

Simple Conducting Tips I Wish I'd Known Earlier

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Two main ideas for today:

- ❖ Let the baton do more of the work.
- ❖ Choose the right pattern for the job.

Two observations:

- ❖ Many band directors use their shoulder as their primary “hinge.”
- ❖ Many band directors use their hands as the focal point of their conducting. The baton is just “along for the ride.”

Three primary “hinges” used in conducting:

- ❖ Wrist
- ❖ Elbow
- ❖ Shoulder

A closer look at the three
hinges...

Wrist:

- ❖ Can move hand on both X (horizontal) and Y (vertical) axes but only within a limited amount of space.
- ❖ Moderate range of vertical motion
- ❖ Slightly more limited horizontal motion

Elbow:

- ❖ Can move the hand through a wide range of motion.
- ❖ Motion limited to single plane.
- ❖ Motion stops when fully extended.

Shoulder:

- ❖ Ball & socket: full range of motion on all axes (x, y, z)
- ❖ Can move hand through a huge space.

Why do we like to use the shoulder so much?

- ❖ It's *really* flexible.
- ❖ It makes movement of the hands through space easily visible throughout a large room.

Any drawbacks to reliance on shoulder?

- ❖ Overuse can lead to injury
- ❖ Limited fine motor control in the hands/
baton

Let's add a baton...

- ❖ Note range of motion.
- ❖ Note fine motor control.

Wrist + baton: not just for “light” anymore!

- ❖ Fairly large range of motion just by themselves
- ❖ You can suggest louder or softer just by adjusting the conducting “frame.”

What about the elbow?

- ❖ Large range of motion but somewhat limited in utility
- ❖ Avoid using it on both the X and Y axes within the same beat pattern. (Fast tempos = fatigue in shoulders and “chicken wings.”)
- ❖ Consider using it more often as a *lateral* hinge to extend side-to-side motion (while keeping basic pattern in the wrist).

Should we avoid using the shoulders at all?

- ❖ Of course not, but consider them for something other than “keeping the beat.”
- ❖ Good for *raising* and *lowering* overall frame of conducting
- ❖ Good for *expanding* and *contracting* conducting frame width

Beat patterns: choose the best tool for the job!

- ❖ Beat pattern styles are possibly underemphasized in our conducting training.
- ❖ There are an infinite variety of styles and variations. STEAL from other conductors on a regular basis! (Pro tip: observing how the 3 basic hinges operate can help you “decode” someone else’s patterns.)

Four basic patterns I use most the time:

- ❖ Legato:

