

THE CONDUCTING TECHNIQUE - AN INSTRUMENT USED TO SOLVE THE FERMATA ISSUE

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SUMMARY. In this study, we have set out to reveal the importance and rank the fermata occupies in choral works, as well as all its facets - the basic stages of its usage, the types of fermata and the manner of execution for each type; also, its dosage and the exactness of the closing gesture. (In this survey, we intend to show what a fermata are, the types of fermata, but also how to execute it). We also recommend a set of practical exercises meant to ensure its proper execution. In order to facilitate the understanding of the fermata, this survey proposes a set of conducting patterns and musical examples.

Keywords: Fermata, choral conducting, conducting apparatus, conducting technique.

“The conducting training courses aim at shaping the artistic personality of the students, by developing their own abilities for the knowledge, understanding and interpretation of music, thus setting the bases for the complex experience required by the artistic and teaching activities”.[1]

A *fermata* (meaning “stop” or “pause” in Italian) is a symbol of musical notation indicating the temporary stop of the metric pulsation.

Executing the fermata

From a conducting standpoint, the fermata is executed in three stages:

1. *Preparing the fermata;*
2. *The actual execution of a fermata gesture;*
3. *Exiting a fermata.*

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1. *Preparing the fermata* – shall be made by attracting the choir's attention with the aid of the preceding upbeat gesture. In terms of gestures, a little wider and clearer upbeat shall be employed – it is a preparatory and, also, a warning upbeat gesture – “Attention! - a fermata is coming!”. Involuntarily, a quasi-*rallentando* shall occur.
2. *The actual execution of a fermata gesture*: the fermata must be „steady”, it must not be counted. It shall be made on the impulse of the beat (on which the fermata is placed), followed by a back-stroke. Attention! The back-stroke must not be very wide, so as not to give the impression that the conductor wants a continuation of the musical discourse. Also, in order to create that feeling of a „steady” fermata, the back-stroke shall have to be moderate.

Only after the back-stroke has been made, can the fermata be shaped dynamically. In this stage, the conductor must focus on the intent to execute the fermata, the preparatory stage (the preceding upbeat) being a liaison towards the final outcome.

Attention! In order to ensure that the fermata can be dynamically adjusted, the conducting plane – at the moment of executing the fermata – must be a median one. On the contrary, if a high plane is used, the sound intensity cannot be amplified; if the lower plane is used, the intensity cannot be diminished.

3. *Exiting the fermata* – is to be made by means of the upbeat gesture. This upbeat can be:
 - A connecting upbeat gesture, in the case of a ‘no break’ fermata (without a breath);
 - A cutoff preparatory upbeat, for the fermata with a simple cutoff (usually used at the end of a phrase or of the musical piece);
 - An upbeat preceding the cutoff gesture – a double-function gesture (a cutoff followed instantly by an upbeat, for the continuation of the musical discourse. The cutoff impulse is the starting point of the upbeat gesture, a gesture used for the ‘short’ or ‘long break’ fermatas (fermatas with breath, also called “short-pause” and “grand pause” fermatas).

Types of fermata

In conducting, there are the following types of fermata:

1. Fermatas followed by breath:

- with cutoff – a double-function gesture;
- with a simple cutoff.

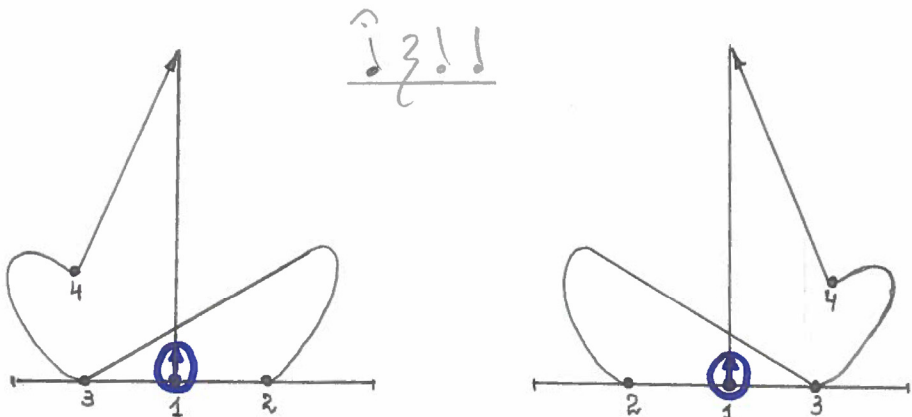
2. Fermatas without breath ('no break' fermatas).

