

Preparing String Students for College Auditions

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College auditions are coming up soon for seniors thinking about majoring in music, and it's not too soon for high school juniors to be thinking about their auditions as well. Being well prepared for all aspects of the audition experience can make a major difference in successfully completing the process. Here are some things to consider when helping our students get ready for auditions:

PRE-AUDITION STRATEGIES

Students should try to set aside at least one day to visit each campus they are considering. In addition to general university campus tours, most schools of music will allow prospective students to sit in on classes, listen to (or participate in) rehearsals, and observe lessons or chamber music coachings.

Perhaps the most important pre-audition experience would be to arrange a sample lesson with the student's prospective private teacher. Most studio teachers will be happy to set up a free lesson in advance of the audition. This is advantageous to both the student and the teacher: the student can get an idea of the teacher's knowledge and teaching style, and the teacher can get an idea of how well the student responds to new ideas. This lesson can also pave the way for a more comfortable audition experience.

Before going for the lesson, the student should do some research on the teacher's background. It's useful to know the teacher's training, teaching experience, performance background, and student success. If any questions come to mind as a result of this research, the sample lesson would be a good time to bring them up to the teacher.

AUDITION REPERTOIRE

Each school has its own repertoire requirements; most of them are listed at the respective schools' websites. If there are any questions about meeting the requirements, don't hesitate to contact a faculty member for your instrument for confirmation. Many schools are fairly flexible about what they will hear, but a few adhere strictly to their guidelines. Choice of repertoire is critical. The most important thing to remember is

to choose rep that shows the student's highest level of playing, but not beyond what they can play well. Most faculty I know would be more impressed by a well-prepared performance of a Breval cello concerto or an Accolay violin concerto rather than a struggling or sloppy performance of Dvorak or Mendelssohn.

PREPARATION IN THE BASICS

One way colleges judge string players' potential is by their setup. If their position is good generally, with a good bow grip, good posture, and efficient motion, an audition committee will perceive that the student is serious and cares about doing things right. A student who is set up well tends to be easier to work with and will be more highly sought after than one who needs remedial work.

INTONATION—SCALE AND ARPEGGIO BACKGROUND

For string players, intonation is the most obvious quality that separates strong prospects from weak ones. Some schools require scales and arpeggios in their auditions, but even if they're not required for the schools you're interested in they are valuable in establishing intonation concepts.

It's a good idea to encourage regular scale and arpeggio practice.

INTERVIEW

Most schools will do some type of interview on the audition day. It's helpful to do some research on the various degree programs offered and be ready with intelligent questions about the school's offerings. Some possible degree programs would be the Bachelor of Music Education, Bachelor of Music in Performance, Music Therapy, and the Bachelor of Arts. Whatever the final choice for a major focus, it pays to do as much homework as possible in advance of the Big Day.

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