- ❖ Single point patterns

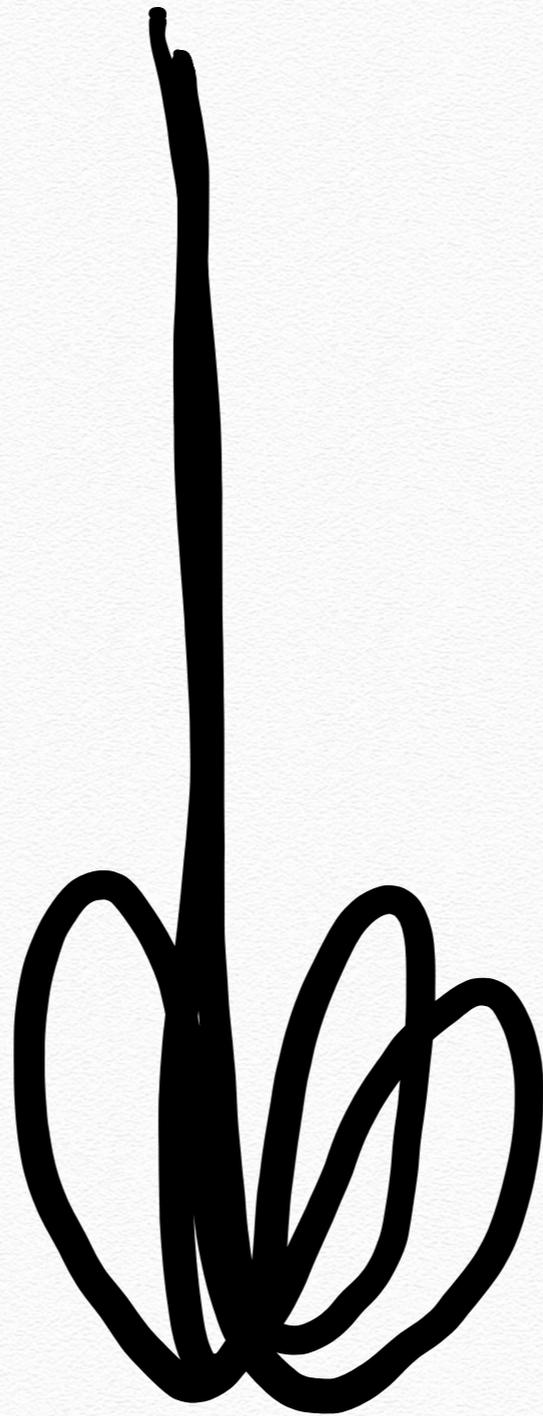
- ❖ Multiple point patterns

- ❖ Staccato:

- ❖ Anchor-shaped patterns

- ❖ Inside-a-box patterns

Legato: **Single point**



Legato: **Single point** - advantages

- ❖ Simple and utilitarian
- ❖ Clear for the players (beat always appears in the same place)

