services to amateur theatre in connection with musical direction. He has been involved with NODA cabarets, both as an MD and as a keyboard player in the cabaret bands.