

# Colchester Choir & Orchestra

## Rehearsal Guidelines

When we *rehearse* with our group, we get together with the music we *practiced* at home and learn how the individual parts blend into one whole musical work. It is during *rehearsals* that we coordinate elements such as tempo, phrasing, dynamics and expression. Rehearsal time is limited and essential to the success of the whole ensemble; please limit chatter, listen (to the conductor, the concertmaster, and to the other musicians when playing) and stay focused. When an orchestra plays “in sync”, it is musical magic, and we truly are greater than the sum of our parts!

### Rehearsal goals

1. Tempo – Are you following the tempo (and tempo changes) the conductor is indicating? What is the unit of beat (is the time signature in 4? In 2? Does the quarter note get the beat)? Are you rushing/slowing down in comparison to the rest of the group?
2. Dynamics – Are your melodies being heard? If you are playing the harmony, can you hear who is playing the melody? Are your crescendos and decrescendos coordinated with the rest of the ensemble?
3. Phrasing – Are you taking breaths between the appropriate phrases? Are the bowings you are using consistent with the other strings? Are your articulations consistent with your section (strings: spiccato or staccato? Winds: da-da or ta-ta?)
4. Eye and Ear Contact – Surprisingly the one aspect of rehearsing that is most neglected despite the fact that it’s so obvious why we need to do this. Can you see the conductor? Can you see your section leader? If you and another instrument are playing the same part, entering at the same time, finishing a phrase another instrument starts, are you listening for that other part? Are my entrances accurate (is someone playing before my entrance? Am I following the conductor’s cues)? Am I cutting off with the conductor/section leader? Are my rhythms coordinated with other players who have similar rhythms?

Whether you are practicing or rehearsing, **there should always be a pencil in your music stand.** Use it to mark down any reminders in your music such as:

- Breath marks, bowings
- Fingerings
- Tempo and meter changes
- Any spots where you need to pay extra attention (accelerando/decelerando)
- Anything else that will help you stay together – I note who plays during long rests in case I lose count.

Circle or write down the measure numbers of any spots where you need to practice or go over with your teacher. Keeping a small notepad handy may also be helpful for this purpose.

## Roles

### **Concertmaster**

Leader of the first violin section, the concertmaster makes decisions regarding bowing, articulation and other technical details of violin playing for the violins, and sometimes for all of the string players. They lead the orchestra in tuning before concerts and rehearsals. They may translate the conductor's generalized requests to string-specific clarification for the other string players. Watch and listen to the concertmaster's playing and bow gestures to bring cohesiveness to all the strings, as well as to the entire orchestra.

### **Section Leaders**

Section leaders provide musical leadership to their section. While CCO may not have explicitly defined section leaders, we all benefit from listening to those with the most experience and musical knowledge, whether it is related to their instrument, or to the specific piece we are playing. Section leaders share details regarding phrasing, bowing, breathing, pronunciation, and so on, to other members of their section. In orchestral music, different sections often play a melody together, either in unison or in harmony. Section leaders will consult with each other so that their breathing, phrasing, articulation and intonation match. Each section leader ultimately works together to achieve what is best for the whole ensemble.

The section leader is responsible for the performance level of the section. The principal might make suggestions so that the section sounds cohesive. In the case of the string family the concertmaster will choose the bowings and phrasings and then pass his or her markings to the other string section leaders for them to imitate.

The section leader is the conduit between the conductor and the other players in the section. The principal is the direct line of communication from the maestro to the members.

Sometimes the technique a conductor is asking for simply does not work on our instrument. If this happens the section leader will (if he or she dares) suggest an alternative. Some conductors are more receptive to interpretive suggestions than others, as you can well imagine.

## **General Etiquette (from the Chicago Symphony)**

*Note: These guidelines come from the Chicago Symphony, but are helpful for us as well. Our music director, however, is open to people asking questions as they come up during rehearsal.*

- Arrive early—at least 15 minutes early, or with enough time to both get your instrument out and warm up. There is nothing more awkward than shuffling through a crowd of seated musicians in the middle of Prelude to the Afternoon of a Fawn. If you are late (it happens), try to avoid taking your seat while the musicians are playing; if you can, wait for an appropriate break in the action to slip in.
- Come prepared. This means two things:
  - Come having thoroughly practiced your music. Nothing is more frustrating to conductors than to waste time rehearsing passages that the orchestra members didn't practice ahead of time.
  - Before you head to rehearsal, double check that you have your music, instrument, bow, rosin, reeds, and any necessary accessories. Be sure to note whether or not you need to bring your own stand to rehearsal or you'll be scrambling without one. You might consider keeping a wire stand in your car (like a spare tire) just in case!
- Bring a pencil. This one gets its own paragraph. Attending rehearsal without a pencil is like sitting through a university lecture without a taking notes. Even if you think you'll be able to remember every direction the conductor gives, every dynamic change, every cut, and every ritardando, really, you probably won't. Keep a couple pencils in your instrument case so they're always on hand.
- Don't under- or over-mark the music. Certainly write down bowings and musical directions as instructed. But don't ruin the sheet music by circling every last key change, accidental, and dynamic marking until your music is black with pencil. And if you're sharing a stand, especially avoid slathering the music with your personal notes and fingerings; it's unprofessional.
- Be courteous to your colleagues. Position yourself so both you and your stand partner have enough arm and leg room and can see the music comfortably. Don't be afraid to ask the people around or behind you if they can see the conductor or if you can move a little to give them more space.
- Don't tune loudly. Tune as softly as possible so the players around you can hear themselves as well as the tuning A.
- Don't chat. If you need to communicate something to your stand partner, do so inconspicuously and quietly. Save personal conversations for break time.
- At the same time, don't be afraid to ask questions. Approach your section leader during a break, or raise your hand with [appropriate] questions for the conductor for any clarifications.
- Don't tap your feet. The conductor is there to keep you in rhythm, and the tapping creates unnecessary noise.
- If you're sharing a stand, the inside player (or player further from the edge of the stage) turns the pages.

