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Professional Writing Samples

Échantillons de rédaction professionnelle (en anglais)

From: *La Scena Musicale* (February–March 2018)

Dr. Trevor W. Payne

No longer conducting, but still a choral force

After 43 years at the helm, Dr. Trevor Payne has decided to put down the baton. His final appearance with the Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir was on December 7 in a concert with the Orchestre symphonique de Longueuil.

He hasn't left the choir for good, though: Payne will continue to serve as artistic director and producer. Here's a look at his memorable moments, his musical background, and the motivation behind his conducting.

Anyone who retires from a job after more than four decades would normally feel a sense of accomplishment, relief, and liberation.

"Quite the contrary," said Payne in a laid-back manner, admitting that his retirement comes with mixed feelings. "It has certainly lessened my load. Being the producer, artistic director, and choir director all at once was zapping my energy."

An artist should reach a peak during performance. Payne found that he was expending much of his energy during the sound check.

"I would be able to finish the show but would need to spend the next three to five days in bed to recuperate," he said.

Given his age—he is 69—and considerations discussed with the board, medical staff, and his allies, Payne decided to step down from active conducting, still thankful for the support he received from audiences who flocked to see his choir perform on international stages.

"My one- or two-hour rehearsals with the choir mean more to me than two hours on stage," he confessed.

Payne will continue to arrange and orchestrate choir selections until the next official conductor has been named. This transitional period will continue until the next concert, planned for December 2018 at Place des Arts.

What is Payne's most cherished memory?

"The bond with the choir," he answered. Of course, he doesn't deny that singing for Queen Elizabeth II or Nelson Mandela and performing at the Hungarian State Opera House were major highlights. All the same,

nothing compares with a great rehearsal, in which choristers start with an unfamiliar tune and put it together two hours later.

Unlike choristers in classical choirs, many of whom read music, singers in a gospel choir learn by ear. How, then, do gospel choristers learn music, especially if they have no musical knowledge? Payne provides an interesting answer.

“The root of black music is communal. It allows everyone from the grandchild to grandparents to perform with or without musical training. If it’s for the entire community, pitch and rhythm don’t apply as they would in European classical music.”

Learning music by ear can be frustrating. Getting through a gospel arrangement of Handel’s “Hallelujah” chorus can be laborious when singers can’t read music.

Happily, learning by ear suits gospel music, which is highly repetitive. What’s more, in the digital age, tools exist to record separate parts.

(...)

In addition to singing gospel, Payne insisted that the Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir learn African-American spirituals in a classical music style.

“Very few black choirs take the time to learn a spiritual,” Payne said. “It’s difficult.” His choir has steered clear of contemporary hip-hop gospel styles that have been popular since the 1970s.

(...)

“Singing is a spiritual gift,” he said. “I was blessed with perfect pitch and a propensity for performance.”

Born in Barbados, Payne played piano at age eight. As he was pulled into the rock and R&B genres, he added percussion, saxophone, and keyboards.

On the strength of this background, Payne was admitted to McGill University’s Faculty of Music (now the Schulich School of Music). Alexander Brott, head of the orchestral conducting department, brought Payne into the conducting stream after only three weeks in his first semester.

Payne’s style is clearly effective. The Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir is now in its 36th year, having admitted more than 700 members. He regards all of this as a gift and is thankful for it.

His thankfulness will undoubtedly leave a mark on the choir, as will his unfailing motivation on and off stage. That motivation has also spread through CD purchases, performances around the world, and feedback choir members receive from the audience.

No longer on the stage, Payne has many projects on the go. And he remains the spiritual leader of the Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir. A spiritual connection will be one of the qualifications the next conductor must have.

Happy retirement, Dr. Payne.

From: *Editors' Weekly* blog (spring 2016)

English Editing in Quebec: All About Style

To combine or not to combine English articles with French ones? Many French organization, institution and group names precede main words with articles. Examples include Les Cowboys Fringants, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, Les Grands Ballets canadiens. With few exceptions, most English names are not preceded by articles or uppercased.

When incorporating French names in English copy, remember two rules:

1. Do not lowercase French articles (e.g., *La Presse*, not *la Presse*).
2. Do not combine French articles with English ones. For instance, do not write, “The news came after **the La Presse** news outlet reported allegations of abuse from young boys who are now adults.”ⁱ Consider rewording: “The news came after *La Presse* reported...” Note that the generic *news outlet* has been removed in the edit, and the newspaper title has been italicized.

