

# STUDENT TIMES

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## A Beginning Conductor's Journey in Score Study

by Carmen Ramirez

Music has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I started piano lessons when I was eight, joined choir when I was ten, began playing cello in the school orchestra when I was twelve, and later began learning other instruments on my own time. Now I am a twenty-one-year-old junior music theory major at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, loving every minute of my education. There are so many classes I want to take and there is so much more about music that I want to learn, but there just does not seem to be enough time before I graduate.

Luckily, in the fall semester of 2020, I had a little extra space in my schedule and decided to take Conducting. Although this class was not a graduation requirement, I thought it would be an important skill to learn as a musician. I never thought that a conductor's job was easy, but I also never realized just *how much* goes into conducting. A conductor has to practice and analyze every little detail about a piece of music before it ever gets to the first rehearsal, and even after that, changes may be made in the moment. The art of conducting requires coordination and physical endurance. The score study that precedes the performance is time consuming, requiring a great

deal of skill and effort, and that is what makes it interesting.<sup>1</sup>

For the purposes here, we will examine Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*.<sup>2</sup> I chose to study and conduct this piece as my final project for the conducting class, as I had sung the work previously. Being familiar with the piece helped when creating markings on the score. This idea of being able to audiate the score is an important part of the process as a conductor.

### Composer Background

To fully comprehend a musical score and its meaning, one must first consider the life of the composer and understand the circumstances that led them to write the piece. Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) was born in Pamiers, Ariège, Midi-Pyrénées, France, where he spent all of his life immersed in music. Under the direction of many distinguished French musicians, such as Camille Saint-Saëns, Fauré expanded his musical knowledge at the École Niedermeyer<sup>3</sup> and was eventually recognized as a gifted composer of French art song. He additionally wrote piano solos, quartets and quintets, cello and violin sonatas, music for chamber

settings, and more. One of his most notable works is the masterwork, *Requiem*, first performed in 1888, but not fully completed until twelve years later in 1900. Some speculate that the piece was composed as a coping mechanism for the grief he experienced at the loss of both of his parents. But when asked about his inspiration for the mass, Fauré stated that rather than writing it in remembrance of a particular person, he composed the piece “for the pleasure of it.”<sup>4</sup> Using what we now know, we can dive deeper and more thoroughly study the music.

## Score Study

Every conductor’s process for score study is different, but there are several fundamental steps that can be taken first that aid in the process. Looking at the macrocosm of the piece is a good starting point. As

previously mentioned, the composer, historical context, and text (if included) are all crucial in honoring the integrity of each piece. Next, we should look at the structural components, such as form, general harmonic organization, texture, and any places where conducting might be difficult. Finally, understanding all the aspects of any given piece of music helps to create informed personal interpretation and expression.

### *From Macro to Micro*

In the first stages of score study of Fauré’s *Requiem*, the overall structure of the work is important to consider. It is clear that Fauré intentionally created a structural palindrome to set the *Pie Jesu* apart from the rest of the text. Movement I (*Intröit et Kyrie*) and VII (*In Paradisum*) are purely chorus and implement

themes of eternal rest and paradise. Movement II (*Offertory*) and VI (*Libera Me*) feature chorus and baritone solos and offer much more grim and heavy tones. Movement III (*Sanctus*) and V (*Agnus Dei*) once again have only chorus and deal with ideas of praise. Movement IV (*Pie Jesu*), which divides the Requiem in half, is a soprano solo that speaks of Jesus Christ and asks that he grant eternal rest to departed souls. In the typical fashion of a requiem, the entire mass is dedicated to the adoration of and pleading to God to bestow peace onto the deceased. Fauré communicates the purpose of this message using different moods and expressions and simultaneously creates a symmetrical beginning, middle, and end. The diagram below shows this palindrome idea.<sup>5</sup>



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----- IV. Pie Jesu -----	Soprano Solo
V. Agnus Dei -----	Chorus
VI. Libera Me - Baritone Solo and Chorus	
VII. In Paradisum -----	Chorus

the voices as well as any unusual rests or entrances that might catch the singers off guard in rehearsals. Dynamic changes should be marked in the conductor's score as well, to allow the conductor to show contrast in gesture.

Score marking habits already established as a singer or player create a good foundation for marking scores as a conductor. As this journey in score study evolves, the use of color in score marking helps immensely. Being able to glance at a page and immediately interpret the colors helps to convey instruction quickly and effectively through conducting. Every color means there is something the conductor needs to do to show the orchestra how to play. Each marking has a different meaning, including ways to show dynamic, articulation, tempo, phrasing, time or key signature changes, and cues.

Once the overall structure of the work is clear, the next step is to go through the score page by page and circle every key change, every time signature, and every clef change. Every breath mark should be circled for

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## Detailed Score Study

### Cues

As seen in the excerpts on the following pages, the color pink marks cues. Figure 1 on page 73 is taken from the *Introit et Kyrie*, right at the beginning of rehearsal letter J. The markings here indicate to cue the Basses on beat 4 of the previous measure and then to cue the Sopranos, Altos and Tenors on beat 1 of that measure (rehearsal J). Although this occurs twice here, it is not the only time in the movement, or the full masterwork, where this happens.

Figure 2 on page 73 comes from measures 3-6 of the *Sanctus*, but the excerpt could have been pulled from anywhere within the movement because this pattern repeats throughout. The voices cued here at the same time are the Tenors and Basses, Violin I and Cellos. The number 3 written in pink is a reminder to cue said voices on beat 3 of the measure before their entrances. The larger patches of pink not only make the small cue numbers more readily visible, but also help to quickly identify which instruments to cue with eye contact. The color pink alerts the conductor of cues that need to be shown, and on different sides of the stage, no less. These markings

allow some time to make eye contact with each section that needs to be cued so that everyone can come in together on the downbeat of the next measure.