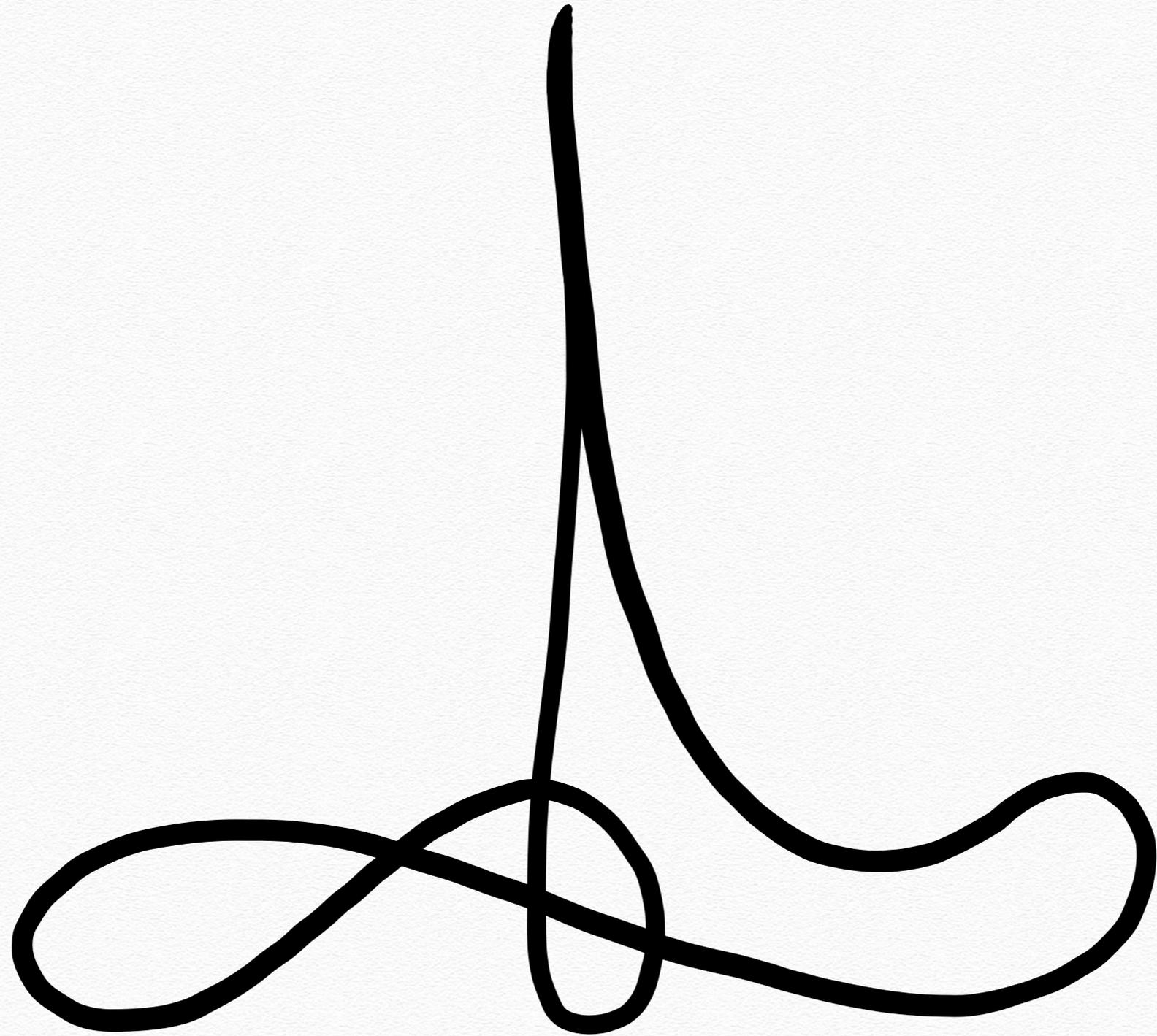


Legato: **Single point** - disadvantages

- ❖ You always have to “run back” to center regardless of how large the pattern has become.
