

Audition Preparation Handout

John DiCesare - Seattle Symphony Orchestra

Overview:

The basic premise of my audition preparation is to be in total command of the instrument and leave nothing to chance. Auditions are filled with variables outside of our control; weather, time of day, quality of space etc. I have found this method to work well in both of my Louisville and Seattle auditions. I was prepared, comfortable, and ready for anything in both instances. You know your playing better than I do, so feel free to modify if necessary! It is important to realize I have years of excerpt practice under my belt and you may need more than six weeks, especially if you're learning things for the first time.

Things you will need:

- Metronome
- Tuner
- Recording device
- Audition booklet (Make this immediately)
- Calendar (Put inside book)
- Deck of cards
- Friends (set of ears)
- Playlist of excerpts (Spotify is easy, Apple music) Useful books:
- Books:
 - Don Greene - Audition Success and Performance Success
 - Eugen Herrigel - Zen in the Art of Archery
 - Timothy Gallwey - The Inner Game of Tennis

Timeline:

This is one of the most important aspects of my preparation. Put this plan in place, and stick to it. We build habits over the years playing excerpts and this is an attempt to get things locked back in correctly. If you have a good excerpt foundation you can start 6 weeks out, if excerpts are new to you I recommend starting 7-8 weeks out. You should continue to do your daily routine BEFORE beginning excerpts. Fundamentals are very important but DO NOT blow your chops out doing a 3 hour routine.

6 weeks:

- Half(ish) speed preparation on challenging excerpts. ****Do not play these excerpts at full speed until 3 weeks out**** The goal here is to retrain the face to be efficient and to lock these in with minimal effort. Do this for 2 weeks.
- Set a metronome and play through excerpts like Fountains, Heldenleben, Ride, Symphonie Fantastique, Symphonic Met., Mahler 5, etc.
- Add a drone when possible; Ride, Opening of Fountains, End of Fantastique.
- Avoid excerpts that will cause discomfort; Bydlo, Petroushka, etc.

- Don't waste time. If you do not need to play Mahler 1 and half speed, don't do it.
- Play excerpts that may be easy for you sparingly and at full tempo. Make use of this half speed practice on excerpts that need it.
- Record and listen back as much as you can handle. It never hurts to listen back. How is your time? Pitch? Are note lengths consistent? What about articulations? You can fix so much by just paying attention.

4 weeks:

- Now we will ramp up the speed to around 75%. Spend the first couple days bumping gradually. Keep using met/drones/recording etc.
- Listen to recordings.

3 weeks:

- Hopefully you aren't sick of this yet. It can be boring but stay focused.
- Ramp up from 75% to full speed over the week. If things start to not feel locked in, take that excerpt back a notch. I would try to reach 100% by Wednesday/Thursday of this week (if you started prep on Sunday).
- Listen to recordings

2 weeks:

- At this point everything is full steam ahead. All excerpts are at full speed and hopefully things are feeling and sounding great. Now the fun begins!
- You may be wondering what the cards are for, and I don't blame you. Label each excerpt with a card; example Meistersinger Soli - 2 of spades. Do this for the entire list. If you have cards leftover assign those to your WEAKEST excerpts. That way these pop up more often. This was a fun way for me to make sure I hit every excerpt daily, and to keep the order fresh. I would traditionally practice the *hard* excerpts over and over and neglect the *easier* ones.
- Mock auditions with the cards and recorder. Shuffle the deck, pull 5-8 cards. Play through the list to your recorder. Listen back, reflect, spend a few minutes touching parts that you didn't like and MOVE ON. Do this until the deck is gone. I only had time to do this once a day, feel free to do it more often if you have enough time and endurance.
- Find a friend you respect and trust to give you good feedback. Play a few mock audition rounds for them this week. Have them select excerpts, make it as real as possible.

1 week:

- Audition is coming up. Continue the deck of cards game with recorder.
- Try to line up mock auditions as much as possible. Find a good room!
- Take care of your face, don't over practice. You know your limits better than anyone.
- Put a section together to blow down section excerpt possibilities. Browse the list and ask a teacher what would most likely be on a section round.

Basic Stuff:

- **Take care of your body:** sleep well, eat good food, exercise, don't drink too much, drink plenty of water. You need to be the best version of yourself. Some people don't drink alcohol during the entire preparation process.
- Keep as much consistency as possible. Setup your horns and chair the same way everyday, read out of your audition booklet, take time between excerpts.
- Make good use of your chops. When getting ready for Seattle I was playing *heavy* kids concerts in Louisville. In order to have enough face for my prep. I had to shorten my routine, and cut a few "easier" excerpts when running mocks.
- Listen to your playlist when possible, learn how tuba fits in the orchestra, you should have a very strong internal concept of how you want these things to sound.
- Time, Intonation, and Sound are **not negotiable**. You will not advance if you aren't close with these.
- **BE YOURSELF** when playing excerpts. Don't try to copy me or your favorite tuba player "X". This is something I struggle with but it's important. There's a certain standard, of course, but don't feel like you have to play Fountains like player "X" to do well.
- The committee **wants you to succeed**. They aren't waiting for you to screw up. They want to hire their new colleague and they are hoping someone comes in and knocks it out of the park.
- **Try to have fun and PLAY MUSICALLY.**

Leading up to and Day of Audition:

- Continue eating well, drinking plenty of water. Avoid overly salty foods.
- One school of thought says NO CAFFEINE! Caffeine is part of my daily life so altering this would actually probably make me worse. If anything wean yourself off well beforehand. Treat this day like any other, you know what makes you feel the best.
- Arrive at the audition city early enough to get comfortable. Find a place to practice (Church, university, hotel conference room.) Know where you're going. How are you getting to the hall the next day? What time do you need to leave? Think of all of this. If you advance where are you practicing if semis/finals are in three days?
- Find out how much time they're letting you warm up on site. You may need to wake up earlier and figure something out.
- Some people like to listen to others play, some do not. I prefer listening to music instead of hearing everyone demolish Ride 50x over.
- **EVERYONE** sounds better through a warm-up room door. I mean literally everyone. You also will latch onto things they're doing better than you. "OMG that sounded so good, I can't do that." You have NO IDEA what they sound like on other things. Don't let this get in your head.
- **Don't overplay in the warm-up room.** Don't overplay between rounds. If you can't play fountains after your meticulous preparation, you aren't going to figure it out in the 30 minutes they give you. The same goes for in-between rounds. Learn from my failures!
- I do best with starting excerpts in the warm-up room, slurring through some intervals, playing sections of excerpts. It's more mental at this point for me. I rarely "run" things in the warm-up room.
- How do you play your best? Amped up? Calmed down? What happens to you when nerves kick in? This is a very individual experience. I work best with energy, and then I focus that energy into music. I listen to music that is going to get me excited, and I don't shy away from caffeine. I treat it almost like a battle. This obviously doesn't work for

everyone. If you do better calm, you may want to avoid caffeine, listen to calming music, etc.

Summary:

This may seem insane; we do just play the tuba after all. The reality is *someone* is working harder and smarter than you. An audition is a 5-10 minute glimpse of all the work you have done, so it has to be the best version possible. There really isn't that much difference between an Olympic sprinter or powerlifter, for example. Try something like this for your next audition, make adjustments if you don't feel like it worked. If you advance - great! You may win! If you lose; use that as a motivator for your next audition. Pick up your head and think how you can improve. There are *plenty* of opportunities on the horizon. Go get 'em!