

On Auditioning

7/28/19

Drew Pattison

1. Set realistic goals, just because you want to win really badly doesn't mean that's even realistic for you. Reach for something just beyond your ability. You're not a hero for setting impossible goals.
 - a. Rapidly repeat the process of striving for something just beyond your abilities if you are behind where you want to be
2. How do you practice to ensure it goes well? It's all about practicing - develop your practice process first and foremost.
 - a. Improve focus/Take the intensity up
 - i. How often do you randomly mess up?
 - ii. Play every note in the practice room like you are performing it on stage as a solo in front of your favorite professional orchestra. Close your eyes and imagine sitting in the middle of the orchestra, conductor looking at you and string players glancing back. You'd feel like you can't mess up at all!
 - b. Specific fixes
 - i. Precision - what exactly needs to change?
 - ii. Ear upgrade - was it generically "bad" or specifically the smoothness and flow from the F# to E wasn't there
 - c. Deep fixes
 - i. No thinking
 - ii. Fundamentals and habits
 - iii. It has to be easy
 - d. Prepare so that it's so easy that it goes well under adverse conditions.
 - i. You could probably play a one octave C major scale quite well even if you were very nervous. It's that easy. Make everything a C major scale.
 - ii. This is heavily related to "nerves." For years I thought I had nerves but it was that many of my excerpts had been practiced to a level of having a 1/10 chance of going really well. The statement "I can play that excerpt" really means I can play it 95 times out of 100, not there is a chance I will play it right. That has no value in auditioning.
3. You can miss, but it needs to sound like you are never going to.
 - a. It doesn't have to be perfect, we are all human, but this is overplayed. It actually has to be quite close to perfect.
 - b. You can never sound out of control or unprepared, all mistakes must sound random.
 - c. Don't avoid live auditions in favor of recorded, you are avoiding this issue as I did!
 - d. You need to get the hardest excerpts 95/100 in the practice room.
 - e. Even if you are getting an excerpt 60/100, and you happen to get a right one, the listener can hear that 40% chance that you were going to miss. Now they are looking for evidence to prove their belief that you don't have control. If you sound like you will never miss (that's their opinion/belief) they will dismiss any mistakes because it doesn't confirm their opinion.
4. Get your emotions and self worth out of it
 - a. Improving your process is the real point, not the result
 - b. The person who cares more in a vacuum always beats the person who only cares because they want to win the audition. Cultivate genuine obsession for the details.
 - c. Progress is the real victory or failure
 - d. Outcome doesn't matter
 - e. Kill it every day, feel good about your work and yourself every day
 - f. Set realistic goals, you can't be better than your best

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- g. If it doesn't go well know that *you* were not bad, your habits might be rudimentary, your process might be rudimentary, but *you* are not those things. Your habits or life patterns can change with hard work.
- 5. Beta blockers - Consult your doctor!
 - a. If approved by your doctor, try a small dose (5mg)
 - b. Wait until grad school, try to figure it out without them, they can be a crutch that prevents you from improving your practice, focus, process, etc.
 - c. Can be a big advantage
 - d. You can mess up in undergrad and there are no consequences, take advantage of this and learn from
 - e. Beta blocker is not a root cause solution, it actually masks the root cause. Get your mental state in order
 - f. Meditation, build up to 20 minutes a day. If you are religious, pray 20 minutes, whatever you need to do.
 - g. Fix your mindset to not focus on result and outcome but focus on your process, if you practice being proud of your work every day it wont be an issue.
 - h. If the fire alarm is going off, because your house is on fire you don't just turn off the alarm. Address the fire.
 - i. That said, it is an advantage unless you have it sorted out, and many people are using them.
 - j. Talk to your doctor.
- 6. How to use programs, courses, and hacks
 - i. It's often great info (I like audition hacker and Bulletproof Musician), but you must repeatedly put it into practice to really "know" it, info alone is nothing.
 - ii. *You* dig in, you engage, you figure out the answers, you get accountable.
 - iii. Process, take action, get experience. Info wont solve it.
 - iv. Any course is not tailored to you, so take it all with a grain of salt, it may be useful for someone else but not you
 - v. You engage in a rigorous scientific process and develop your own info in addition
- b. "Run around and get your heart rate up", never worked for me, felt totally different than nerves in an audition
- c. Books. They should be an ancillary part of your approach at most. Don't avoid doing the hard work first. No book is going to fix it for you. Read Bob Duke's Intelligent Music Teaching to learn to practice/learn. Others often cited are Don Greene, James Loehr, sports psych.

