

Close Encounters of an Instrumental Kind

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Before committing to a project using instruments...

- Consider NOT using instruments!
- You may be better off simply using a fine pianist instead.

The Negatives...

- Expensive
- Often under-rehearsed
- Rules can be restrictive
- Players are not always capable — even the Pro's.

The Positives

- A whole world of repertoire opens to you
- It is great for singers to experience singing with players
- It can be a lot of fun to conduct!

So, if you decide to use an orchestra, do the following non-musical work long before your first rehearsal.

With professional players, hire a contractor:

1. He will hire good, collegial players.
2. He can give you great advice regarding
 - ✓ Length of services
 - ✓ Length and timing of breaks
 - ✓ Appropriate pay, including fees for recordings
 - ✓ Seating
 - ✓ Numbers of players

If using students, and their director is not involved

- Hire a well-liked, respected student to serve as your manager/contractor.
- ✓ She can perform many of the same services as a union contractor.
- ✓ She can also recommend students who are good players and responsible.
- ✓ She can nag those players.
- ✓ She can set up chairs and stands (using your seating plan).
- ✓ She can issue and collect parts.
- ✓ She can issue paychecks., etc., etc.

Also hire (or recruit) a Chorus Manager

- He can serve as crew chief for riser set up and strike.
- He can supervise lining up and filing on.
- He can supervise sit and stand cues.
- He can deal with purse/backpack storage.

Put EVERYTHING in writing.

- Dates, times, locations of rehearsals
- Dates, times, locations of concerts
- Program order with times
- Location of instrument case/purse/backpack storage
- Concert Attire
- Pay

Again, write down everything.

- Create a written seating chart for the orchestra and soloists. (Don't be afraid to ask for help.)
- Create a written seating chart for the chorus.
- Write out exactly how bows will work at the end of the piece/concert. Share that information with all performers...in writing.

And now to the music!

- Mark your full score first. If it is a rental, make a copy and use that as your working score.
- Text translation
- IPA
- Phrasing
- Voice doublings
- Tempi
- Write in instrument names next to every staff and cue.
- Know your clefs and transpositions. Practice this daily.

Use that full score in all rehearsals from Day 1!

- Full orchestral scores have more staves than choral scores! It takes time to get used to the look of the printed page.
- You will begin to notice things — where parts are independent and where they double.
- Harmonic analysis can really help, i.e. when you hear an F# in a C Major chord.

Practicing with a recording?

- It's useful, but it doesn't replace singing each and every part.
- Don't listen to recordings once you begin rehearsing the piece. It's confusing and will undermine your own mastery and interpretation.
- Commercial recordings often use tempi that simply don't happen unless you are dealing with top-drawer, professional players.

Instrumental Parts

If you're dealing with a rental company, it's often possible to negotiate performing rights and fees. There is usually some leeway in terms of when you receive the materials. It doesn't hurt to ask!

KNOW THE SCORE

- Sing or play every part many times.
- Conduct each part individually.

If recitatives are involved...

- Consider staying out of the picture when only continuo and soloist are involved.
- Consider reduced forces on accompanied recitatives.
- Regardless, practice these a lot, and run them many times with your soloists and a pianist.
- Recits are tricky, and you want them firmly in hand before facing an orchestra.

Prepare yourself mentally....

- This will be exhilarating, but challenging.
- Write out a rehearsal plan with exact times for each movement/section.

Now, look at the individual parts

- Make certain that the chorus parts, your full score, and the instrumental parts all align. Never trust a rental company. Never.
- Put the same musical marks in the instrumental parts as you did in your full score — Breath marks, marks of articulation, tempi, etc. (This is not rocket science.)
- Yes, you probably learned a thing or two about bowings in college, but unless you are an expert, do not put in bowings.
- Make two copies of each instrumental part on heavy bond paper — one to issue, one to replace the part that gets lost. NEVER issue original parts.

DURING THE REHEARSAL

- Know the names of your players if at all possible.
- Adhere to the written schedule you developed.
- Who tunes the orchestra? If you want something other than $A = 440$, chat with the contractor about that far in advance.
- DO NOT TALK except “I’m in 1 here,” faster, slower, louder, softly.
- Use exactly the same preparatory beats in rehearsal as you will use in the concert.
- Know exactly what you want at the ends of each movement in terms of rallentando, sub-division, etc.

- If you have more than one orchestral rehearsal, arrange to run *tutti* movements first and let players leave when their passages are over. The timpanist and third oboe player will love you for this kind of advance planning.
- Final rehearsals should always consist of run-throughs.
- ATA go back run the beginning and end of each section and transitions.
- Remind yourself, that professional players will fix things on their own. They don't have to be taught their parts.

- If a player asks you a technical question (Do you want a hook here?), respond with a musical answer, ie “I would like this to be slightly detached.
- Do not be intimidated. You are the one writing the check.
- Adhere to contracted lengths of each service and required breaks.
- You may want to put the break at the end of the service, but ask the contractor if that is OK.
- Expect minimal eye contact.
- Don’t talk when your arms are in preparatory stance.

- Baton or Hands — doesn't matter.
- Playing on the beat/behind the beat.
- Record the rehearsal for self-study.
- Be prepared for the reality you may not really hear what is happening because it is all so foreign.
- Remind yourself that sometimes the orchestra *should* dominate.
- Choruses will need energetic consonants to cut through the instruments.

- Prepare the chorus for the reality that you are going to be focused on a number of elements in addition to *them!*

DURING THE CONCERT

- Have your contractor/manager issue checks before the concert.
- Plan the ceremony of entrances, tuning, bows, etc. Ask for help if you're unsure.
- Give the same preparatory beat(s) in concert that you used in rehearsal.
- Players have a tendency to drag; don't let them.
- When players have been *tacet* for a long time, they really do need and appreciate a cue.
- Generally, players don't need as many cues as singers.

**HAVE A WONDERFUL TIME!
YOU DESERVE IT!**

AFTER THE CONCERT...

- Thank everyone for a job well done!
- Email players and thank them for their contributions to the concert.
- Chat with the contractor and tell her what you liked or disliked about particular players.
- Compile a list of the players you loved and of those you hated so that you can give guidance for the next gig.
- Return all rental material immediately.
- Put copies of parts in a file for future reference.