- Pass down bowings or comments from the section leader. Don't be the break in the chain.
- Players on the outside (closest to the edge of the stage) play the top line of a divisi section while the inside player plays the bottom.
- Leave your arrogance at home. Members of the orchestra are all equal; everyone is contributing. Don't gloat if you have a solo, and don't bust out personal solo concertos and performances pieces just to show off. Everyone will be more annoyed than impressed. Also, don't practice another orchestra member's solo to demonstrate that you can play it better.
- If at all possible, don't miss any rehearsals leading up to a concert. It is a sign of disrespect to both the conductor and your orchestra members if you're prioritize getting your nails done over working as hard as everyone else in preparation for a performance. Be careful not to double book yourself.
- If you've agreed to play a performance, don't back out if you get another gig, even if it pays better. It's bad form, and you may lose your opportunity to ever play with the initial ensemble again if the director deems you flaky.
- Learn the art of the "hidden yawn." Sometimes you just can't avoid yawning, but you can hide it with a little creativity. Lean over to tie your shoe or pretend to scratch your nose to hide your gaping mouth. Don't let the conductor catch you yawning. Ornery conductors may send you packing or never invite you back.
- Treat your music with kindness. Most sheet music is rented or borrowed from a library. Only write markings lightly in pencil so the next player to use it doesn't have to painfully scrub out markings with a massive rubber eraser. Try not to bend pages or tear them. Keep the music in a protective folder to keep it from getting crinkled in transit.
- Don't wear perfume or cologne. You'd be surprised by how many people are allergic or irritated by it.
- **TURN OFF YOUR PHONE.** Enough said.
- Stop when the conductor stops. If you keep playing, it's a sign that you're not paying attention. Also, don't noodle around or practice while the conductor is talking. Personal practice and group rehearsal are two separate activities.
- Don't eat during rehearsal. Bottles of water with lids are okay.
- Don't question the conductor or treat him/her with disrespect. Trust in their artistic direction. Don't argue with the conductor or you'll likely find yourself packing up and sent on your way.
- Don't complain about where you sit. Even if you've had seating auditions and you think you can play better than other members in your section, graciously accept your position. Just because you sit in the back doesn't mean you're not a valuable player; in fact, being in the group to begin with is a privilege in itself. But don't hesitate to practice your tail off in preparation for the next seating audition.
- Lastly, enjoy the music! Don't take rehearsal so seriously that you lose your connection with the piece or with your instrument. Playing music in an ensemble is a real treat; don't forget that you're taking part in a meaningful cultural tradition that will edify your audience.

## Other tips

### **Quick reactions during performance**

- If your leader makes a mistake with an incorrect bowing, it is not your responsibility to copy them. There are too many players in the section who would then also have to copy the leader's mistake with a split-second reaction. Since not all players will pick up on this, and not at the same time either, there will be many bows in different directions, and this is much worse than just the section leader with the opposite bowing. The leader should rectify their mistake very quickly anyway.
- If your leader forgets an entry after rests, you should only play if you're 100% certain that you're correct. If you're not, then watch the front desk like a hawk.
- If the conductor cues your entry incorrectly, do not follow them. If you're 100% certain that you're correct, then enter at the correct time. If you're not sure, then follow your front desk.
- If your leader breaks a string during performance, they'll need another violin immediately. It becomes the responsibility of the player behind the leader to swap violins, and for that player to walk offstage and replace the string quickly and efficiently. Alternatively, the player behind the leader can then swap with the last player of the section, so that he/she can continue to play as well, while the last player in the section replaces the string offstage. This would be a good procedure if there are solos coming up for the principal violinist (violinist seated behind the leader). The player who left the stage to change the string should not return to the stage until the conclusion of the movement or piece.

### **Orchestra etiquette: Extra useful information**

- Do not touch other musician's instruments or instrument cases without their permission. Some musicians get quite offended if you even touch their case to make room for yours next to theirs.
- Do not place your instrument case on a chair or sofa. Other musicians may want to sit down and some will be irritated if your case is in the way.