# The mediator as conductor

David Mitchell

*The mediator sits with you*

*Looking and observing,*

*Listening and hearing,*

*Feeling and understanding.*

*With chosen words in language known,*

*With unspoken language in face and body,*

*Baton less, yet conductor-like, she entrains heart-minds and creates synchrony that becomes a new, finished symphony.*

- *David Mitchell*

Google search has a lot to answer for. On searching for articles on Kubler-Ross’ Five Stages of Grief; I was directed to the fourth movement of Schubert’s Great

Symphony No.9 which is considered to contain these five stages musically. Directed by Google to YouTube, I watched and listened carefully. First time through, I was unconvinced. Second time, I found myself watching the conductor as I listened. Suddenly, the five stages became obvious and the music reflected each of the stages accurately. The conductor’s charisma, authority, professionalism and implicit knowledge of the symphony entrained me[[1]](#footnote-1). His movements, of trunk, arms, head, baton, and facial movements and expressions entrained orchestra, and audience (in this case, me) such that I moved, heard and became part of that musical piece.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It occurred to me that a mediator is like a conductor. I was not the first to think of this. A Google search found a wondrous article by Schechter[[3]](#footnote-3) relating the stages within a mediation to musical beats, tempo, and collaboration (entrainment with the mediator):

“No baton is necessary for this conductor (the mediator), but the skills required to wrestle sixty musicians into harmonious compliance are strikingly similar to those of a mediator faced with multiple agendas and the need to create an atmosphere where point and counterpoint combine into a theme all can follow.”[[4]](#footnote-4) This is an article worth reading.

Schechter describes the musical connections between mediator and mediates whereas this article will focus on *why* this can happen and point to *how* to use this information.

# The neural response to rhythmic sound

Socially, before speech, words, reading and writing existed, communication consisted of gestures, movements (including dance) and non-verbal utterances. Within humankind there is an integral connection to rhythm, unconsciously expressed in our day-night circadian rhythm, and the rhythmic switching on/off of hormonal release and neurotransmitter production. These internal rhythms are affected by external rhythmic stimuli (e.g. music), in turn affecting groups of brain cells called neural oscillators. Neural oscillations are correlated with the perception of

beat, temporal regularity of a sound sequence and tempo. [[5]](#footnote-5)

‘A rhythmic stimulus can entrain these oscillators, and the neurons carry on responding at the entrained interval after the stimulus has stopped, exhibiting a

“memory” of the interval.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

# The neural response to rhythmic movement

Strong connections exist in humans between beat and movement. Using EEGs (electro-encephalograms) Nozaradan outlines how music spontaneously entrains humans to move whilst ‘movement influences the perception of musical rhythms.’[[7]](#footnote-7)

Kumar and Morrison take this one step further in emphasising that music processing and cognition rely on visual clues: the movements of musicians and conductor determine the quality of the experience.[[8]](#footnote-8) The success of an orchestral piece relies on the conductor employing non-verbal movements like appropriate eye contact, rapid pacing, modulation of voice or mouthing of words and rhythmic body movements with baton, arms, head, torso and via facial gestures and expressions[[9]](#footnote-9),[[10]](#footnote-10).Such mechanisms and manoeuvres entrained the orchestra and the audience. Kumar and Morrison found that the audience was less entrained than the orchestra since they did not experience the frontal and facial movements of the conductor. This suggested that the conductor facing the audience or a video of the conductor from the front would enhance the musical experience[[11]](#footnote-11).

A singular example of this is the 1987 film, ‘Children of a lesser God’ wherein a young William Hurt acts out as a conductor and a listener of Bach’s Concerto for Two Violins to explain and share his joy of music to a beautiful deaf teacher (Marlee Martin). His actions become the music and her brain absorbs, processes and becomes entrained by these visual signals creating a unique musical experience for both.[[12]](#footnote-12)

# The mediator as a conductor

Mediators, including conductors and orchestra, ‘are active carriers that transform, translate, distort, and modify.’[[13]](#footnote-13)

A mediator conducting a mediation must rely on presence, trustworthiness, impartial professionalism and compassionate listening skills. Verbal interaction is primarily restricted to pre-mediation contact, opening delivery, listening to the mediatees’ narratives and collaborating in agenda setting and during each one-on-one breakout session. Yet by functioning like an orchestral conductor, and interacting with the mediatees as if they were an orchestra, they can, at all times, use gesture, movement, facial expressions and eye-contact to shift the positions of opposing mediatees towards entrainment and possible resolution.

# How to become a mediator as conductor

All conductors require specific skills training. So, too, do mediators who wish to conduct. The mediator has a range of skills and ‘orchestral pieces or symphonies’ available through :

* Narrative theory
* Transactional Analysis
* Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP)
* Emotional intelligence
* Compassionate reflection • Esoteric, off-the-shelf systems.

Each of these symphonic techniques will be developed over the next few issues of *Pulse*.

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‘Entrainment to music is an extremely common behaviour, shared by humans of all cultures. It is a highly complex activity, which involves auditory, and also visual, proprioceptive and vestibular perception.’

2 Kumar AB and Morrison SJ (2016), The Conductor as Visual Guide: Gesture and Perception of Musical Content. Front. Psychol. 7:1049.

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3Dena Schecthter 2009. Mediation Music downloaded from www.mediate.com/articles/schechterD2.cfm

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5Jessica A. Grahn 2012. Neural Mechanisms of Rhythm Perception: Current

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   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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   DOI: 10.1111/j.1756-8765.2012.01213.x [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nozaradan ibid1 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kumar and Morrison ibid2  [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Brian A. Silvey and Christopher M. Baumgartner. Undergraduate Conductors’ and Conducting

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   DOI: [10.1177/8755123314554809](http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/8755123314554809)  [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Kumar ibid2 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Kumar ibid2 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Karen Allendoerfer Neuroscientist and violinist at https://www.violinist.com/discussion/archive/12240/Classical Music in Film. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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