- ❖ It has a limited capacity to model phrase shaping.



Legato: **Distributed points**



Sidebar:

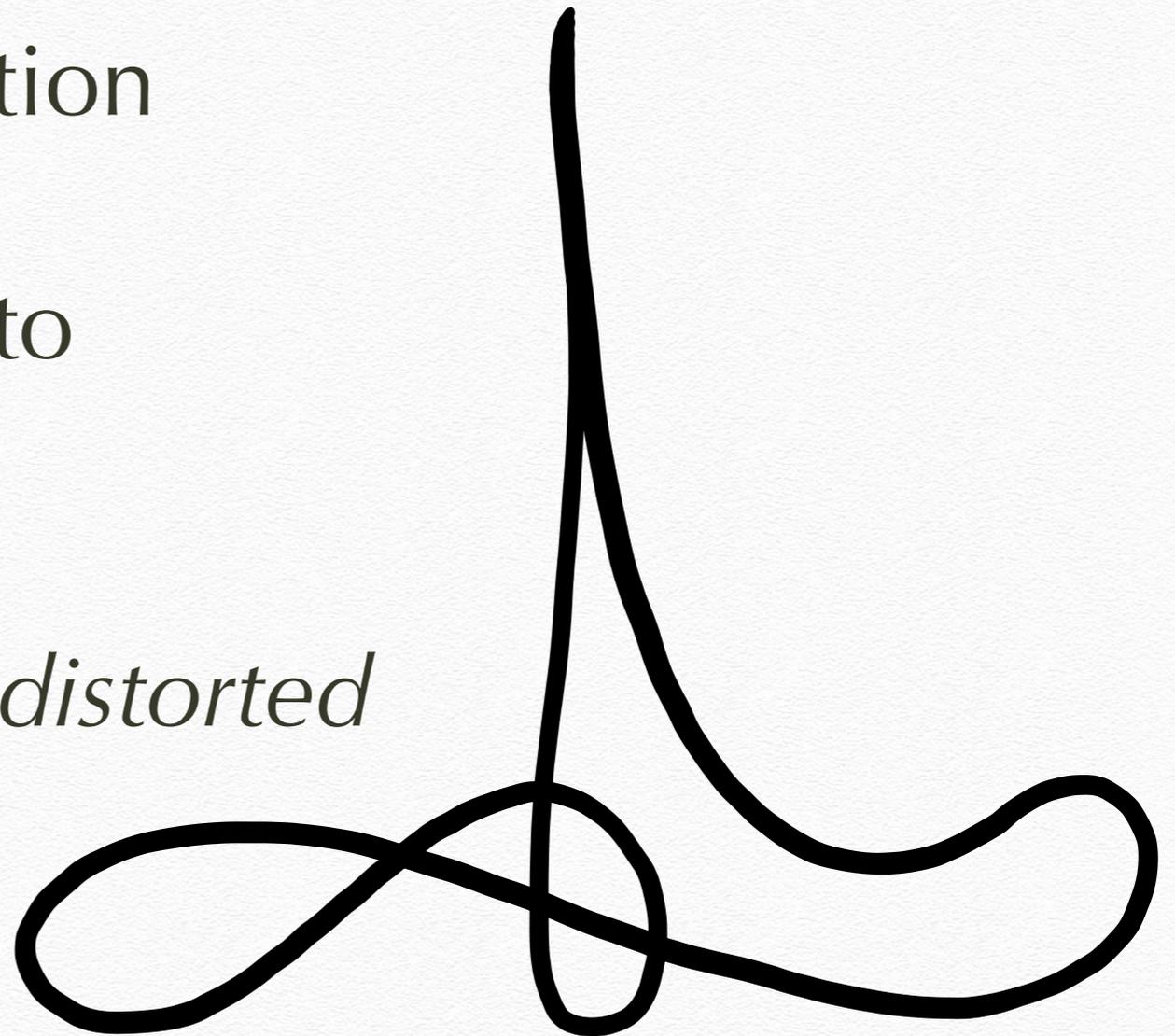
Let's reconsider what's *behind*
our visual cues for volume...