1. Fermatas followed by breath:

- with a simple cutoff:

Fermata → cutoff → caesura (or a rest written in the score) → upbeat for the next stroke.

Fig. 1

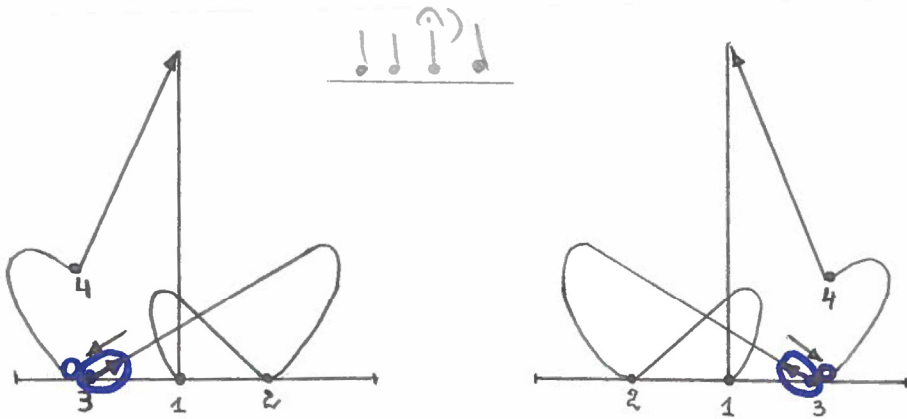


- with cutoff – a double-function gesture:

Fermata → cutoff → directly an upbeat for the next stroke.

Attention! In this type of fermatas, the cutoff gesture shall have a double function (the cutoff impulse serves as the starting point for the upbeat toward the next stroke).

Fig. 2



2. The fermata without breath, also called a 'No break' fermata.

Fermata exiting the fermata by means of the connecting upbeat gesture, towards the next stroke.

In the musical score, this type of fermatas can appear as a simple fermata, with no "with/without breath" indication or without a *legato* being provided.