Phrasal verbs. This grammatical form combines verbs with adverbs or prepositions, extending or altering meaning.ⁱⁱ Phrasal verbs are divided into a number of categories: verb plus particle with no object, verb plus particle with an object, verb followed by an object and particle, verb followed by a particle and a preposition and an object, verb with a particle before or after a noun object, but only after an object which is a pronoun.ⁱⁱⁱ

You can **come over** for a cup of coffee this afternoon. (visit)

Call me back when you have more information about the event. (phone)

Please **fill out** this form and send it to us at your convenience. (complete)

The Queen **turned into** an ugly old hag. (transformed)

Phrasal verbs are more idiomatic and improve overall readability. I suggest you consider using phrasal verbs when working into English or editing English translations. This is not to say, however, that Latinate verbs should be eliminated altogether: they have their place in some contexts.

Le chef d'équipe distribuera les documents aux agents de recenseurs la semaine prochaine.

La firme architecturale vérifie les plans et formule des recommandations d'ici la fin du mois.

You could write:

The supervisor will *distribute* documents to enumerators next week.

The architectural firm will *verify* blueprints and will make recommendations by month's end.

Distribute and *verify* are, of course, perfectly acceptable English cognates. But the above sentences will be more idiomatic if you use phrasal verbs:

The supervisor will **hand out** documents to enumerators next week.

The architectural firm will **go over** blueprints and will make recommendations by month's end.

ⁱ What follows *reported* is fictitious; I could not find the actual excerpt where “The news came after...” was first mentioned. Context: In February 2016, we learned that Claude Jutra, the late Canadian actor, film director and writer, was at the centre of sexual abuse allegations in a book written by journalist Yves Lever.

ⁱⁱ Sandra Thibeau, *Guide de la communication écrite en anglais*, Québec Amérique, 2012, p. 230.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, pp. 230–233.

From: *ZoneCulture* (winter 2019)

Champion is the third opera to grace the Place des Arts stage this season. Like the previous season, Opéra de Montréal has sought once again to charm audience members with at least one new, contemporary work. This is a wonderful way to bring new audiences to the opera, for as we know, not everyone is a fan of the traditional works—you know, the Romeos, Figaros, Traviatas, and Butterflies of this world.

Presenting new works comes with its set of risks, though. Unlike traditional operas that have been performed multiple times, contemporary operas have usually been performed only once before premiering elsewhere. When the curtain drops, we'll know how to perceive an opera by, say, Monteverdi or Gounod. A contemporary opera? Not so much.

Champion premiered in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 15, 2013. The musical mastermind behind the story of American boxer Emile Griffith was Terence Blanchard, a leading jazz trumpeter and one of many prolific film composers of his generation. The librettist is director, actor, and screenwriter Michael Cristofer.

This is the first time *Champion* has been presented on Canadian soil. The opera began its run last Saturday.

By reading the gentleman's biographies, it is obvious that both have had soaring careers in the cultural industry. But depending on who you talk to, *Champion* is at best a great melting pot of musical genres; at worst, a long, endlessly repetitive production rife with profanities and suggestive sexuality, slightly touching the topic of homosexuality.

(...)

Unlike *JFK* that premiered at Place des Arts last winter, the Opéra de Montréal team was careful this time around to warn us that *Champion* contained coarse language. And coarse language there was. As long as the social or historical context is justified, profanities are fine. In this performance, however, the profanities gradually became excessive, unnecessary, to the point of being outright offensive. Even a Spanish deflexive was repeatedly uttered in the scene featuring Emile and Benny "The Kid" Paret in act one—the moment when Emile gave Benny seventeen blows in under seven seconds; Benny collapsed, winding himself in a coma. Before Benny lost conscience, he addressed the deflexive to Griffith who identified himself as a homosexual.

(...)

Despite the show's downsides, some positive qualities come to light.

For starters, Blanchard juxtaposes the classical music genre with bebop, jazz, gospel, pop, and other styles, making for a work that could be fit for a Broadway performance! Some would argue that the term *opera* is not appropriate for a work like Blanchard's, but we should leave this discussion for another forum.

The Orchestre symphonique de Montréal accompanied the singers throughout. The players did a fine job switching from one genre to the next. The orchestra, choristers, and soloists did a fine job keeping their rhythms, especially when the three groups were not moving at the same time. No small feat for a contemporary work!

The singers were a mix of Opéra de Montréal and Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir choristers, an appropriate mix for selections that were more gospel than classical. (...)