

All-State: How to Better Prepare Your Students for College and Youth Symphony Auditions

presented by Charles Gray; reported by Janet Anderson

Charles Gray started with the disclaimer “auditions aren’t fair.” They are not always an example of how well a student can play and one has to accept an audition for what it is: one moment in time in the life of a player. The best advice Gray had was to start early, research the piece, and be on top of requirements for each audition. The student should never attempt to play in the audition any part of a piece that isn’t under control.

When preparing the piece with the student, one needs to ask if the lesson time is being used well. Scales, excerpts, fingerings have to be rehearsed over and over. Also, students need to practice with a pianist even if they will not be included in the audition. Students will miss the overall musicality of the piece if they are unaware of the accompaniment.

The most important points to consider when rehearsing a student are a good sound and use of the entire bow. Working on

tone with the bow is what can make the difference between winning and losing an audition. This is achieved by practicing all the major and minor scales.

In Gray’s experience, judges listen for:

1. Tone quality: Is it in tune, is the bow correct and is the vibrato working?
2. Can the student account for the piano part? They need to count short rests in the part.
3. Students who come early and are well prepared make a better impression than students who rush in late at the last minute and tune during the audition.
4. Students need to prepare with a breath before their first note. This relaxes the body and looks good.
5. Sight reading: Students should not stop and need to practice this before they come to the audition.
6. Beyond rhythm, playing in tune and sound, can the student transmit a feeling of excitement?
7. Check the requirements for the audition on the web site. Know these.
8. During the audition, students need to clear their minds, lose distractions and focus solely on the music for maximum performances.
9. Students need to know the performance standards.
10. Character is as important as playing ability.
11. Play the best part of the piece first. Always start on a strong note.
12. Plan ahead. Students who are prepared have the advantage.

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