

# *A Recital Checklist*

by

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Preparing for a recital may seem an obvious task. You just practice and rehearse with your accompanist, right? This is what you might think, if you have never done one before. Preparing for a recital requires not only practicing and rehearsing, but also a lot of organization and planning.

While experienced performers may know how to prepare, the novice recitalist could have a tough time without proper planning. Below is a list of items to consider in preparing for a recital. Each heading indicates the amount of time **before** the recital that a specific task must be done. Keep in mind that this is just a starting point and that each recitalist will need to plan for his or her concert in a unique way.

## **Six Months**

*Select the Music* - The recital music must be chosen early to guarantee proper preparation. Music that is particularly challenging will even need more time to master. Choosing the repertoire early also allows prospective accompanists (pianists and chamber musicians) to peruse the music to be sure it is within their capabilities.

*Set a Budget* - Find out how much money is needed to mount the recital. Be sure to figure in such items as hall rental, cost of music, accompanying musicians' fees and gifts, recording fees, clothing purchase or rental, travel, housing and meals. You will not know if you can afford to present the recital until you have figured these costs. If you are receiving a fee for your concert, be sure you will still maintain a profit after expenses.

*Select a Date and Site* - You need to set the date and site for most recitals at least half a year ahead to assure hall availability. If possible, schedule a dress rehearsal and extra time for the accompanist to practice on the hall piano when booking the site. Be sure to check the local calendar for other events in the area that may deter people from attending your recital, such as other concerts, athletic events, and holidays. Also be sure to check the hall regulations about recording the concert. Some halls allow outside engineers, while other require you to use their personnel at a set fee.

*Select Accompanying Musician* - Get a firm commitment from supporting musicians and double check that the date is "inked in" on their calendar. Be sure to find out their fees, including rehearsals, dress rehearsal and performance.

*Start Practicing the Music* - This seems obvious, but you might be surprised how many people put off this important step. It is never too early to begin the musical and technical preparation for a concert.

## **Two Months**

*Provide Accompanists with Music* - If accompanying musicians do not already have their parts, get the music to them at least two months before the concert. Be sure you keep copies of scores for your own study.

*Double Check All Planning* - This is the time to be sure all the arrangements are finalized. Included would be hall reservation, availability of accompanying musicians, finances, and the like. Do not let a missed detail spoil your concert.

*Intensive Study of Recordings* - Prepare a compact disc of your recital music from professional recordings, when possible. Live with this tape and listen to it daily to become thoroughly familiar with the selections.

*Engage the Recording Engineer* - Colleges and universities will often provide a recording engineer free of charge. If you are performing at a private hall, however, be sure you make recording arrangements at least two months in advance.

## **One Month**

*Start Performing the Music* - Up to this point, you may have just practiced the compositions. You should now begin to run whole movements and pieces, even without accompanists. This will help you get ready for the unexpected mental and technical errors present in all live performances. This also prepares you for the physical strain of a full recital, similar to the training an athlete does in preparation for a sporting event.

*Research Program Notes* - Those individuals who plan to provide program notes at their recital should begin researching the selections. Allow plenty of time to assure that your program notes are well written and accurate.

*Prepare and Distribute Publicity* - Colleges and universities usually require that publicity packets for recitals be completed and submitted about a month in advance. Concerts at private halls will require similar information. Included should be a copy of the program, any information about the pieces that would make good news copy, photos (if requested), and often brief information about yourself and the other musicians. Be sure to check the spelling of accompanist's names and avoid using nicknames or shortened versions of names. At this time, remember to send announcements to friends and relatives reminding them about the recital.

*Begin Rehearsals* - If possible, start rehearsing at least some of the selections with the accompanying musicians one month in advance. This will depend on the availability of accompanists, of course. Early rehearsals will lead to a more relaxed and polished final performance.

## **Two Weeks**

*Intensify Rehearsals* - Now is the time to get the rehearsal schedule going in earnest. These two weeks of intensive rehearsing will no doubt make or break the final concert.

*Begin Coachings* - If you are a college student, you will probably start bringing in accompanists to lessons for formal coachings. Those students not in college may choose to engage a teacher or other musician to listen to rehearsals and offer suggestions. If a professional coach is unavailable, tape the rehearsals and study them to become your own coach. (This last idea is a good one regardless of whether you have a coach or not.)

*Pre-Recital Concert* - Nothing prepares a final concert better than a pre-recital concert. This can be another formal performance or just a run-through in front of friends, families, or teachers. A low-pressure situation, playing even a few of the selections, will help prepare you for the mental demands of the recital.

