

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE COLLEGE AUDITION

by

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The college audition can be a terrifying, yet exhilarating experience. Much rests on this one brief performance, so careful and proper preparation is essential. While practicing is a crucial element, it is not the only one. Listed below are items to consider in preparing for the college audition.

Research

Begin early and narrow your interests. Any student contemplating a college music degree should begin preparations in their junior year of high school. An important initial step is determining in which area of music a student wants to specialize. Some of the more popular degree choices include music education, performance, composition, jazz studies, and music theory or history. Newer areas include recording engineering, music therapy, music business, and popular or world music. I recommend that each student select the primary degree interest and at least two other areas of music to research. It is common for students to change majors within a music program during the first year or two, so having a couple of choices in the beginning is wise.

Find the right schools. Research the colleges and universities that are strong in your chosen fields. Choices can be narrowed by determining what price range you can afford and what locales you want to consider. Saxophonists may also want to research schools where they know about the private teacher. The high school music teachers and guidance counselors may be of great help in limiting the search based on these factors. Recommendations from music professionals are probably the best way to begin, since these people are familiar with a variety of schools.

Search the Internet. One of the newest and quickest ways to research colleges and universities is by investigating their web page on the Internet. Most schools have developed a comprehensive computer catalogue that can give the reader much information about the institution and its various programs. Included are usually campus photos, detailed music school information, admissions procedures, tuition and fees, and faculty photos and résumés. For instance, a student interested in Ithaca College (Ithaca, NY) can visit our web site at <http://www.ithaca.edu> or go to the specific School

of Music site at <http://www.ithaca.edu/music>. You can even send an electronic letter (e-mail) requesting information or asking questions. For those who do not know the Internet addresses of specific schools, I highly recommend this web site (<http://www-dtp.cc.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/>), which lists colleges and universities around the country.

Request brochures and CDs. The older method of reviewing a variety of print materials from schools is still one of the best ways to start. This is the most thorough introduction to a campus and includes much of the vital information most students want to know. Traditional brochures are now augmented by video and audiotapes, as well as CD and DVD recordings. Request everything the school has to offer.

Application

Apply to several schools. The initial research base should include many schools. After reviewing the pros and cons of each school, the student should narrow the choices down to say five or six institutions. If possible, plan to visit all of these campuses before you bother applying. Location, facilities, and a sense of the institution's personality can only be assessed from an on-site visit. The sooner this is done, the better. If possible, try to set up a meeting with the private teacher and director of admissions while you are there. Some teachers will even offer a brief private lesson to give you an idea of their teaching style.

Prepare applications early and thoroughly. Once the choices are selected, get the application material as soon as possible. Usually the beginning of the senior year is sufficient. Prepare these materials very carefully and thoroughly. Provide all of the requested information in a timely fashion and in a neat and organized manner. Information regarding financial aid is particularly important if a student is requesting scholarships, loans, work-study positions, or similar financial support. Be early with all of the application materials and check periodically (and politely) with the institutions to be sure everything has arrived.

Repertoire Selection

Find out what is expected. The college audition frequently includes scales, etudes and/or solo selections, and sight-reading. Some music schools have a prescribed set of materials that must be performed for a saxophone audition, while others allow the student to play whatever he or she wishes. Contact each school to find out what is required. The material may also vary depending on whether the audition is primarily classical or jazz in nature. Once information is obtained from all of the schools, select a set of pieces

that can work for all of the auditions. The least amount of music you have to prepare the better you will play.

Select material that you play very well. A good audition should show off everything you do well and hide everything you do badly. Many students tend to select pieces that are too difficult for them or that they have only prepared for a short time. An easier piece played well is much more impressive than a harder piece played poorly. Show off at the audition and play at your highest level.

Choose contrasting styles. Something slow and lyrical will illustrate tone and vibrato, while a faster selection will demonstrate technical mastery. A Baroque transcription, contrasted by an original piece for saxophone, will demonstrate your breadth of musicianship. If you can play well in the altissimo register or can do some other special techniques, choose material that demonstrates them. Show the auditioner all your abilities.

Preparation

Get in shape! This means toning the muscles necessary for playing the saxophone. Of course, the best method is a consistent daily practice session, preceded by a logical and organized warm-up routine. Any high school student serious about a college audition should be practicing about one to two hours daily. The sooner this routine is established, the greater the chances for success.

