



## How to Take Ownership of an Audition

### What to say to your students before they audition...

By Horace Alexander Young

**H**ow many times have you come out of an audition feeling that you played poorly in spite of having “done all the right things” to prepare for a successful outcome? This is obviously a frustrating experience that many of us share and when one finds this to be a commonplace occurrence, often times the resulting position that is adopted yields the phrase “I don’t audition well.” Let’s look at some of the common approaches to preparation and examine some alternatives.

**Problem #1 - “I stayed up all night before the audition and played my prepared piece over and over. It was perfect at home, but when I got to the audition everything fell apart.”**

**Solution** - You cannot play well if you are tired and not rested. You may be operating under the illusion that you are prepared and that “everything sounded great at home,” but even that assessment is a judgment made by tired ears. Such an approach is one that is dated and steeped in a tradition that is somewhat old-fashioned. The simple solution here lies in time management and practical assessment of the results of your practicing and preparation.

a. Take more time, ahead of time, to prepare and drill the entire audition piece and all of the difficult passages in a detailed manner. Don’t wait until the last minute to cram because you think it helps you “feel that edge.”

b. Record yourself during all of your practice sessions leading up to the audition. Sometimes you think you sound great when truthfully, the opposite is the case. The recordings of your practice sessions will not lie. Learn to use recordings as your biggest asset towards improvement. I would also suggest that you listen to a recording of your audition piece (if available) that has been made by an established performer whose interpretation and



style is the closest to the approach you are taking. Make every effort to absorb the recording aurally and apply it to your performance. Your goal is to know exactly how you sound on this material before the audition.

c. Keep in mind that the best use of time the night before an audition is a good night's sleep (at least eight hours is suggested).

**Problem #2- "I just knew I was ready, but then he/she counted the piece off faster than I was prepared to play and I started rushing because I was nervous."**

**Solution** - If you are playing a prepared piece, you control the tempo. Make sure that you remember to take a long, relaxed breath before counting off the tempo and before you play

your first entrance. This usually ensures that you are relaxed and that you can focus on the center of the tempo. If you are sight-reading a piece as part of the audition, take all of the time

provided to look the piece over and then ask the adjudicator if you can take your own tempo. If that request is granted, then take the piece super slow, at a tempo where you are confident that no errors will be made in pitch recognition, rhythm, style, or dynamics. Once completed, you may be asked to play it again at a faster tempo, but by then you are no longer sight-reading and you can approach this with a greater level of confidence. This is one of the most critical areas where many musicians fail to control their own destiny.

**Problem #3 - "I thought I was in tune before I started playing, but as the piece progressed, I could tell that I was sharp/flat."**

**Solution** - Time should be taken prior to entering an audition to make sure that you are ready to play with good pitch. If you do not own a portable tuner, buy one. Every serious musician should own a tuner, a metronome, and some form of recording device to use in the learning and practicing of your instrument. You can check your pitch in the bathroom or hallway before you enter the room. Even if you tune again to the piano, you should be "ballpark close" and should only require minor adjustments. If you are performing with a play-a-long recording, be sure to tune to the track before you start. Some CD players do not have the same playback rate of speed as the one that you are accustomed to using. If your accompaniment tracks are on an iPod (or some other MP3 device or a laptop), be sure that you bring your own adapters or cables to plug into the playback system or device. If your tracks are on your cell phone, be sure to put your device in "airplane mode." You do not wish for your performance to be interrupted by an incoming call or text message. Be sure to call ahead of time and ask about this information so that you are adequately prepared.

**Problem #4 - I got there and everyone else had on a suit and tie. I felt so out of place in jeans and a sweatshirt."**

**Solution** - You should always make the assumption that your attire should reflect a professional image. Despite some trendy, contemporary idealistic fantasies to the contrary, "Image does matter." What you wear is a direct reflection on and about you

and it sends a signal to others who do not know you on a personal level. If you come to an audition poorly attired, those listening to you will be predisposed towards a negative first impression about you that may be difficult for you to overcome with your performance. Some time should be spent deciding what you will wear and it would be a good idea to make a video of you performing in that attire. This will give you a chance to see yourself and have a solid idea of how you look on stage. Obviously, the attire should also be chosen based on comfort and ease of playing. With proper advice and adequate lead time in your preparation, your ultimate choices in this area can yield very positive results.

Lastly, here are some brief pointers that will give you an advantage in the "ownership" of your audition.

1. Always arrive early and make a point that those in charge of the audition see you and know that you are there.

2. Prepare a short resume or bio that you give to the adjudicator(s). Do this even if it is not required or asked of you.

3. Make a repertoire list of pieces or excerpts of which you are prepared to play (from memory) and encourage the adjudicator to choose what they would prefer to hear. Since you have all of the materials memorized, their choice will not matter. This is a technique that will impress an adjudicator based not only on your subsequent performance, but also on the level of preparation on your part.

4. When sight-reading, play with a full, confident sound and do so with an attitude that you already know the piece very well. Again, confidence is very importance here.

5. Quite often, you will be asked about your goals and objectives concerning your musical career or the job or position for which you are auditioning. Your answers need to be direct, short, and straight-to-the-point. If you do not anticipate these types of questions and prepare your responses ahead of time, you will be caught off guard when this happens.

6. Always thank the adjudicator(s) or audition panel members at the end of your segment for the opportunity you have been granted, regardless of how well or how poorly you may feel that you have performed.

Every audition is merely another performance, another chance to experience the joy and the privilege of playing music for someone who shows enough interest and respect for us to take their time to listen. By keeping this thought in mind constantly as we perform, we will capture the last, but most important key to the concept of "ownership": humility.



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