

# Audition Etiquette for Musicians

Looking beyond your performance.

Suddenly it hits you – how you perform during those difficult few minutes could determine the course of your life for the next few years.

This is the scenario facing hundreds of musicians each year as they prepare to audition for graduate schools, competitions, festivals, and jobs. Many will be successful, but many others will endure the disappointment of a rejection. Although rejection can be discouraging, one must remember that Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team and went on to become one of the greatest players in basketball history.

Throughout your career as a performer, soloist or teacher you will be required to audition. If you are not the one auditioning, you may be asked to judge a competition or sit on an admissions committee for a music program – at the very least you will want to know what's good practice to share with your own students.

## AUDITION PREPARATION

Start preparing for your audition well in advance. Timelines are often very helpful in preparing for auditions. Start with the date of the audition and work backwards. Make a planning calendar with attainable goals. (I'll have the first movement learned by this date; I'll complete and send in my applications by this date; etc.)

Be sure to spend an appropriate amount of time on the other equally important parts of the audition process - applications, resumes, bios, headshots, reference letters & networking. You should always bring extra copies of your marketing materials to the audition with you in case you are asked for them. These pieces are ongoing and will be updated before and after every audition.

Select your audition repertoire carefully. When appropriate, review the audition repertoire requirements of your targeted schools. Play as close to the same program as is feasible at each audition. Pick two or three pieces and focus in on them. Do the same for your etudes. Standard pieces are always good choices.

Play mock auditions in front of other people before going to your auditions. Try to choose people to play for whose opinions you respect (your teacher, director, local professionals, fellow students, etc.) and ask them for feedback. Tape yourself regularly during the entire preparation process. Listen for your progress. Ask yourself: Is my rhythm accurate? Am I playing with contrasting dynamics? Is my interpretation musically and stylistically appropriate? What can I do to sound better? Mock auditions are vital in helping to prepare mentally and physically for the real audition experience. Imagining the audition experience when practicing is also very helpful.

You've worked hard at your pieces; you deserve someone who accompanies for a living, or at least has extensive experience. It's painful to spend so many hours in practice only to have your accompanist perform terribly at an

audition because they couldn't handle the repertoire, or worse, they "got nervous." A professional will never make mistakes (well, at least *very* rarely), and will in fact work around your tempo and will minimize your performance errors. Though the price is higher, it's nice to know that your performance will still go well if you change your tempo suddenly or even skip an entire bar of music! Contact local teachers, performers, or schools of music to find out whom they recommend.

Remember to give your accompanist plenty of notice before the performance, and meet with them at least once beforehand to rehearse. Both your music and theirs should be clean, clearly marked, and laid out to eliminate or simplify page turning. Make sure that your excerpts are in the correct playing order – a three-ring binder works best. Some vocal auditions may require you to use original copies, be aware. Finally, have your sheet music prepared in the correct key.

Make sure that you figure out where the audition site is well ahead of time, and not just the building - know the very room! Imagine your panic 5 minutes before your audition when you're still running the hallways searching desperately for the audition room... not realizing that you're in the wrong building. Ouch! Help your accompanist by giving them specific directions ahead of time as well.

If you show up late for an audition, brace yourself for disappointment. Depending on the ensemble, judge, or committee you may be told not to bother even performing. Though this would most

likely not happen at a less-than-professional level, it is nonetheless a black mark on your performance before you have even played a single note. Auditioning committees often have dozens, or even hundreds of applicants, and they have little patience for someone who doesn't appear to their audition on time, or worse, not at all.

### **NERVES & ANXIETY**

Nervousness will always be a part of the performer's life. Learning to accept nervousness and finding ways to cope with the anxiety is very important in making performing and auditioning more enjoyable.

