

Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies Audition Tips

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AUDITION! While the word audition can make us all sweat a little, we would like to offer some helpful hints and suggestions to make this a more comfortable situation. We look forward to the upcoming auditions for all instrumentalists. We want this to be a successful and enjoyable audition for all students.

The GTCYS audition consists of three components; scales, a prepared solo and sight-reading. Students who wish to be considered for Camerata, Concert Orchestra, Philharmonic, and Symphony must also prepare an orchestral excerpt. Please make sure that you have studied the list of requirements for each orchestra (found on the auditions page at www.gtcys.org). The scales for each orchestra are specific, and you need to know what these are BEFORE you enter the audition room. The scales and prepared solo should be representative of your BEST playing.

Preparation of Scales and Repertoire

- 1) **Practice Slowly.**
Practice at half tempo. Listen to the tone and pitch of every note. Practice your piece at half tempo. Often, we do not hear pitch and rhythm inaccuracies when we are playing things through at a faster tempo.
- 2) **Practice with a Metronome**
Use the metronome at a slow speed and performance tempo. Many times our internal clocks and tempi do not match the metronome. Remember that the metronome is your friend!
- 3) **Perform for an Audience.**
Yes, perform even your scales for an audience of three or more people. Scales are the building blocks of your pieces. The more accurate and solid your scales, the more accurate and solid your repertoire. The more you perform in front of an audience-even a small one-the more comfortable you will be.
- 4) **Constant work on the Difficult Spots**
You can never practice the difficult passages too many times. You should be able to play the most difficult passages with the greatest of ease. This only comes with careful and constant repetition. Practice makes permanent!

When the audition day has come, your work is done. Preparation is the biggest key to having a performance/audition that you can enjoy. Until then, keep practicing!!

On the audition day:

Plan ahead! Make sure that you know where and when your audition is.

Warm up! It is a good idea to play through your scales and pieces SLOWLY before you arrive at the audition site. Once you arrive, start your pieces and scales. There will be plenty of space for you to do this.

Think Positively! As you think about the audition, imagine your sound as one of confidence and clarity.

Enjoy! This is what you have been working for. The adjudicators are there to listen to you play well and really enjoy listening to each and every student. Keep breathing and relax!

Pointers from a Pro...

Roger Frisch has been a violinist with the Minnesota Orchestra for over thirty years. He has heard many auditions and works with many students who are preparing for professional auditions. When talking about auditions he offers these practical tips:

1. Read all the information that pertains to the audition.

Roger recalls one of his first auditions-one that he thought he was prepared for. When he got into the room, the audition panel asked him for a piece that he didn't see on the list. Roger encourages all students to "take the time to read all of the requirements." Needless to say, he was quite rattled after that point and the audition did not turn out so well.

2. Prepare yourself psychologically.

Students spend many hours practicing scales, etudes and repertoire. Musicians are great at practicing and rehearsing, but often times forget about the psychological preparation that needs to take place. "Students should not only learn the notes and technique, but should also visualize what a performance or audition will sound like. Athletes do it in preparation of games and meets, and musicians should do it also. Picture yourself playing in the performance room and imagine what the sound is." says Roger.

3. Prepare for sight-reading by playing chamber music.

Roger says "There is no way to prepare for sight-reading on your own. The only way you can practice sight-reading is by playing chamber music. You have to learn this by doing. The more you can expose yourself to sight-reading with others, the better prepared you will be. Get together and play chamber music with your friends. Play duets, trios, quartets-anything!"

Finally...

Remember to arrive at the audition site at least 20 minutes prior to your scheduled time so that you may register, receive your audition room assignment and warm up. String, woodwind and brass auditions are approximately ten minutes in length; percussion auditions are approximately fifteen minutes. Selections do not need to be memorized and no accompanist is required.

For any other questions, check the website at www.gtcys.org, or call the office at 651.602.6800. We look forward to hearing you soon!

Sincerely,

The GTCYS Artistic Team

Mark Russell Smith, Artistic Director & Symphony
Mary Sorlie, Philharmonia East & West
Ernesto Estigarribia, Sinfonia East
Laura Hebert, Sinfonia West
Dan Mollick, Concertino
Kent Musser, Camerata
Mark Gitch, Concert Orchestra
Gary Wolfman, Philharmonic

AUDITION STRATEGIES HOW TO PLAY WELL WHEN IT COUNTS

Prepared by Michele Frisch

“The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win.” Michel Debost, Flute Professor, Oberlin

Why do auditions make me so nervous? Why do I even panic sometimes? Why are my palms sweating, hands shaking, heart beating fast, breathing too fast, having trouble concentrating? Why do I sometimes feel like running out of the room? You have a very good reason for that: your body is programmed to do exactly that in a crisis! Those symptoms are all caused by a protective response to a scary/excited/dangerous situation, namely, adrenaline.

Now, this comes in really handy when you are fleeing a house on fire or lifting a heavy branch off of someone or outrunning a crisis. This surge of chemical protects us from some situations that could cause us harm. Unfortunately, it doesn't always distinguish between a genuinely dangerous situation and one that just makes us excited or nervous. And once that adrenaline starts flowing, we are in fight-or-flight mode, ready to run from the scene, or so hyped-up that it's difficult to control a passage of notes.

