

The golden rules of orchestral auditions

Peter Stark's reflections on how to give successful auditions



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We all hate auditioning! Nobody who sits on an audition panel would dispute that fact because we have all been there ourselves, and probably (certainly in my case!) many times. The main reason for our difficulty with, or hatred of auditions, is down to nerves or anxiety; but, the adrenalin that causes our tremors and racing heart beat actually heightens our awareness and, particularly important, critical faculty. In short we never play as well as we know we can, but I would suggest that we also (unknowingly) actually play better than we think we are.

The anxiety issue is dealt with beautifully in Peter Gane's excellent video on this. What I would like to offer is some help in realising what audition panels look for, and give some insight as to what to expect in a EUYO audition. Firstly let's investigate what orchestral auditions are about, whatever the orchestra you are applying for.

1. What do audition panels look for?

It goes without saying that panels are looking to see how well you play! Sound quality, facility, rhythm and intonation all register with us, but also your ability to deal with the pressure of the situation. Above everything else, we are looking for positive attitude and an ability to communicate. Play as communicator, not performing circus act!

2. Your solo piece

How is your performance? Is it stylistically appropriate, confident, subtle? Do you show you have an idea of how the music affects you? Do you cope with the almost inevitable accidents on the way, or are you phased by them?

3. Orchestral excerpts

These form the essence of orchestral auditions. They equalise everybody, and they also demonstrate clearly whether you know the piece they come from. Of course, they are difficult – they always will be! No orchestra would give excerpts that are easy! Learn the piece that they come from, and what is going on at the same time as the passage you are playing. For the panel it is absolutely clear whether you have done this. Let us say you have a string accompanying passage... do you show awareness of the melody you are accompanying? Or, if a panel member asked you what was playing at the same time and you couldn't answer – this is a real negative. Do you respond to the harmonic changes that might happen during your passage, waiting perhaps for a beautiful harmonic change that happens in another part, not yours? We notice these things!

4. Personality

Every orchestra wants beautiful personalities in its membership! If you show musicality, optimism, character, idea you will score well, but if you show trouble, difficulty, and blank expression you will not.

5. EUYO auditions

And now, something more specific about EUYO auditions. In a final round audition there will usually be only one EUYO tutor and his or her camera. Obviously, this panel member may or may not be of your discipline, so the camera is there for final moderation; when auditions have finished the videos that we collect are grouped together and sent to a specialist of your 'department', so strings, woodwind, brass, percussion and harp. There will also be some moderation by further focusing on individual instruments; flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon - and so on.

Apart from percussion, you are likely to be asked to play your piece first, but please be aware that we will only hear a short section. Don't be alarmed if we seem to stop you quite quickly, or read this as a suggestion that you're not playing very well. It is only because we want to spend enough time on the excerpts. Your choice of piece is quite critical; some instruments have few possible pieces written for them, but for some others a vast wealth of repertoire exists. For the latter instruments, choose your piece carefully!

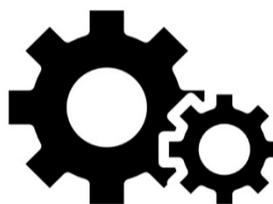
After that, we will hear some of the excerpts; be prepared to play any of them, as we might want to hear a particular aspect of your playing. We're going to increase our practice of working a little on one or more of the excerpts; this is not to put you under pressure, but to see how flexible you are, and look at your ability to change and adapt.

'When will I hear the result?' - We can't give results until all audition have been heard. This process takes until mid-December. After that all the moderating takes place, which can take a few weeks (and subject to the holiday period). We hope to get results out at the very end of January, or beginning of February. Please respond as quickly as possible to any invitation as the office has a fairly quick turnaround to prepare for the Spring tour.

Finally, some golden rules:



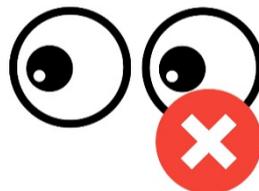
1) Choose a solo piece that you are comfortable playing. Don't try to impress us with one that is perhaps beyond you at this stage.



2) Treat the orchestral excerpts with real respect, and practise playing them at different speeds and in different moods.



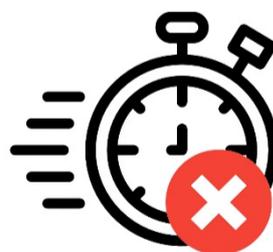
3) Greet the panel member with positive and good-natured politeness!



4) Never look at the panel member whilst you are playing.



5) Do not register disgust or even disappointment at a mistake made; all this does is to interrupt the flow of thought needed to get you back on the rails.



6) Do not play the fast excerpts too fast! This only makes them even harder! Nerves encourage us to be perhaps less aware of speed than we are in our practice room!

I wish you all success, and look forward to hearing those who come under my schedule!

Peter Stark

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