

Planning for Success: The Scholarship Audition

By George R. Boulden



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In February of 2003, the University of Kentucky Symphony Band was a featured ensemble at the **Kentucky Music Educators Association Conference** in Louisville, and most recently performed at the **2005 Southern Division MENC/Florida Music Educators Association Conference** in Tampa, Florida.

One of the most enjoyable parts about teaching at the college/university level is the opportunity to hear high school seniors as they audition for scholarship consideration. Unfortunately, there are a few who arrive less prepared and may not demonstrate their true level of musicianship during the brief time of the audition. It is the intent of this article to offer some suggestions to those students who may be considering auditioning for scholarship assistance during their senior year.

PART ONE: BEFORE THE AUDITION

As a junior in high school you should begin to investigate the options available to you. *It is not usually a good idea to wait to begin this process your senior year. As you will see, there is bit of detective work involved, and you will be busy enough during your final year in high school.* As you make a list of schools that you find most interesting, call or write the various Admissions Offices to find out the proper procedures necessary to be admitted. In many cases, this information may also be found on the internet by using a search engine to locate a particular school. After you receive this information, read through it carefully and begin to determine a list of campuses you might like to visit. It is in your best interest to visit at least 2-3 schools during your junior and senior years. This will give you the opportunity to gather more information and allow you to begin to rank the schools in order of preference. This will not be an easy task and may require an additional visit prior to your audition date. Finally, if you have not started private lessons you may want to ask your director for her recommendations. Based on my experiences, the students who have studied privately tend to be more relaxed and better prepared for their audition. *Extra preparation now may pay dividends later.*

The next step is to contact the music department and plan a campus visit. During this visit you will want to meet the ensemble director(s) and the studio professor of your voice/instrument. You may also take a private lesson, observe rehearsals/classes, and talk to students currently in the program.

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- What types of scholarship assistance are available?
- Are there different levels of scholarship support?
- Are scholarships available to anyone regardless of academic major?
- What are my obligations/commitments in return for the scholarship assistance?
- When are scholarship auditions held?
- What am I expected to prepare and perform to be considered for a scholarship?
- What additional fees or costs are not covered by a scholarship?
- And, when will I be notified of the results of my scholarship audition?

Before you leave the campus, make sure the music department has the information necessary to contact you during your senior year. This usually involves completing some paperwork to ensure your inclusion on the school's database.

Based on the audition requirements, the next steps in your preparation are vitally important. *You are encouraged to audition at several schools - don't limit your opportunities for success!* As we all have learned, there is no substitute for experience, and auditioning at different schools will allow you to visit the campus once again and learn more about the music program.

Here are some guidelines as you move to the next step:

- Choose the literature you are going to perform carefully. The studio professor that you met on your initial visit may have some suggestions for you. Call to confirm your ideas -or- to see if he/she has any other recommendations. *Remember that you want to select music that demonstrates your strengths as a musician.*

- Ask if the music should be memorized.
- Find out if an accompanist is required.
- For instrumentalists, ask which scales may be required.
- Will the audition include sight-reading?

Once you have this information confirm the date, time, and location of your audition. It has become increasingly popular for seniors to prepare a brief resume of their past experiences and accomplishments. This can be particularly helpful to the committee members that will be meeting you for the first time during your audition. Before the audition date find several opportunities to perform the audition material for your private teacher, ensemble director, and peers. Use these performance opportunities to build your confidence and make any final adjustments in your preparation for the audition.

PART TWO: THE AUDITION

Be sure to be well rested and make plans to arrive at least one hour prior to your audition. Find the warm up area, take your time and RELAX! Dress comfortably, but look nice and professional. *Remember that first impressions are lasting impressions.* You are selling an image of yourself, just as you would in a job interview. Once you enter the audition room introduce yourself to the faculty members present by shaking their hands and making good eye contact. Smile, and try to relax. At this point play/sing a few notes to get a feel for the room, Do this carefully since this is the committee's first opportunity to hear your sound – *another first impression.* If you are using an accompanist, remember to tune to the piano. Whether you plan to sit or stand, take time to adjust the stand to the proper height. As a general rule, brass players should not point (aim) their bells directly toward the committee. Present an original copy of your music to the committee, take a deep breath, and begin. It may help you to know that each member of the committee wants you to perform to your best ability, and was, at an earlier time in his life, in the same position you are in now.

After you have finished, the committee may have some questions for you. Again, try to relax. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to highlight your accomplishments during high school, including academic as well as musical achievements. You may also want to share your goals and aspirations for the future. It is important to let the committee know that you are very interested in attending their school next fall. Regardless of how you feel the audition went, remember to thank the committee for hearing you. Smile, gather your belongings, and leave quietly.

PART THREE: AFTER THE AUDITION

Now comes the most difficult part of your quest – the wait! Based on your initial inquiry you should have some idea when you might receive notification of the results. While you are waiting, take the time to review how the audition went.

- What would you do differently?
- What did you do well?
- What could you have done better?
- What did you learn from this experience?

The answers to these questions can be particularly helpful if you are preparing for a future audition.

If, after a reasonable amount of time, you have not yet heard from the music department, contact the studio professor of your major instrument/voice. This is also a very busy time for the scholarship committee and tough decisions have to be made. It would be appropriate to contact the studio professor by phone or letter to find out the status of your audition. At this point she should be able to let you know when you will receive more information.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

At this time competition for scholarship assistance is very high, and costs of attending a college or university continue to rise with no end in sight. The good news is that scholarship assistance at all levels exists at most colleges and universities. You have nothing to lose and much to gain by completing the audition process. As well as possible financial opportunities, you will gain experience and further your musical development. You may discover more about your true musical goals and aspirations for the future, and where you might fit into the “puzzle” that makes up the music program at the college or university you plan to attend. Finally, remember to be yourself, ask lots of questions, and plan for success!

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