Fig. 3

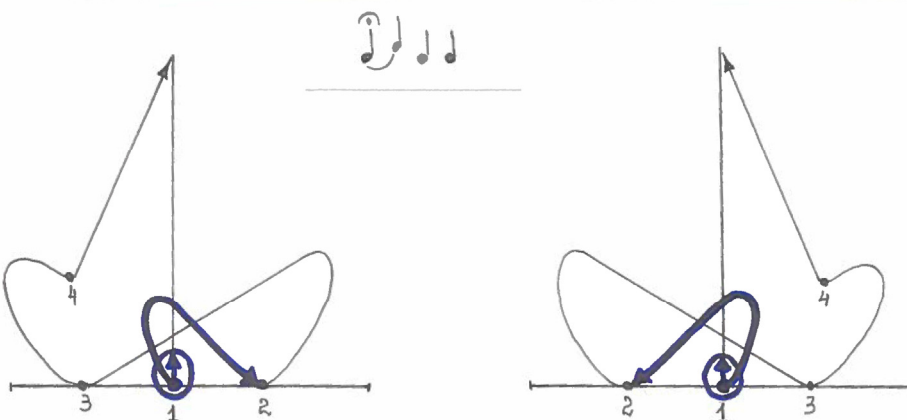


Fig. 4

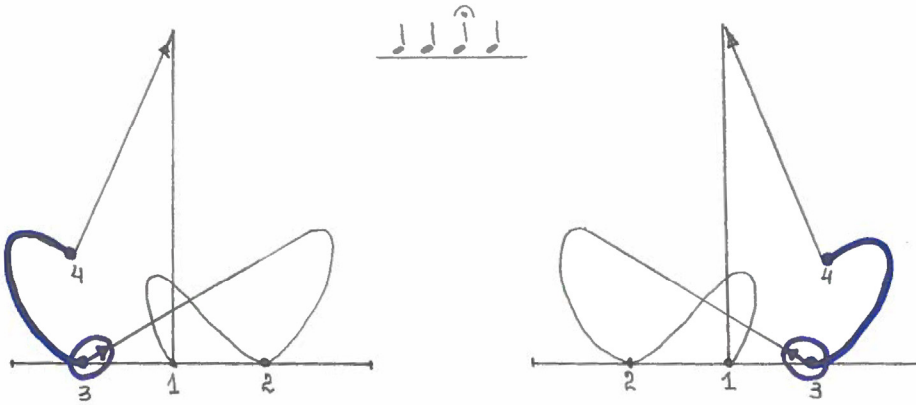
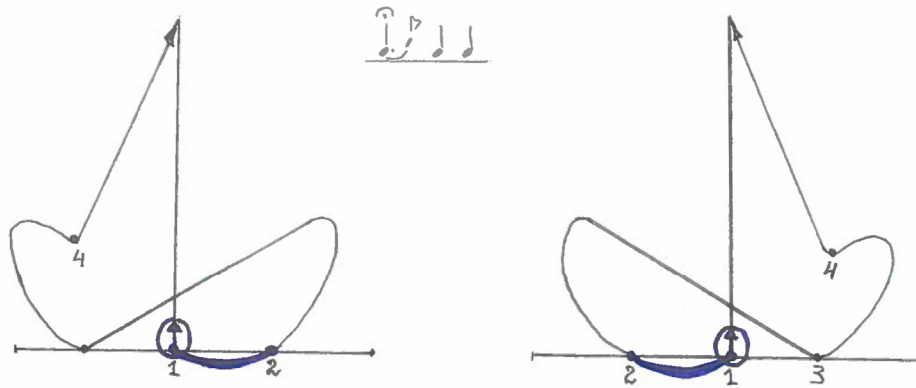


Fig. 5



The two basic types of fermatas can also be divided into:

- **Fermatas on beat** – usually used throughout the musical work or at the end; they can also be found at the beginning of the work.

E.g. 1

Andantino poco lento (in 6 movimenti)

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

poco rit...

poco rit...

p

Pri

man - - - tu ie

**Fragment from the song “Rugăciune” (in English: “Prayer”),
by I. D. Chirescu**

- **Fermatas on a half-beat** – which require, in most cases, a dividing of the beats.

E.g. 2

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

la

la la la

la la la

**Fragment from the work “Răsunet de la Crișana”
 (“An echo from Crișana”) by I. Vidu**

- **Staggered fermatas** – they are staggered from the standpoint of the musical writing.

E.g. 3

Molto rubato

SOPRANO
De la noi, ba - deo, la va - le,

ALTO
De la noi, ba - deo, la va - le,

TENOR
De la noi, ba - deo, la va - le,

BASS
De la noi, ba - deo, la va - le,

Fragment from “*Lino, Leano - De doi*” by N. Ursu

There are also **expressive fermatas**:

- *fermatas on rests* – used to extend the duration of the rest.

E.g. 4

Andante sostenuto

SOPRANO
mf

ALTO
min. *mf* *mp* *Ca*

TENOR

BASS

Fragment from “*Heruvic*” (in English: “*Cherubic Hymn*”) by I. D. Chiorescu

- *fermatas placed over a bar* – which interrupt the musical discourse abruptly.

Balancing the fermata

The duration of the fermata depends on the type of the musical work and its tempo, on the logic and content of the musical discourse, as well as on the conductor's mental concept regarding the work. "This mental approach comprises two well-defined sides: The technical mental approach (TMA) and the performing mental approach (PMA). The technical mental approach reflects the intention to render the musical piece through a conducting technique and by summing up all the information gathered after analyzing the musical work, as in the two stages(SMA+VCA). The performing (interpretative) mental approach comprises two important aspects: The feeling and the intuition".[2]