You are often your own worst enemy when it comes to nerves. Try to stay away from caffeine (pop/soda, coffee, chocolate) prior to the audition. Lower your sugar and salt intake and drink at least 64 oz. of water to stay properly hydrated. Exercise or other hobbies also help with relaxation, but don't over do it. Some musicians have found that mantras can help sooth nerves and increase confidence. "I'm in control!" "I can do this!" "I'm calm/relaxed." "I'm prepared and ready!" The best way for you to respond to the demands of this situation is to prepare carefully. Pay strict attention to the time limits specified in the audition requirement sheet.

**RELAX!** Once you have learned your repertoire, the hardest part is over. Remember that everyone is nervous at auditions and you can expect to feel those butterflies in your stomach. Sometimes that extra adrenaline rush can actually help your performance!

### **THE AUDITION**

*Treat every audition like a performance.*

Believe it or not, what you wear can mean almost as much as how you perform to an auditioning judge. While you're certainly not going to wear a formal tux when you audition for a local wind ensemble, wearing jeans automatically undermines your credibility and commitment as a performer. Most auditioners want to feel that you are dedicated to the position you apply for - make them believe that you take the audition seriously by wearing slacks or a long skirt, with a nice shirt.

A word of caution - if you get nervous easily when you perform, wear nice pants: even the longest skirt will show your shaking legs!

Black has always been a classy, conservative outfit for concert attire. Auditions are likely to be a more relaxed environment. Feel free to break the constraints of the typical audition garb. But of course, try to avoid the extremes: don't wear clothing that distracts from your performance. You may love that bright pink, sequined flamingo shirt, but think of it from the auditioner's perspective. Dress professionally and appropriately (think about the organization and individuals you are auditioning for). Jewelry, make-up, and clothing colors should be kept to a minimum and keep your hair combed and simple. Also, wear shoes that you feel comfortable in! Ladies, there's nothing worse than tight-fitting or overly-high-heeled shoes when you're trying to concentrate on a difficult piece, so be careful about your shoe choice – think style AND comfort.

Considerable care is taken these days, particularly in orchestral auditions, to ensure that there is no cultural and gender bias. Players often audition behind screens that shield their sex, age, and ethnicity. Often, floors are padded to conceal the sound of women's shoes.

In the excitement of the event do not forget to sign-in, receive excerpt order (if applicable) and ask questions if you have any. Focus on yourself and try to ignore the other players. If you know players at the audition, wait to visit with them until after you are through playing. Also, do not compare your playing to how others play. Be confident in your own abilities!

It is also important not to change any part of your routine on the day of the audition – stay with your normal warm-up routine. Make sure you have at least half an hour to an hour before your performance to prepare for the audition. Just as an athlete's performance would be compromised if she/he didn't stretch beforehand, warming-up makes an incredible difference. You should use the same specific warm-up routine before an audition as in your everyday practice.

The purpose is not to exhaust yourself, so try not to play until your facial muscles are over-exerted. Before you begin to play or sing breathe deeply and let your muscles relax. Focus on making music, and even if you make a mistake, keep going.

The audition committee may ask to re-hear a certain piece or excerpt(s). They may also ask for something to be played differently. Be flexible, but remain calm and collected. Many auditions will have an audition proctor on stage or behind the screen with you. That individual alone can answer questions and ask for clarification from the audition committee on your behalf. If this is the case do not speak directly to the judges. You may also be asked to stop at any point in the audition. If this happens, be polite and courteous and accept suggestions or criticism.

When you are required to speak to the judges maintain good eye contact. When performing, singers should place the individual to whom you are speaking/singing just behind and above the auditioners - that way they will be able to see you better. Avoid elaborate introductions, since they are probably already familiar with the piece you have chosen. Simply introduce yourself, the opera or larger work the piece is taken from, the composer, and perhaps the name of the character. "I will begin with *Ach, ich fühl's* from Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte" sung by Pamina." "The first excerpt is from Beethoven's..."

Be aware that there will not be any applause during an audition. When you have completed your audition simply thank the judges and exit the room/stage. Keep the whole audition process in perspective... what is the worst that could happen? Learn from the experience. The next audition will be easier because you have experienced the whole process and have (hopefully) grown as a musician and as an individual.

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