So... let's see if we can use this adrenaline burst to our advantage, rather than let it sabotage our concentration, control, and freedom to play our best in an audition situation. Let's see if we can envision the audition as less scary, and use that left-over adrenaline to our advantage, to be on top of things. For this we will use a formula we've learned for when we have caught fire and need to put out the flames safely and quickly:

STOP ~ DROP ~ ROLL

STOP: Think. What can I control?

- Preparation - Listen to yourself. Practice slowly, with metronome. Isolate passages. Practice backwards. No repetition without understanding! Listen to recordings for guidelines. “The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win.” Your top priority in practice should be the quality of your concentration, not just the quantity of time.
- Familiarity - Play your audition material for people in a situation that will cause you to be nervous. Do this several times before the actual audition. Learn from your mock audition: what went right, wrong?
- Attitude - What audition or competition or recital doesn't seem overwhelming when we begin to learn, shape, and refine it? Make a plan:

“To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time.” Leonard Bernstein, conductor, composer

- Self-Care - A healthy body works better. Get plenty of rest, exercise, and nutrition. Optimize your chances of feeling good on audition day!
- Thorough Warm-Ups - Loose, pliable fingers, shoulders, arms, and lungs perform best when warmed up. Music is a sport! An athlete wouldn't dream of running a race, pitching a game, or kicking a field goal without first warming up his/her body. Small motor muscles require the same loosening, because they are used repetitively. A steady, strong bow arm or a steady, pliable wind sound is best accomplished with careful warming up before a practice/rehearsal/performance.

DROP: those bad habits!

“We first make our habits and then our habits make us.” John Dryden, poet

- Practice Schedule - consistent, organized. Work on the five practice zones: Warm-ups, exercises & etudes, solo, ensemble, sight-reading. If you are able to practice longer hours, rest in-between:

“Start off in the morning; put your violin away; practice in the afternoon; put it away; practice before bedtime. David Oistrakh, violinist

- Metronome work - rushing, dragging? Aim for consistent evenness.
- Unproductive body movement - aim for simplicity. Explore Alexander Technique and other methods that teach the excellent use of your body.
- [Fill in the Blank] - What have you been working on with your teacher?
- Procrastination - The first step leads to a world of possibility.

“The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex, overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one.” Mark Twain, author

ROLL: with the punches! Expect the unexpected. Anticipate the issues and events beyond your control.

- Audition room too hot/cold/breezy/bright/dark/dry - Just assume that it will be one or more of these and prepare to play in any setting.
- Judges intimidating - Smile anyway. You cannot control a judge’s attitude or style. Play for yourself, at the standard you have carefully prepared. If asked by a judge to do something different or replay a passage, do so with a humble spirit and a concentrated effort.
- Difficult or confusing sight-reading - Think: you prepared for this! Take time to look it over and then--it is just you and the music. Drop: the bad habit of stopping. Roll: Expect to make mistakes, but keep going.

“Do not stop. This is the only secret for sight-reading. If you do so, it means that your head is in the past, however recent, whereas your eyes and thoughts should turn forward. Silence your guilt machine: everybody makes mistakes. The only sin is to stop.” Michel Debost

- Car trouble, weather, wrong time, accompanist late, hiccups, etc. - Plan well to minimize the unexpected: prepare to arrive early, reread audition sheet, communicate with accompanist. Beyond that, assume that you will be dealing with an interesting variable and take the adrenaline and put it back into your music. Be glad for an exciting performance!

“Remember, the most important elements of your playing
are not your hands, fingers, or lips,
but your head and heart.” Michel Debost

Michele Frisch
Minnesota Opera
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SIGHT READING

by Mary Sorlie and Barb Flooding

Before the audition

- Play something new every day
- Play with others; your teacher, fellow students
- Work from rhythm books
 - Master Theory by Charles S. Peters and Paul Yoder
 - The Logical Approach to Rhythmic Notation by Phil Perkins
 - Essentials for Strings by Gerald Anderson
 - Rhythmic Training by Robert Starer
- Play chamber music (string quartets/ wind ensembles)
- Use online resources
 - sightreadingmastery.com
 - thepracticeroom.net
 - sightreadingfactory.com
- Play pieces that are below, at, and slightly above your level
- Work with a metronome
- Advanced string players should practice in the higher positions everyday

During the Audition

- Take a moment to look at the excerpt
- Scan the entire excerpt; don't dwell on a single part of the excerpt
- After looking at time signature and key signature, look for accidentals, rhythmic patterns or changes, register changes, articulations, and dynamics
- Keep breathing. We don't know CPR.
- If you have played something before, don't announce it. Smile and play beautifully
- Keep commentary to a minimum
- Play as musically as possible
- Make sure that you are playing the part as best you can. Play what you see, not what you think it should be.

After the Audition

- Congratulate yourself on completing your sight reading
- Don't beat yourself up for things that could have gone differently
- Think about the positive