*Prepare Recital Reeds* - Two weeks before the concert is about the right time to begin preparing your recital reeds. This is especially true in climates with significant seasonal changes. Reeds need to be adjusted for the climate expected during the recital, so start with fresh reeds and begin to break them in properly. (Of course if you have that "magical" reed that always seems to work, keep it on hand!)

*Engage Piano Tuner* - Many concert halls provide the services of a piano tuner free of charge. Be sure to check on this important item at least a month in advance. If you are responsible for this cost, secure the services of a reputable tuner early.

### **One Week**

*Positive Mental Imagery* - You have worked hard, so focus on all the positive aspects of your playing. Sure, there may still be a few items in need of attention, but feel good about yourself and "imagine" the joy of playing this recital well. Envision yourself on the stage as you listen to your cassette tape and keep a very positive outlook.

*Perform Recital Daily* - You are now in the final stages of preparation, so daily performance of the recital is crucial. Set aside some time each day for practicing problem spots and a separate time for performing the music. Space these two sessions, so you can envision the latter as a true performance. This mental and physical conditioning is essential for a successful recital. (Do this even if the accompanying musicians are unavailable. Play your part, counting out all rests, and do not stop for mistakes!)

*Pre-Recital Concert* - If possible, schedule another pre-recital concert, including all the selections this time. Perform the music in order to better gauge the physical demands.

*Final Reed Selection* - Select the reeds that seem most responsive in the present climate. Adjust them as needed to be sure you have several available for the concert. Be sure to rotate reeds daily, so you do not "blow out" your best reeds before the concert.

*Plan After-Concert Gathering* - Many people choose to give a party or reception after a concert. If you intend to do so, plan out all of the details at least a week ahead. (Remember, the room in which you hold the function may need to be reserved well in advance.) If possible, let a friend or family member take over this responsibility to remove one more burden from your shoulders.

*Purchase Gifts* - Although accompanists may be receiving a fee, small gifts are often appropriate as a more personal sign of your appreciation. If friends are accompanying you, this gift, and the enjoyment of performing the music, may be their only "reward." Gifts need not be extravagant; as always, it is the thought that counts. (I do not recommend corsages for accompanists. These are nice, but often get in the way during the concert. Flowers are best given as bouquets.)

### **Dress Rehearsal**

*Performance Check or Run-Through* - You will need to decide the purpose of your dress rehearsal before you begin. If the hall is familiar, you may want to use the time as a pre-recital concert, with no stops. If, however, the hall is unfamiliar, you may prefer to use the time for balance checks and placement experimentations. A coach or other qualified musician sitting in the audience will be crucial for advising you.

*Acoustics Check* - Dress rehearsals are a good time to check out the hall acoustics. Position yourself at various spots around the center of the stage to find out what works best. Moving the performers closer or further from the stage lip can often make significant differences.

*Piano Check* - Allow the pianist plenty of time to try out the piano. If more than one is available, they should be compared to find out which one is best. (Remember, you have brought your saxophone with you. The pianist must adjust to this new instrument on the spot, so be patient and quiet as he or she tests the instrument.)

*Reed Selection* - Test your reeds to see which ones respond best in the hall. Be sure to mark them to avoid confusion at the concert.

*Record Performance* - If possible, record your dress rehearsal. (This is especially important if you have not given a pre-recital concert.) You can learn much from listening to this tape and fix many small problems quickly.

### **Concert Day**

*Be Confident* - The big day has arrived! You are undoubtedly apprehensive, concerned that you may not be able to meet the demands of the program. You have prepared well, though, so be confident!

*Rest* - Be sure that you have had plenty of rest the few days before the recital. It is especially important that you have a peaceful night of sleep the day before, so get to bed early! You need to be rested and alert to do your best.

*Minimal Practice* - Do not play through the music on the recital day. Do a good warm-up routine and just spot check passages. Let the recital be the main event and merely prepare you to play well.

*Pick Recital Reeds* - You will usually be able to get into the concert hall about an hour before the concert begins. Since the ushers allow people to enter about 15-30 minutes before the concert time, you will only have about half an hour to play. Use this time to make final reed selections.

*Recording Engineer Set-Up* - Remember that the recording engineer will need to get into the hall early, too. The equipment can be set up while you are checking reeds and spot-checking tempi with your accompanist. The engineer can get balance checks during this time to assure the best results.

*Enjoy Your Performance* - The months of preparation are behind you. Now, enjoy your hard work and have fun! Do not be unnecessarily distracted by the few slips and errors that occur at every recital.

*Celebrate Your Success* - The concert is over and all of your hard work has paid off! Now, put that horn in the case and go celebrate with your fellow musicians, teachers, friends, and family.