Reconsidering volume “stimulus”:

- ❖ What were we *taught* to do to encourage an ensemble to play louder? Softer?
- ❖ How do you show volume change over time?
- ❖ What is the role of *speed* of motion?
- ❖ How might we distort patterns to encourage phrase shaping?

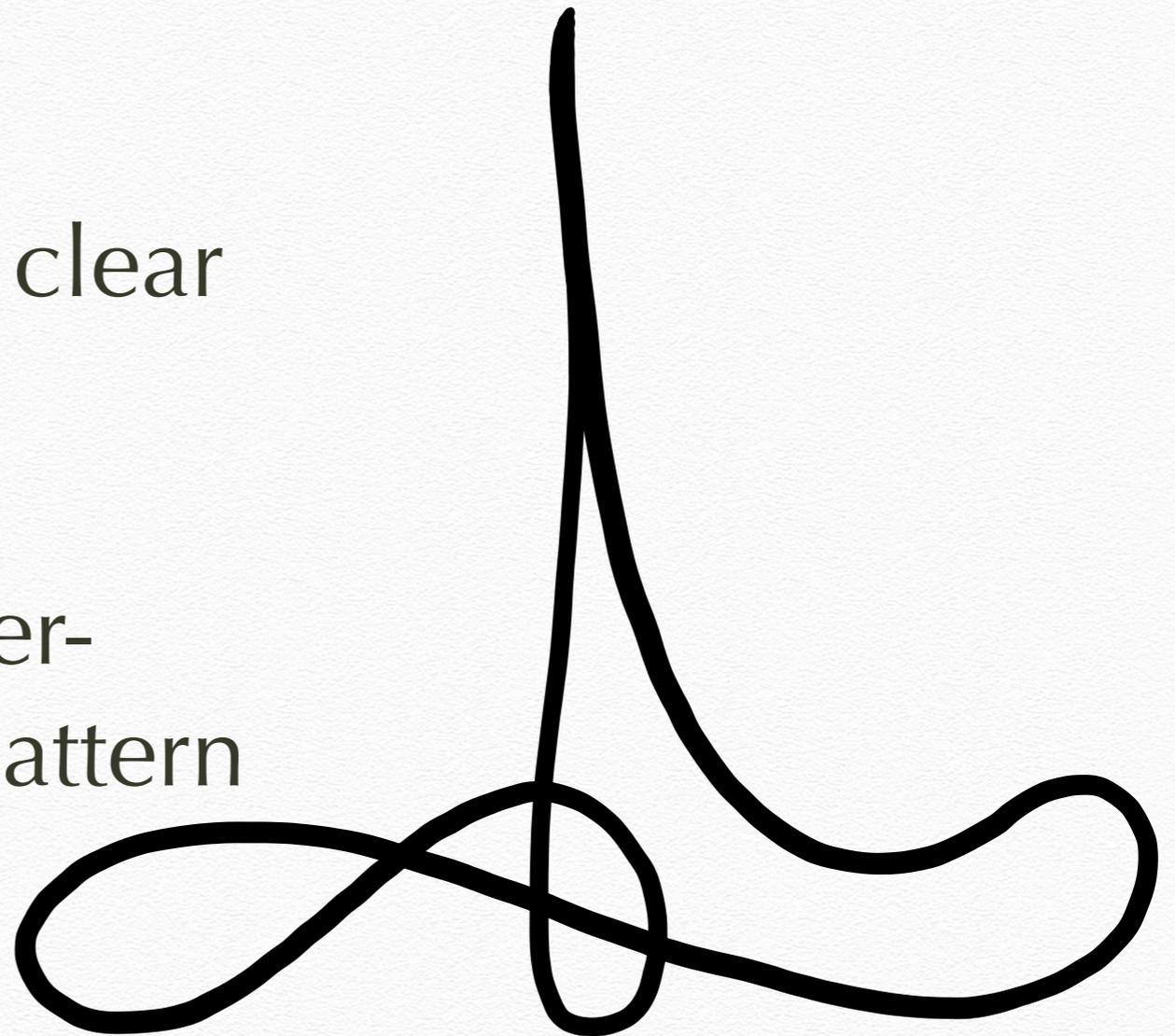
Legato: **Distributed points** - Advantages

- ❖ Its *lateral* orientation better models continuous, legato sound.
- ❖ Its shape can be *distorted* to better model phrase shaping.



Legato: **Distributed points** - Disadvantages

- ❖ Can be a bit less clear to the players
- ❖ Can invite a larger-than-necessary pattern



Sidebar:

General conducting differences
between legato and staccato...

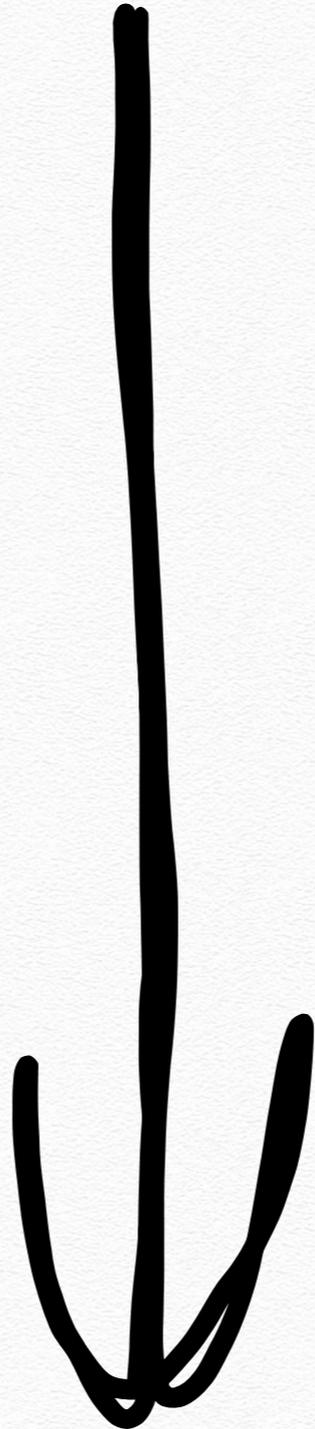
Legato:

