

## AUDITION TIPS by Charles Bartrug

**This is the time of year when All-Region and All-State auditions are looming. The following tips were taken from a number of clinics on the subject of audition preparation.**

### WHY IS PREPARATION SO IMPORTANT?

- There is no substitute for being prepared on your music.
- A lack of preparation leaves too much to chance.
- Good preparation gives us better control over the situation and helps us control our nerves.
- Begin preparing as early as possible.

### IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF A GREAT AUDITION

- Tone quality – this is listed first for a reason. A person who plays great technique with a bad tone still sounds bad.
- Basics – notes, rhythms, and articulations must be completely in place.
- Pulse – this is an often overlooked component, but you may be surprised how a bad sense of pulse can negatively affect the judge's opinion of the performance.
- Style – in the most basic sense, style is all about note length. Surprisingly, many performers are not aware of style inconsistencies. Be sure you think through all the passages with regard to note length.
- Musicianship – the best performances show obvious attention to the details of dynamics, accents and phrasing. Even if the music has no expression markings, great musicians will create their own interpretation.

### TOOLS

- Metronome – this is my favorite practice tool. Using a metronome helps you keep a steady pulse (see above), and is a great practice aid. Technical passages can be practiced slowly, then sped up to reach the desired tempo. When practicing with a metronome, be sure you are “tuned in” to the clicks. I have witnessed many students practicing with a metronome who just ignored the pulse. This is counter-productive. MAKE yourself stay with the beat. If you can't – slow down.
- Tuner – Someone once said the most important person to play in tune with is you! Use a tuner to help center your pitches in extreme upper and lower ranges, and to help with large interval leaps.
- Recording Device – this could be your phone, iPad, or a purchased recorder. Be aware – inexpensive recorders (like a phone) don't have a very wide frequency range and won't help you judge your tone. Also, many have built-in volume leveling compressors, so all your

dynamics will be leveled to the same volume. Recordings can give you a very accurate representation of steady sound, articulation, rhythm, tempo, missed notes, places to breathe, style and interpretation. Recording yourself is great because you not only hear all of the things you are doing incorrectly, but just as importantly, you hear all of the things you are doing correctly!

### SIGHT READING

- When it comes to separating the top players in an audition, sight reading is usually the key factor!
- Many students practice hard on the prepared etudes, but totally neglect sight reading. This is certainly to your disadvantage.
- Buy a second (or third) method book. Read a page every day. Don't go back to fix things. Try to create a performance on the first reading.
- Smartmusic is a fantastic tool for sight reading. Many sight reading exercises of every conceivable level are included in the files, and the Smartmusic program will even assess your performance for you. This is well worth the money!

### AUDITION DAY TIPS

- Don't over-practice on the day of the audition. If you don't know it by now, cramming won't help (see the section on preparation).
- Focus on your performance, not on anyone else. Many students create their own mental problems by worrying about beating someone else. You can only control your part of the audition, so focus on that.
- Concentrate – this may seem obvious, but many students let simple distractions wreck their audition. Stay focused on playing the piece of music in front of you and don't think about anything else. You must get yourself wrapped up in the music you are performing. Get lost in the moment and forget about everything else that's going on your life during the actual audition.
- When performing, remember your air is your friend. If you practice breathing correctly and apply it to your performance, you will be surprised at how you will be calmer, and your playing will be made easier.
- If your mouth gets dry when you get nervous, bring a cup of water in the room with you and take a sip before you play. NO ICE! Ice makes your tongue swell, and will hinder articulation.
- At the conclusion of your audition, leave quietly. Don't give the judge any reaction to your performance, good or bad.

**Use these tips to give yourself the best possible chance of success at your upcoming audition. Good luck!**