Find a private saxophone teacher. Good colleges are very competitive and a highly qualified private teacher can make the difference between acceptance and rejection. This professional usually knows what colleges expect and can provide a wealth of information about playing the saxophone at an advanced level. These weekly lessons help the student set higher goals and provide the frequent feedback necessary for improvement.

Aim for perfection. Work with the private teacher to be sure that the music is both technically and musically prepared to the best of your ability. If you think you have it perfected, look for another aspect of the music to improve. It can never be too good.

Practice the art of performing. Set aside time in each practice session to perform something. This can be simply scales, a warm-up routine, or part of a solo or etude. (Keep in mind that performing means no stops; so keep going regardless of any errors.) This will help train you to ignore the small mistakes we all make in our daily playing and help teach focus and concentration. Play the audition material for a recorder device and critique yourself during the playback. You know how it should sound, so be your own teacher. The pressure of playing the music in front of friends, family,

and teachers also will prepare you for the performance in front of the auditioner. Do as much performing before the audition as you can.

Prepare numerous reeds. Different climate and humidity can make that "perfect" reed you selected at home a disaster at the audition. To combat this problem, have four to eight reeds ready to play, including ones that are too soft and too hard. During your warm-up period, find out which reeds work best in this school's environment, so you will be ready for any surprises.

Prepare a repertoire list and résumé. Bring a complete repertoire list (including solos, etudes, and method books) and résumé to your audition. Even if you sent these previously, they may not be available to the auditioner. Do not be afraid to list your non-music jobs, school clubs, and even hobbies. This shows your outside interests and personal background, and tells the auditioner more about you.

Pay attention to academics. Most schools require a minimum SAT and high school average for acceptance. Those students who think only of their music and little about their academics are often not attractive to the better schools. Be well rounded and complete in your preparation.

Audition Day

Stay relaxed to do your best. This may be easier said than done, but it is a key element to success. As the saying goes, "Do not sweat the small stuff." If you have prepared well, you will probably play the audition fine, regardless of nerves and a few errors. Most auditioners have spent years hearing college auditions and know when a student is ill prepared or just nervous. Relax and have fun.

Save it for the audition. Save your best playing for the audition, not the practice room. Play a logical warm-up, including a few excerpts of the music you are going to perform, test reeds, and be sure your ready. Do not overplay in the practice room or you may have nothing left for the audition.

Be confident and flexible. If you have prepared well, you should be very confident at your audition. Play to impress the auditioner. Be polite, friendly, and smile (this will also help you to relax). Since most auditions have to be fit into a brief time span, you may not be allowed to play everything you prepared. Do not worry if the auditioner stops you in the middle of a piece. It is probably due to time, not bad playing.

Play only one saxophone. I recommend that you only audition on one saxophone. Some students think that playing several saxophones will increase their chances. In fact, it only slows down the audition procedure, while the student takes various instruments out of the cases and wets several reeds. Telling the auditioner that you play other instruments will usually be

sufficient, while demonstrating your high-level skills on just one horn. If in doubt about this, contact the school ahead of time and discuss this with the auditioner.

To jazz or not to jazz. If jazz music is an integral part of the audition, be sure to prepare it well. If jazz is not part of the audition, it may not be necessary to demonstrate this skill. Focus only on what is needed for a successful audition. Jazz at a classical audition, or visa versa, may be nice, but may only distract you from preparing what is required at your topmost level.

Take a tour. Some audition-day programs include a tour of the music facilities and campus. If none is offered, ask about this or explore for yourself. It is very important to become familiar with the campus of all the schools you are considering.

Results

The long wait. Some schools provide the audition results within a week or so, while others wait until April to make notification. All you can do is wait. If you have not heard within the indicated time, feel free to call or write the music admissions director to check on your status.

Take the good with the bad. A school cannot take every applicant. Some students will be accepted by every school for which they audition, while others will be rejected by some of their choices. The latter is depressing, especially if your first choice turns you down. Keep in mind that this audition process is geared toward helping you to succeed. The audition is a school's way of assuring that the students who are accepted meet its minimum performance standards. Once you have been accepted by certain schools, feel good that they deemed you worthy a student in their program. You can do little about the ones that rejected you.

Thank those who have helped you. Many people made the audition day success a reality. Relatives, friends, and teachers have all played a big part in supporting your efforts in one way or the other. Show your appreciation by a kind word, a call, or a card to let them know how much their support meant to you.

The college audition is one of the most singularly important events in a high school student's musical life. Make plans to prepare well for this audition to help secure a position in the school of your choice.