



BASS

Getting Ready for Auditions

by Tom Pieper

One of the first things that all musicians must do is get comfortable playing for other people. Everyone has to start performing for others and the more relaxed and receptive you are to someone giving you help the better musician you will become. The point of playing for someone is to have them help place you along the continuum of your musical development, help you hone your skills, and let you connect with more accomplished musicians to work on similar music. It comes down to a basic fact that if you want to play with people you must let them hear what you can do.

The first time you audition it is helpful to know what the requirements are and what the goal of the audition is. After a year of playing you might want to play in a summer music camp. Try to find a camp that fits your schedule and your level of commitment. If you want to do well it often is best to do a concentrated camp that meets often for a 1 or 2-week period instead of one spread out over time. Make sure that you are committed to attending and working very hard for that period because this is the way that you will maximize your growth.

When you are given options remember you will be more successful if you choose where you should be instead of where you want to be placed. You might have a friend who is also in your grade and you would like to play with them in the top orchestra but unless your skills line up do not put yourself in a group that is way above your playing level. If you want to learn and have fun, go by the guidelines that the organization gives for levels and place yourself there.

After you have completed a few years of playing, you might want to have a youth orchestra experience in addition to your time playing at school. Youth orchestras are great because you play with students across the area and you get to play cool music that you spend a lot of time rehearsing. Audition requirements are varied but I think the best idea is to read through and prepare exactly what they ask for. They have a lot of experience and are not looking to be impressed by soloists playing hard concerti, but by

students who demonstrate competence and ability to work in an ensemble. Some of the elements they judge you on are subjective and will be part of the judge's personal taste; some other elements are objective and non-debatable. Remember that all people are judged and while the human factor of taste comes into the process everyone has the same experience of playing for a judge.

Here are the audition requirements from the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies *[with comments]*:

The three components are: solo, scales and sight-reading. Adjudicators will listen for sound quality *[subjective]*, pitch and rhythmic accuracy *[objective, cannot debate the value of this]*, intonation *[objective]*, technique *[subjective]*, scale range, expression *[subjective]* and reading skills *[objective]*

Solo

- Prepare one unaccompanied selection (or two shorter selections) displaying your technical and expressive facility. *[It is really important to play something standard—judges should know the piece—and that shows you off well. Playing Bach cello suites at pitch is not a good idea! Play what you can play! A good place to begin is your method book; if you have played for 1 or 2 years look at the solos in the back and learn one of them.]*
- Choose your selection with guidance from your instrumental teacher. *[If you have a private teacher you can select a piece and work on it over time. To be truly serious about improving your playing you need to work with someone who can help you get there.]*
- The music should show what you can do well. *[As stated previously.]*
- Bring one additional copy of your piece for the adjudicators' reference. *[Easier for you and the judges.]*
- Solos need not be memorized. *[If you know it really well it probably is close to memorized but play it the way you*

are comfortable. If reading the solo is a distraction, play from memory; if not, have the music in front of you. In all cases practice performing your audition as you will perform.]

Scales

- All musicians will be asked to perform memorized scales. Review specific scale requirements for each orchestra level. *[When they give you additional information—check it out and apply what you learn.]*

Sight-reading

- Sight-reading examples will be selected by judges at the audition. *[You can prepare for this by sight-reading new material daily.]*

Here is another example from Minnesota Youth Symphonies. They lay out everything that they want you to do. If you are wise you will go through this process. You want them to know that you can work to the level of their expectations and follow simple directions. Like building LEGOs or IKEA furniture—be prepared!

1. Solo piece. Prepare a polished, recital-ready, unaccompanied solo piece. You may play any work of your choice, but the level of difficulty should be an accurate representation of your technical and artistic ability. Remember, it is not what you play that matters most, but how well you play. Your solo piece need not be memorized, but the entire piece should be performance-ready. You may be asked to stop playing before you reach the end of your prepared piece, or asked to play only a particular section. If this happens, please understand that it is only in the interest of time, not a reflection of your playing.

2. Excerpts. Play one excerpt, included in this packet, closest to your ability level. If you are unfamiliar

iar with the excerpts, consult with your private teacher or a coach who is familiar with them. It is recommended that you also listen to a recording or live performance of the piece in order to give yourself proper tempo and musical context. As with your solo piece, the performance of your excerpt should be an accurate representation of your technical and artistic ability. *[With your solo and/or your prepared excerpt, you may be asked to play it again in a different manner—slower, faster, more lyrically, etc. Please regard this as evidence of your musical flexibility, which will weigh heavily on the success of your audition.]*

3. Scales & technique. All required scales must be memorized. Automatically play the corresponding arpeggios to a scale, if required. *[Pay attention to the scale keys, modes and number of octaves for the orchestra level you hope to get into.]* String Orchestra: Must have a basic understanding of shifting and be able to demonstrate the following bowings on demand: staccato and détaché. Please have your entire solo performance-ready, as you may be asked to play any given section. Philharmonic Orchestra. Scales must be prepared using the following bowing techniques: spiccato, détaché, martelé and staccato. Must demonstrate a full understanding of 1st through 3rd positions, must produce a continuous vibrato and a clear, full

tone. Repertory Orchestra. Must have a solid understanding of 1st through 5th positions. Must be able to play with a continuous vibrato and produce a full, clear tone. Must know the following bowing techniques: détaché, ricochet, spiccato, martelé and chords. Symphony Orchestra. Must be able to play with a continuous vibrato and produce a full, clear tone. Must know the following bowing techniques: ponticello, détaché, ricochet, martelé, spiccato, chords and hooked bowings.

4. Sight-reading. Sight-reading for all orchestras will include complex rhythms relative to the level of orchestra.

5. Orchestra placement. Student placement is competitive and is ranked in order of artistic quality. Those qualities include superiority of tone, intonation, vibrato (as appropriate), dynamic range, musicality and general accuracy. Although a student may be able to perform all the requirements for a particular orchestra, he or she may still not qualify based on the level of competition in a given year.

Finally think about preparing for College Music Auditions. This should not be the last part of your application process but something you have developed as a plan throughout middle school and high school. Most likely you have been taking lessons and playing with as many other people as

possible. You must prepare just like you have done with any other academic class or field of interest. Most college students have spent time practicing for ACT and SACT tests and music needs to be given the same priority. If you are considering studying music in school you probably have been preparing for a long time. If you want to continue music while in college you will still benefit from an audition and may be able to get some scholarship money for being in the orchestra or jazz program. I think it was easier in the past to decide to study music at the last minute but now with the level of abilities, competition, and expense of college you must do the homework to show yourself off in the best possible way. There are always exceptions of course when people are exceptionally talented. Scott LaFaro who revolutionized jazz bass playing in the late 50s was a tenor sax player of little success until switching to bass. Peter Lloyd started late to the double bass and went to Curtis School of Music and said, “I kind of took to it.” I always remember a James Clute quote, “Music has to be your blood, not just your passion. You can live without passion but not without blood.”

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