- ❖ More *horizontal* (than vertical) motion
- ❖ “Brushes” the plane of conducting (ictus) rather than striking or clicking it
- ❖ Remains in continuous motion

Staccato (separated):

- ❖ More *vertical* (than horizontal) motion
- ❖ More precise in defining/showing the plane of conducting (ictus)
- ❖ Motion *stops* between beats
- ❖ Length of rebound (*roughly*) corresponds to relative note length

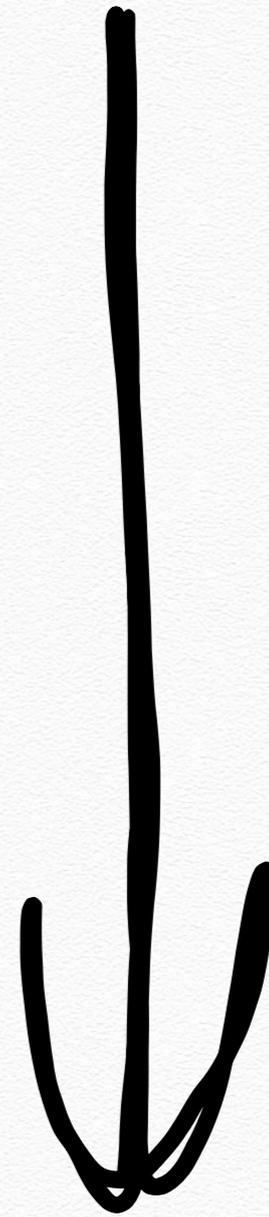
Staccato: "Ship's Anchor"



Staccato: “Ship’s Anchor”

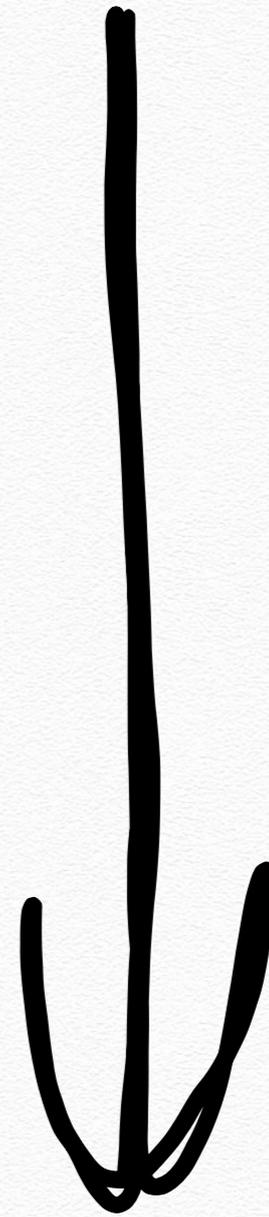
- advantages

- ❖ Lack of side-to-side motion reduces overall “travel” and baton can therefore stop between beats.
- ❖ Allows you to suggest relative length/style by shortening or lengthening rebound.

