

Transfer method of conducting in the symphony orchestra of the Hanoi National Conservatory of Music, Vietnam

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Abstract – This is a qualitative designed and conducted with two primary research aims, which were: 1) To study the life and experiences of symphonic orchestra conductors in Hanoi, Vietnam; 2) To study the inheritance process for conductors of the symphonic orchestra in Hanoi, Vietnam. The research area for this investigation was purposively selected as the Vietnam National Academy of Music in Hanoi. The investigation began in October 2012 and was concluded in January 2014. The two key informants for this investigation were expert conductors and teachers at the academy, Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiểu Hoa. Data was collected from a combination of document analysis and field research. Tools used for data collection included interviews, participant and non-participant observation and focus group discussions. Results show that both of the key informants for this investigation were born into families of artists and had a particularly close relationship with traditional folk art. Scholarships to study abroad at the Tchaikovsky University, Russia enabled them to learn from Russian conductors and they developed the skills that have now led them to be recognized as being among the most accomplished conductors in Vietnam. The process of instruction preferred by these two academics is taught in three steps: the preparation stage, the teaching stage and the assessment and evaluation stage. The benefits of studying with Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiểu Hoa are the cumulative experiences of international conducting practices and the high standards that the two academics possess and demand.

Keywords – Transfer method, conducting, symphony orchestra, Hanoi National Conservatory of Music, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Classical music is taught at institutions across Vietnam and has been standardized as a subject at higher-level education. The genre remains popular in Vietnamese society and the country has produced many award-winning national musicians [1]. Musical institutions in Vietnam have followed the Russian and American standards of classical music and international music is taught to the same degree as national Vietnamese music [2]. One of the major musical establishments in Vietnam is the Vietnam National Academy of Music, formerly known as the Hanoi National Conservatory of Music. This higher education organization offers tuition in a wide variety of musical instruments and genres [3]. In addition, they run symphony orchestras, large classical

ensembles led by conductors. Due to the size of the symphony orchestras, the conductor plays a very important role in maintaining the rhythm and harmony of the musicians and their instruments. Due to the position of the conductor as the group leader, the individuals performing the role must display strong leadership qualities and earn the trust and respect of the ensemble [4].

Symphony orchestras are comprised of four sections of musical instruments: string, woodwind, brass and percussion. The orchestra is arranged in rows, each row containing instruments of the same or similar type [5]. The most important and most prominent group of instruments in the symphony orchestra is the group of string instruments. The size of the orchestra depends on the number of string

instruments in the performance. The conductor leads the performance by giving instructions with a baton from a small stand in front of the orchestra. The musicians are arranged in a semi-circular formation with (generally) the strings at the front and centre, the brass and percussion at the rear and the woodwind in the middle [6]. This type of orchestra predominantly plays symphonies, extended musical compositions, usually in three or four segments. Small symphony orchestras will be composed of 40-60 musicians, medium-sized orchestras will be composed of 60-80 musicians and large orchestras will be composed of 80-110 musicians.

The ultimate purpose of symphony orchestras, as with all musical ensembles, is to stir emotion through sound. It is more difficult to play to the correct emotions in larger orchestras due to the need for all component parts to play in the same rhythm, at the same pitch and speed. The job of the conductor is to keep all the instruments in harmony. In the past, conductors kept the timing of the orchestra by standing at the front of the ensemble and beating a long stick on the ground. This caused a number of problems, not least affecting the sound of the music and causing mistiming when the stick accidentally struck the leg of the conductor. Over time, the baton was introduced and the conductor was able to perform a number of more complex functions, including giving more detailed timing instructions, signalling volume adjustments and controlling the overall harmony of the performance [7].

Given the importance of the conductor to symphonic orchestras and the difficulty of the role, it is important to ensure that inheritance of techniques and professional standards is thorough. Inheritance of Vietnamese conducting techniques currently takes place in the major musical institutions of Vietnam in the form of academic courses. However, inheritance of musical culture is currently under threat from modern musical developments that dilute traditional practices [8]. Popularity of conducting is on the wane due to the intense concentration, dedication and skill required. There is a danger that, without an increasingly systematic transfer method, Vietnamese conducting will become synonymous with conducting in other countries [9]. With this in mind, the research team was interested in analyzing the transfer method of a conductor's tasks in the symphony orchestra of the Vietnam National Academy of Music, Hanoi.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This investigation was designed and conducted to study the life and experiences of symphonic orchestra conductors in Hanoi, Vietnam and to study the inheritance process for conductors of the symphonic orchestra in Hanoi, Vietnam.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research area for this investigation was purposively selected as the Vietnam National Academy of Music in Hanoi. The research sample was purposively selected and divided into three groups. The two key informants were expert conductors and teachers at the academy, Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa. The casual informants were teachers and students on music production courses at the academy. These informants were selected on the basis of their professional relationships with the two key informants. This included members of the symphony orchestra at the academy, who were also teachers or students. The general informants were former teachers and students on music production courses at the academy who had successfully graduated. This qualitative investigation began in October 2012 and was concluded in January 2014. Data was collected from a combination of document analysis of current scholarly literature and field research. Tools used for data collection included interviews, participant and non-participant observation and focus group discussions. The two major categories for discussion were effective techniques for management of music production knowledge and effective presentation of music production knowledge for inheritance.