Miscellaneous

- 1. Research
 - a. Listen to at least 4 recordings with standard conductors and orchestras. Many recordings on Naxos are not standard.
 - b. Seek out conductors like Muti, Barenboim, Abbado, Haitink, Levine, Schwarz, Rattle, Dutoit, Boulez, etc. Watch out for recordings that are almost old enough to be outdated, not that they aren't great recordings but maybe less relevant to today : Karajan, Bernstein, Solti, etc.
 - c. *New recordings* from orchestras like Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Vienna, London, Berlin, Pittsburgh; Seattle, Detroit, Kansas City, etc.

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- d. Write down the recording artists, the tempi of each recording (use a metronome,) and what track and what time your excerpt starts
 2. Practice organization from Miles Maner (CSO)
 - a. Decide what you must review every day
 - b. Divide the rest into A, B, C rotation
 - c. Pick a date to being playing for people (3 weeks perfect)
 - d. Two weeks before audition, divide excerpts into three new piles ranked: Very well prep, somewhat prepared, under prepared. Get to work on the under.
 3. Record all the time
 - a. If you are having trouble figuring out what needs to be improved, check one element at a time (rhythm, pitch, phrasing, articulation, musicality/mood, etc.)
 4. Stay open minded - ask for advice, look for new fingerings, stay hungry for better solutions to problems in excerpts
 5. Make many cycles of reeds, often 4-5 consecutive batches for me to really get in shape
 - a. Practice getting exactly what you want from adjustments (3-4 weeks of "failure," to hone this skill)
 6. Put yourself first (practice this mindset the week of)
 - a. You can't let the moment take over your mind, you must do what you need first, as a reflex
 - b. Do what you need to do to perform with nerves and under pressure
 - i. Meditation, religion, yoga, friends, netflix, book, whatever.
 - c. Go out to eat, let people do favors for you, etc.
 - d. Ask the proctor to wait for you, don't let them rush you
 - e. Ask for a new room if your room is cold
 - f. Ask the proctor for a specific day, etc.
 7. Get ready for the emotional plunge
 - a. Usually a few days or weeks before the audition there will be some point of existential crisis
 - b. You will feel unprepared, depressed, guilty, screwed, etc.
 - c. This is normal, it's the last big hurdle. Hang in there, persevere.
 8. Practice walking in a room with all of your stuff and playing with no warmup (mock auditions)
 9. "In the warmup room/day of" preparatory exercises -
 - a. Run a recorded mock audition every day one week before the audition at the exact time of the audition (9am vs. 5pm)
 - b. Experiment and adjust what you do before the audition
 - c. What I do:
 - i. fundamentals warmed up to be automatic: no body tension, automatic support, reading every note, line independent of vibrato and dynamics.
 - ii. At least one full speed run through of everything to be played in the round, warmup what isn't ready
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Pre-reading Reflection exercise (notes p. 2)

1. What was your best audition ever like?

2. What did you feel when you played?

Was it hard or easy?

Do you remember how stuff went?

Were you worried?

3. How did you prep?

Did you know the piece?

Did your fundamentals allow you to play the piece easily?

Were your expectations realistic (didn't know how bad you were)?

Prep: Play for people? Lessons? Peers? Studio? Summer festival?

Time and space to prep the right way?

4. How can you apply these notes to your next audition and your current skill level?