### Articulation and Phrasing

The next excerpt (Figure 3 on page 74) is taken from rehearsal F of the *Introit et Kyrie* and, as previously mentioned, each color gives a different instruction. Green shows a breath for the choir, light blue shows decrescendos and piano dynamics, orange is for mezzo-forte (or a dynamic shift to mezzo-forte), and red shows crescendos and fortes. Aside from the colors on the page, other notes are included to aid the conductor during rehearsal, such as Latin text translation, solfège and sounding pitch for transposing instruments, and gesture reminders for which beat to cue a specific section. This oscillation between forte and piano acts as the climax of the development before the cadence into the recapitulation, where “Kyrie eleison” is sung for the first time—“Lord have mercy.” A requiem is a remembrance for the souls of the dead, as well as a plea for their eternal rest. Throughout the *Kyrie*, the text asks for “eternal rest” and “perpetual light,” but it is not until this point that it additionally begs for mercy for the departed.

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### Expression

Figure 4 on page 75, is taken from the *Libera Me* following the time signature change right after rehearsal D. This movement deals with the dread that comes with the final day of judgment, and it is here that the well-known words “Dies Irae” are powerfully spoken. The dynamics, tempo, time signature change, and text all compound to create a mighty climax. As this section settles, the recurring theme of asking for mercy and peace once again appears.

Beneath the text, the orchestra reinforces the chorus through the use of static movement in



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Figure 1 is a musical score for a choral piece. It features five staves: four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and one piano accompaniment staff. The lyrics are: "le - i - son Chris - te e - le - i -". The score includes several handwritten annotations in red and blue ink. A red asterisk is placed above the first measure. A blue circle contains the letter "J" with the word "sempre" and a dynamic marking "p" next to it. Red arrows point to the first measure of the vocal lines. Red numbers "1" and "4" are written above and below the vocal lines, respectively, indicating specific measures or phrases. The piano part has a red "J" in a box below the first measure.

Figure 1

Figure 2 is a musical score for a choral piece. It features six staves: two vocal staves (Soprano and Alto) and four piano accompaniment staves. The lyrics are: "Sanc - tus Sanc -". The score includes several handwritten annotations in red and blue ink. A red number "3" is written above the vocal lines, indicating a triplet. Blue circles contain the dynamic markings "pp" and "ppp". A red vertical line is drawn through the piano accompaniment staves, corresponding to the triplet in the vocal lines. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes.

Figure 2

The musical score is for the piece "Hear my prayer". It features woodwind parts for Bassoons, Horns, and Trumpets, and string parts. The woodwinds have handwritten annotations: a large red '4' in the Horns part, and dynamic markings like *p*, *mf*, and *F* with arrows. The vocal parts have lyrics: "ex - au - di ex - au - di o - ra - ti - o - nem me - am". The string parts are marked "doubled process" and have dynamic markings like *ff* and *p*. The score is marked with a box containing the letter 'F' at the beginning of the woodwind and string sections.

"Hear my prayer"

Figure 3

Horns

Trumpet

Trombones

Timpani

Di - es il - la Di - es i - rae Ca - la - mi - ta - tis

Di - es il - la Di - es i - rae Ca - la - mi - ta - tis

Di - es il - la Di - es i - rae Ca - la - mi - ta - tis

Di - es il - la Di - es i - rae Ca - la - mi - ta - tis

Di - es il - la Di - es i - rae Ca - la - mi - ta - tis

col 14

col Vcclle

*ff* *sf* *sempre.*

"That day, the day of anger, of calamity..."

Figure 4

the horns and rising stepwise motion in the strings and organ. In the fifth measure of this selection, the trombones are introduced to support the choir when singing “Calamitatis et miseriae,” arguably the climax of this movement. The sforzando in the strings

in the following measure further justifies this claim that the orchestra provides foundation for the text. The broad green marking serves as a reminder that a breath between “illa” and “Dies,” is not necessary, but rather a brief and precise space should be used so that “Dies irae” may be further emphasized.

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#### Conclusion

Conducting a masterwork like Fauré’s *Requiem* is a completely different experience than singing the piece. As a choir member, the singer tends to focus solely on their voice part, but as a conductor, it is the conductor’s job to hear it all. Conducting presents the opportunity to lead the music, to guide it with personal interpretation. The conductor must depict the music through conducting gesture, facial expressions, and body language. The conductor must be fully immersed in the music in order for the audience to be as well. Once the initial score study is established enough to practice gesture, it is up to the conductor to envision a space with a full orchestra, and to cue musicians as if they were really there. It can be difficult to recreate the energy and atmosphere one feels on stage entirely, but the exercise is necessary and aids immensely when it comes to actual rehearsal and performance time.

The desire to study to become a conductor was not something I ever anticipated for myself. For so long I knew



that my calling was to work with music, but performance, teaching, or even theory did not captivate my interest enough. It was not until I registered for conducting classes on a whim that I had this great awakening. Is it a huge time commitment? Yes. Can it get tedious studying every line of music in a full score? Of course! But that is also the magic of it. Today, I still love playing the piano, singing and analyzing music, but I have never felt more in my element than when I am up on that podium. I know I was meant to do this, and even though I am just getting started, I am eagerly awaiting the long journey ahead of me. 

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### Resources for Young Conductors

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brock McElheran, *Conducting Technique: For Beginners and Professionals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Fauré, *Requiem Op. 48* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Ernst Eulenburg Ltd., 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Fauré. *New World Encyclopedia*. (2017). from [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Gabriel\\_Faure](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Gabriel_Faure)

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Fauré, *Requiem for Four-Part Chorus of Mixed Voices with Soprano and Baritone Soli* (Milwaukee, WI: G. Schirmer, Inc.).

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