The research procedure was divided into seven stages: 1) The researchers identified the research area and built relationships with the research sample to promote familiarity and make respondents feel relaxed about providing information; 2) Related literature and theories were identified; 3) Data was recorded from related literature; 4) Field research was conducted and data collected using the data collection tools listed above; 5) Data were verified by a process of triangulation and organized into categories according to the aims of the research; 6) Data were analyzed by a process of analytic induction; 7) The results were presented as a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh (Figure 1) was born on 17th October 1947 and is a former vice dean of the

Vietnam National Academy of Music. He started to play music when he was 11 years old. At present he is a retired artist who has composed over 400 songs. He was also selected to be a national artist of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In 1999, his works were played in New York and America. Meanwhile, Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa (Figure 2) was born in 1952 in Tang Hua province of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. He started to play instruments including the trumpet and the French horn in 1962 at the Vietnam Academy of Music. In 1970, he had a chance to study music in Moscow, Russia and learned how to be a conductor about six years later. He also studied music with other well-known conductors. After he finished his studies, he lived and worked in Russia for 26 years. Now, he is a dean at the Vietnam Academy of Music.



Figure 1. Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh



Figure 2. Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa

Both of the key informants for this investigation were born into families of artists and had a particularly close relationship with traditional folk art. These foundations meant that both had the opportunity to study music from an early age. Both were taught at prestigious music schools and both were granted scholarships to study abroad at the Tchaikovsky University, Russia. This enabled them to learn from Russian conductors and they developed the skills that

have now led them to be recognized as being among the most accomplished conductors in Vietnam (Respondent 4, personal communication, 2012).

Now, both scholars are responsible for the development of national Vietnamese music. As assistant director of the Hanoi Institute of Music, Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh was responsible for the development of musical production courses. Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa continues to influence the direction of the National Academy of Music. Importantly, both academics are recognized as national musicians and possess high levels of skill in conducting music and symphonic orchestras. They are teachers and Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh is regularly invited to the National Academy of Music as a visiting lecturer. In their roles, they are directly responsible for the transmission and inheritance of key skills and personality characteristics integral to the role of symphonic orchestra conductors [10].

The process of instruction preferred by these two academics is taught in three steps (Respondent 2, personal communication, 2012). The preparation stage is concerned with preparing the conductor for the song. During the teaching stage, students practice reading the score and conducting the music with a piano expert until they are able to conduct music with a symphony orchestra. For the assessment and evaluation stage, students perform the score with an orchestra (Respondent 1, personal communication, 2012).

Teachers of classical choral and instrumental conducting in Vietnam must have successfully graduated in the field and have knowledge of teaching techniques employed in countries internationally recognized for their conducting heritage. These include Russia, China and Hungary. Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa prepare, teach and evaluate their lessons in similar fashions. To begin with, the teachers introduce their students to famous conductors and encourage the students to observe the way in which these conductors portray their emotions and the emotion of the music in their conducting [11]. After this, the students are required to read the score and familiarize themselves with the notes to the point when the music and the emotions become second nature. The purpose of practicing with a piano is for convenience. It would be impractical for the conductors to practice and learn with a full orchestra due to the size of the orchestra and number of instruments and musicians required [12]. When the

conductors are accomplished with the piano they will be ready to move on to the full orchestra.

The benefits of studying with Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa are the cumulative experiences of international conducting practices and the high standards that the two academics possess and demand (Respondent 6, personal communication, 2012). By learning from such experts, Vietnamese students are fortunate to have access to two of the world's finest symphonic conductors. Despite the internationalism of Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa, both are well-schooled in the traditional music of Vietnam. This is part of the foundation of their own musical education and the principles of traditional Vietnamese music are visible in their work. This means that students do not lose the cultural heritage of Vietnamese music by studying a course as international in its scope as symphonic conducting [13].

The National Academy of Music can boast staff with a wide variety of musical experiences and expertise. This means that students are fortunate in the choices available to them. The musical production department is particularly strong and the expertise of Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa is combined with the wide-ranging skill-sets of their colleagues. This creates a vibrant, exciting and creative learning environment that is conducive to producing cutting-edge scholars (Respondent 5, personal communication, 2012).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This was a qualitative designed and conducted with two primary research aims, which were: 1) To study the life and experiences of symphonic orchestra conductors in Hanoi, Vietnam; 2) To study the inheritance process for conductors of the symphonic orchestra in Hanoi, Vietnam. The research area for this investigation was purposively selected as the Vietnam National Academy of Music in Hanoi. The investigation began in October 2012 and was concluded in January 2014. The two key informants for this investigation were expert conductors and teachers at the academy, Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa. Data was collected from a combination of document analysis and field research. Tools used for data collection included interviews, participant and non-participant observation and focus group discussions. Results show that both of the key informants for this investigation were born into families of artists and had a particularly close

relationship with traditional folk art. Scholarships to study abroad at the Tchaikovsky University, Russia enabled them to learn from Russian conductors and they developed the skills that have now led them to be recognized as being among the most accomplished conductors in Vietnam. The process of instruction preferred by these two academics is taught in three steps: the preparation stage, the teaching stage and the assessment and evaluation stage. The benefits of studying with Dr. Nguyễn Phúc Linh and Dr. Nguyễn Thiều Hoa are the cumulative experiences of international conducting practices and the high standards that the two academics possess and demand.

Suggestions

From the results of this investigation, the research team wishes to make the following suggestions:

1. The National Academy of Music should publish a set of professional standards for its teachers to uphold and a second set of standards for its students to strive towards. This will help sharpen the professional image of the institute and Vietnamese conductors.
2. Musical institutions from the countries in the ASEAN socio-economic community should cooperate to create a set of professional conducting standards unique to Southeast Asia. This will improve conducting in the region and help boost the reputation of Southeast Asian conducting on the international stage.
3. Further research should be conducted to examine the effect of the government budget on learners of music production.
4. Further research should be conducted to examine the curriculum and learning resources for conductors in the National Academy of Music, Hanoi and other musical institutions throughout Vietnam.

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