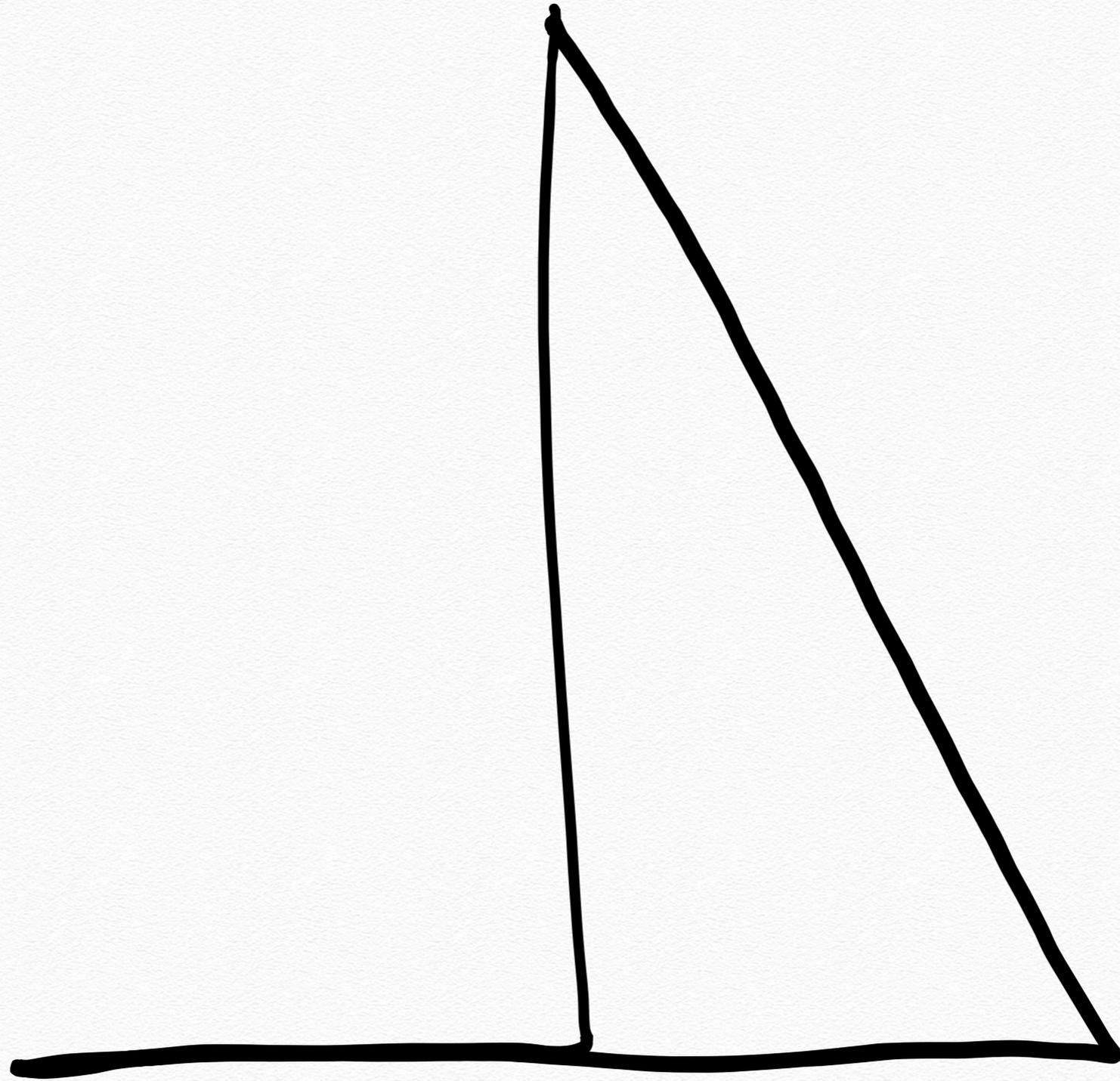


Staccato: “Ship’s Anchor” - disadvantages

- ❖ Not effective for legato
- ❖ Not very clear (to players) for discerning which beat you’re on.

