

# RCMJD ORCHESTRAL & ENSEMBLE GUIDELINES

## WHO ARE THESE GUIDELINES FOR AND WHY DO WE NEED THEM?

These guidelines to orchestral behaviour are intended for distribution to all Royal College of Music Junior Department students, even those (e.g. singers, pianists and guitarists) who are unlikely to perform in an orchestral environment: many of the points contained below apply equally to ensemble playing, and we hope they will help students to make the most of the opportunities for concerted music-making provided at the RCMJD. Please read them (all) carefully and remember all the summary bullet points.

## SUMMARY

- Be punctual
- Be sure that you're sitting properly
- Tune up at the appropriate time
- Have a 2B pencil (and preferably an eraser) ready at all times
- Ask the principal of your section if you have any queries: he or she will ask the conductor (or tutor) if necessary – but keep talk to a minimum
- Don't make distracting or unnecessary movements
- Be aware of what is happening in the whole orchestra
- Follow the leader when acknowledging applause

# PRACTICAL POINTS APPLICABLE TO ALL

## PUNCTUALITY

Please be ready to play, sitting in the correct seat, before the rehearsal is due to start. Don't wait to be told to go on stage. The conductor has every right to expect to start rehearsing at the stipulated time with a full complement: any late arrivals are disruptive and can render pointless any work done until then; one latecomer in a 90-strong orchestra could be letting down 89 others! If you have a really valid reason for being late, tell the conductor, preferably in advance.

## SEATING

Before the rehearsal starts, make sure that you have enough room to play and that you can see both the conductor and your music (and each other in the case of ensembles): this means that a line between you and the conductor should pass through the music, or if you are sharing a part (say as part of a string section), the conductor/music line goes midway between you and your partner (be fair about this). It is also important that the conductor can see *you*, so don't hide behind the stand. Your posture should be upright but relaxed: it is a good idea to practise orchestral music sitting down.

## TUNING UP

Procedures for tuning up are not standardised, but whatever system is used, make sure that whoever gives the tuning-note (usually the oboe, on an A) can be heard, by you and everyone else, for a reasonable time: then tune quickly and quietly, without using the opportunity to do some last-minute practice – only play enough to check that you are in tune. You will, of course, have arrived at the rehearsal in sufficient time to warm up your instrument and yourself.

## WRITING IN PARTS

It is absolutely essential that every single player has a 2B pencil (preferably with an eraser on the end) at every rehearsal. (Anything harder than 2B is difficult to read and rub out, and can damage the paper; anything softer gets blunt too quickly.) Use this pencil with discretion: writing too much on the part can obscure the music, and there often simply isn't time to read overlong comments as well as play the notes, so restrict yourself to changes made by the conductor (such as altered dynamics or indications of the beat). If possible, put tempo indications above the staff and dynamics below, which is where you would expect to find them in printed parts; make sure there is no doubt which part of the music your markings are referring to. To show where the beats are going to be, use a short vertical line directly over the note-head (not numbers); if there is any ambiguity about the number of beats in a bar, write e.g. "In 6" at the beginning of the bar (there can be no doubt what this is referring to, unlike other possibilities such as 6 in a circle). Other useful markings include a wavy line over a passage where the tempo may fluctuate slightly, *VS* (*volti subito*), for turn page quickly, and a drawing of a pair of spectacles, which means 'watch out!'; these are also reminders for you to watch the conductor even more carefully than you already are! If you are in doubt about how to mark your part, ask your tutor.

# ORCHESTRAL ETIQUETTE

## QUESTIONS

If you have any problems, ask the principal of your section: he or she should be sufficiently experienced to answer your query, or pass it on to the conductor (or a tutor). If you pay attention to everything the conductor says, and to every little detail in the part, you may find that you don't *need* to ask questions after all.

## MOVEMENT

In an orchestral situation, unnecessary movements can be very distracting, both to other players and to a concert audience. British orchestras tend to move less than other nationalities, but some movements are frowned on the world over. Foot-tapping is one of these (if you tap your foot, you take your own tempo, not that of your colleagues or the conductor), as is turning your head to look at another player during a solo, whether the solo is going well or badly. *Never* play with your legs crossed, or in clothing that prevents you from playing properly.

## ACKNOWLEDGING APPLAUSE

Stand up and sit down with the leader, who will act on the advice of the conductor: the only exception to this is when the conductor singles out one particular player or section for an individual 'bow'; if this happens to you, simply stand up (don't bow) and *stay standing* until told to sit, which will usually be after the whole orchestra has stood up again. Try not to talk during bows, no matter how exciting the concert was!

# EXTRA POINTS FOR EACH SECTION

## STRINGS

Keep alert. You are a team. Your contribution and full attention are vital. It matters that you all play in the same part of the bow within your section. You will not be able to hear much of your own sound, but you can develop antennae for intonation and blending of sound. This is the mystery and magic of the orchestral world!

Make sure you get bowings from the desk in front of you: front-desk players, relay any changes or additions you make in the part to the desk behind you. It is customary for players seated on the left to be responsible for marking the parts when the orchestra is actually playing, so that the rehearsal can continue smoothly. Keep your music clear and tidy. Use the eraser *first* when changing a bowing.

Section principals and those on the front desks: don't be afraid of the conductor. He/she likes to have eye-contact with you. Ask if something is not clear. You are responsible for your team; try and be aware of the other principal players and what is going on behind you.

Sliding mutes are essential. You can prevent the Tourte mute from vibrating by attaching a small dot of Blu-tack to the tailpiece and resting the mute in place when you are not using it.

## WOODWIND

Make sure that any alternative instruments, such as piccolo, cor anglais, A clarinet, are to hand and in working order, and, as far as possible, warmed up.

## BRASS

Always have your mutes ready (not in your case at the other end of the hall); it is a good idea to label your mutes clearly with your name.

## PERCUSSION

Always set up instruments well in advance, and be prepared to clear up afterwards: be sure you know who is playing which instrument when, and that all the necessary sticks and beaters are to hand.

*With thanks to all RCMJD orchestral tutors for their help in compiling these guidelines.*

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