

# The Audition

*Many people consider the audition to be among the most stressful aspects of the music admission process. Although the audition is probably the most important aspect of the application process, it does not need to cause great anxiety and stress. In order to perform your best and to make the most favorable impression possible, here are some important ideas to keep in mind:*

## Plan a Reasonable Audition Schedule

Most music applicants audition at several schools. When planning your audition schedule, allow enough time between auditions to visit each school and to explore its campus and facilities. Allow some time for interviews with faculty or admission personnel. Plan your trips so you will have plenty of time to travel to the next school, relax and have an adequate warm-up before your audition. Do not let poor planning make you feel overly rushed and affect the quality of your audition. If possible, schedule only one audition per day. Make your travel plans early and try to arrive at the university the day before the audition so you can get a good night's rest before you perform.

## Follow Directions

Don't let careless mistakes keep you out of the music school of your choice. Most music schools publish a list of audition guidelines and requirements. If specific procedures or guidelines are given, follow them. Demonstrate to the auditioning committee that you have taken the time to research and prepare your audition down to the smallest details. While conforming to requirements might not be noticed by the auditioning professor or committee, deviations from the procedure likely will be noticed.

Some schools may require that pieces be memorized or may require scales, sight reading or orchestral excerpts for the audition. If you have any questions about the requirements, it is best to call the school as soon as possible for clarification.

## Select Your Repertoire Carefully

Choose pieces that show off your abilities. Remember, an audition is an opportunity to showcase yourself. Auditioning committees like to hear a variety of playing styles. Choose pieces and passages that demonstrate technical ability, lyrical phrasing, differences in articulation and interpretive ability. Don't select pieces which, though technically flashy, are beyond your ability. It is better to play an easier piece well than to play a more difficult piece in a sloppy manner. If possible, have your private teacher or high school music teacher help you select your audition repertoire.

Some schools request specific pieces for auditions. Follow these lists, if possible. If you are auditioning at several schools which require different pieces, however, contact those schools to see if you may substitute a piece from one list to the other. It is better to reduce the number of pieces you need to practice in order to make better use of your preparation time, so you can give a very polished performance. Most schools are interested in hearing you perform at your best and will try to accommodate such changes.

## Practice!

Prepare the best, most polished performance you can give. The audition is the single most important factor admission committees consider in an application to music school. A good audition can convince a university to admit a “borderline” applicant, and a poor audition can cause a music school to deny entrance to a very bright and talented student. Tape your practice sessions and listen to them to identify and correct mistakes. Perform your audition material as often as possible at solo and ensemble contests, for music teachers, for parents, for friends, at church or anyplace else you can find an audience. Get used to playing in front of people.

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Remember that faculty members want to hear you at your best. They are more interested in hearing what you can perform rather than what you can't perform. Don't be surprised if the atmosphere of your audition is very informal. Many professors do this to put students at ease. During your audition, let your personality come through both in your performance and in your conversation with the professor or committee. The audition is a chance for the school not only to evaluate your performance but also to evaluate you and see how you will fit into their musical community. Stay calm and relaxed. Don't be afraid to ask to play a few notes to get used to the room or to replay a part of the audition that you feel did not go very well. Make a good first impression, from the way you dress to the way you interact with the auditioners. Don't be afraid if the auditioner gives you advice or criticism and asks you to play a part of the audition again. Many teachers do this to see how a student reacts to criticism and to determine how quickly a student can adapt and learn. Remember, there is much more to an audition than just playing!

## Keep Your Eyes Open

An audition isn't only an opportunity for the school to evaluate you. More important, it is a chance for you to “audition” the school. Use your audition and visit to provide an impression of the school, the teacher and how you interact and fit in with both. Evaluate the professor to see if you will feel comfortable studying with him or her and whether this teacher will be able to keep you challenged and interested in your playing. See how you feel about the atmosphere and character of the school. Determine whether it is the right “fit” for you. Some students thrive at large schools. Others prefer smaller institutions with a focus on greater individual attention. In most cases, you will be able to tell quickly whether or not you will enjoy studying at that school. Trust your feelings about the place. Don't go to a school merely because you were told that it is “the place to go” or the professor there is “the person with whom you should study.” Attending the most prestigious music school in the world means nothing if you will not be happy there. Such unhappiness will be reflected in your attitude, your grades and your ability to learn and grow, as well as the quality of your performance.

## Taped Auditions

While in-person auditions are superior to taped auditions, restrictions on time and money may make it necessary to submit a taped audition instead. If this happens, take the time to prepare the best tape possible, but don't spend too much time on it. Most musicians find the best performance occurs on the first or second attempt at recording. You will never be able to turn in a perfect performance on your audition tape. Stop recording when the performance level is acceptably good. Small errors in your performance will not make a significant difference in your admission decision, and the listening committee is not expecting perfection. If possible, make arrangements to visit the school later. A personal visit is always the best way for you to evaluate a school and for them to evaluate you!