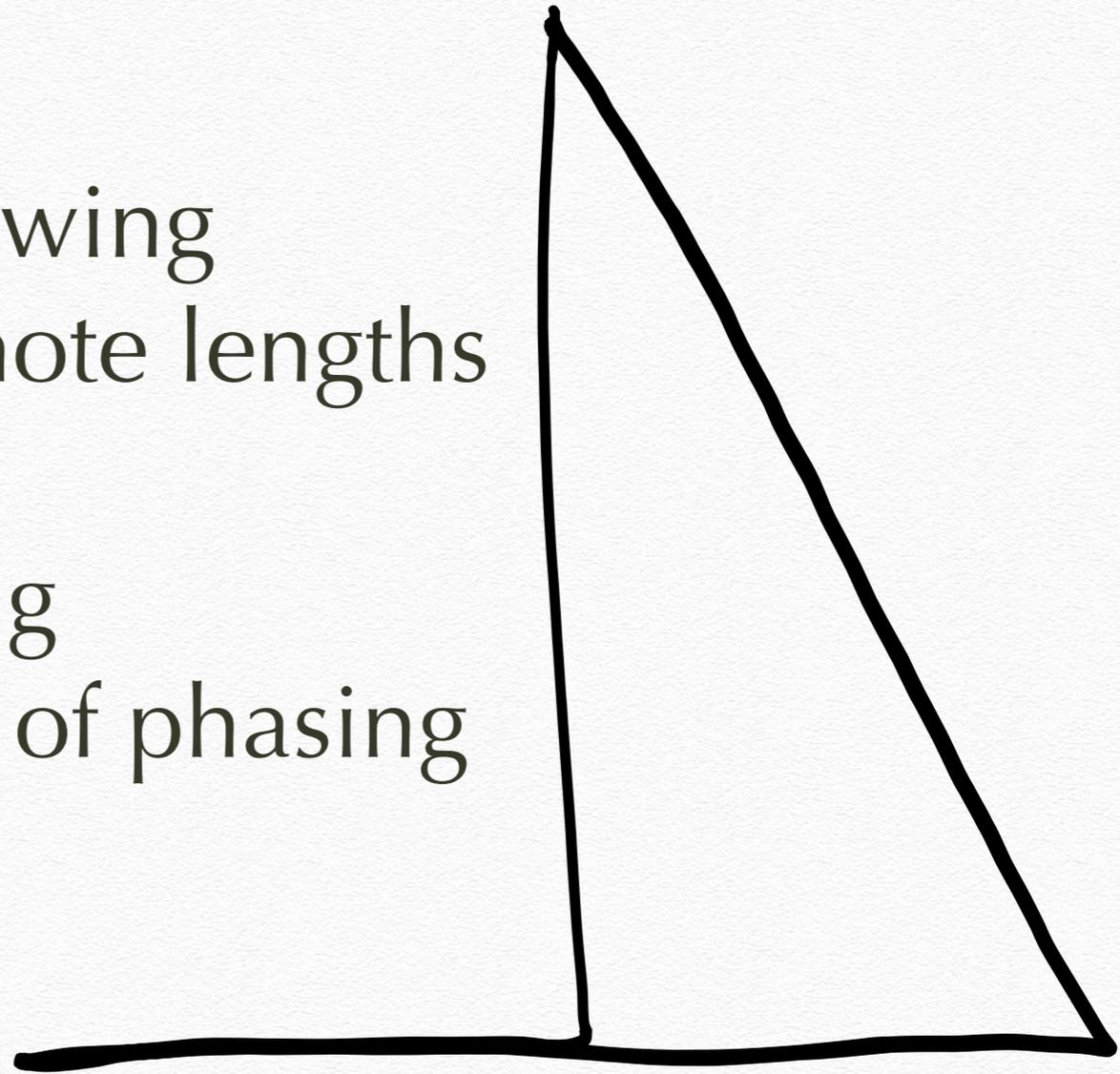


Staccato: **“Inside-a-Box”**



Staccato: “**Inside-a-Box**” - advantages

- ❖ Excellent for showing super-dry/short note lengths
- ❖ Useful for making ensemble aware of phasing problems



Staccato: “**Inside-a-Box**” - disadvantages

- ❖ Very little information beyond (short) note length and weight can be conveyed.
- ❖ Makes ictus- and rebound-obsessed conducting teachers squirm.