Each conductor shall interpret the fermata differently, in terms of its precise duration. Still, there are a few rules that must be observed, such as: the balancing of the fermata depends on the place in the score, where it is used – at the beginning, throughout the work or at the end. It also depends, naturally, on the way in which the musical material progresses (up to, and after the fermata). Obviously, the fermatas found throughout the work shall be more moderate, compared to the ones at the end, which are usually longer. The fermata can have various uses, within a given context; it can serve as a means of diminishing or increasing the sound energy. As an example, we can use the work "*Suita de cântece vechi din Bihor*" ("*Suite of Old Songs from Bihor*") by Fr. Hubic, part I – "*Trimis-a-mpăratul carte*" ("*The King's Orders*") – where we can notice a decrease in energy, and part II – "*Dusu-s-a bădița, dus!*" ("*My beloved has left for the army*") – in which the fermata generates an increase in dynamics and sound energy.

E.g. 5

car - te la fe - cio - rii de la car - te la fe - cio - rii de la sat..
 clo - pu ca'i in ta - ra ma-re clo - pu ca'i in ta - ra ma - re foc.
 ne - le ca'i in ta - ra ma-re ne - le ca'i in ta - ra ma - re jel'.

car - te la fe - cio - rii de la sa - te, la fe - cio - rii de la sat..
 clo - pu ca'i in ta - ra ma-re fo - cu, ca'i in ta - ra ma - re foc.
 ne - le ca'i in ta - ra ma-re je - le, ca'i in ta - ra ma - re jel'.

car - te la fe - cio - rii de la sa - te, la fe - cio - rii de la sat..
 clo - pu ca'i in ta - ra ma-re fo - cu, ca'i in ta - ra ma - re foc.
 ne - le ca'i in ta - ra ma-re je - le, ca'i in ta - ra ma - re jel'.

Fragment from "*Suite of Old Songs from Bihor*" by Fr. Hubic,
 part I – "*The King's Orders*"

E.g. 6

5

S
di - ta dus, mai! Pe dru - mul Be - iu - su - lui, mai!
nu mai vi - e. Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.
na - na mea, le Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.

A
di - ta dus, mai! Pe dru - mul Be - iu - su - lui, mai!
nu mai vi - e. Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.
na - na mea, le Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.

T
di - ta dus, mai! Pe dru - mul Be - iu - su - lui, mai!
nu mai vi - e. Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.
na - na mea, le Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.

B
di - ta dus, mai! Pe dru - mul Be - iu - su - lui, mai!
nu mai vi - e. Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.
na - na mea, le Du-su - l'au la ca - ta - ni - e.

f *poco allarg.*

**Fragment from “Suite of Old Songs from Bihor” by Fr. Hubic,
part II - “My beloved has left for the army”**

The cutoff of the fermata

The fermatas found throughout the work shall be cut off on the beat on which they were executed. The ones at the end can be cut off both on the beat on which they were executed, as well as with a cutoff gesture, meant to end the entire musical work.

Practical exercises

Exercise no. 1 - Practicing the ‘No break’ fermata

A chain of 4-beat conducting measures shall be executed – the first measure is to be conducted naturally; in the second measure, we must accomplish a fermata on the first beat (a fermata without breath, just like all the fermatas from this exercise are); in the third measure – on beat 2, in the fourth measure – on beat 3 and, in the fifth measure – on beat 4. Then, the sixth measure is to be conducted fully, with a cutoff gesture on the last beat.

Exercise no. 2 - The No break fermata

A chain of 4-beat conducting measures shall be executed, with the fermata being conducted on two beats, out of the four ones: the first measure – fermata on beats 2 and 4; the second measure – on beats 1 and 3; the third measure – on beats 1 and 2; the fourth measure – on beats 3 and 4.

Exercise no 3 - The fermata followed by breath (with cutoff – a double-function gesture)

This exercise consists of the four steps mentioned above (in exercise no. 2), only using a fermata followed by breath (with cutoff – a double-function gesture).

Exercise no. 4 - The fermata followed by breath (with a simple cutoff)

This exercise has the same steps as exercise no. 3, only using the fermata followed by breath (with a simple cutoff).

Conclusion

The artistic and pedagogical achievements of a student, future teacher and conductor depend on a correct education, on their creative abilities and on a proper professional training.

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