

Derek Gullett Audition Process (as of June 2025)

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Overview

Included here is a detailed outline of my personal audition process at every stage. The information I present here is not necessarily matter of fact, but instead my thoughts and opinions that I have developed following many years of auditioning. I should mention that all this information comes from my experiences from auditioning for symphonic, ballet, opera, and contemporary orchestras. I have never auditioned for military bands or orchestras, concert bands, big bands, marching bands, or any other form of ensemble. I have also never gone through an audition and interview process for a full-time faculty position at a university. Although my audition experience is in the classical orchestra world, I am sure that much of this information will still be applicable to almost every other musical discipline. I very much recommend that you take from this process what will work best for you and leave out what does not. This is less about how to practice and more so about how to organize your practice. Everything written here is a culmination of me developing this process until it led me to the position I am in today. Everyone's journey is going to be very different and therefore not everything will work from one person to the next.

Pre-Application

To look for and stay up to date with upcoming auditions, there are a few ways to go. Most orchestras announce their vacancies and auditions on their website as well as through other online outlets (social media and other websites specializing in gathering audition information). There are also musician-specific newspapers and journals where many orchestras publish and advertise their upcoming auditions monthly. Before applying for an audition, there are a few questions you need to ask yourself.

Am I in a place where I can adequately prepare for this audition (both mentally and physically)?

Mentally

Being in a strong enough mental state to deal with the immense pressure of both preparing for and performing in an audition is crucial to succeeding. Not having a relentless drive to improve, a love of the music you are being asked to prepare, or confidence in your abilities to help you succeed will guarantee that you will not win the audition. If you do not believe that you have even the smallest chance of winning the audition, you most certainly will not win.

Physically

It is also extremely important to be in good shape playing-wise. "Good shape" does not necessarily mean that you are strong enough to audition tomorrow, but instead physically capable of getting to that point over the course of your preparation. If you are battling an injury that would worsen by preparing for and taking an audition, absolutely

do not take the audition. It is not worth jeopardizing your career for any audition, no matter how enticing the job may be.

Productive Environment

Another physical component of preparing for an audition is having the time to do so in an environment that enables productivity. You can be the most motivated musician on the planet, but, if your life schedule is working against you, you are going to have a very difficult time adequately preparing for an audition. Try to schedule your other life events around the preparation stages for the audition. Besides the obvious things that need to come first in terms of priority, audition preparation should be next at the top. Make sure you also have access to a practice space where there are no distractions of any kind. Any form of distracted practice is useless practice. The only way to get meaningful results is to be totally committed and focused for the entire duration of your practice sessions.

Financial Health

Branching off the physical requirements of taking an audition, being in good enough financial health to deal with the expenses of auditioning is also important. One of the biggest flaws of current auditions is the financial disparity between potential applicants. Auditions are an expensive investment for everyone involved. Everybody (the orchestra included) must spend significant amounts of time, energy, and money anytime an audition is held. When it comes to candidates, however, the financial costs associated with auditioning can be an uncontrollable barrier for many. I do not recommend taking an audition if it forces you to spend beyond your means and it negatively impacts your financial health. If money is tight and an audition is not currently looking feasible, I would first suggest seeking out organizations that specialize in assisting auditioning musicians with offsetting the financial costs of auditions. If this route does not yet make the audition a realistic possibility, there is no shame in politely asking friends and family for assistance. If they see that you are genuinely committed to moving your career forward and they are in a comfortable enough financial situation, most may consider helping you out in some capacity. If you are currently a student, many music colleges have a fund for reimbursing some (sometimes all) of the expenses associated with auditioning for its students. I very much recommend looking into that as a possibility if it applies to you. I have taken advantage of all these routes at one point or another during my time auditioning. Unfortunately, there will still be some potential candidates that will not be able to get past this financial hurdle. In a perfect world, orchestras would have the funds available to cover every candidate's audition expenses. The only instances where I have seen and experienced this is when an audition is split over a longer period. Typically, candidates that advance from the earlier rounds of an audition and are asked to return weeks later to finish the audition are offered reimbursement by the

orchestra for coming back. I assume this is more feasible on the orchestra's end as there will be a much smaller pool of candidates at this point.

Will I accept this position if I win the audition?

You should only take an audition if your intention is to accept the job at the end of the process. Determining whether a job will be a good fit for you depends on a wide variety of factors, but some of the main ones are location, compensation, benefits, workplace dynamic, and artistic fulfillment. The latter two are difficult to gauge before applying, but, depending on the orchestra, there may be talk among musicians in the community about these that can help inform your decision. Winning an audition and declining the job offer after everything is not only a slap in the face to the orchestra you auditioned for, but also to yourself. Doing so is a quick way to sever your connections and lose respect. Taking the time and spending the money and energy to get to that point is no small feat, but that is all for nothing if you demean the very purpose of it. There is also a very common mentality of wanting to take an audition "for the experience." I find this to be demeaning of the audition process as well because taking an audition for any reason besides earning and accepting a position is going to warrant a lower standard of preparation and seriousness. People who take auditions without the intent to see the process all the way through waste both the time of the orchestra and themselves. Those people's audition slots could have instead been filled with people who had the right intentions, which would create a more positive audition experience for everyone involved. At the end of the day, either plan to accept the job or do not bother applying.

Am I ready to take this audition?

This is a trick question of sorts because, in my experience, nobody ever truly feels that they are ready. Somebody could prepare their entire life for an audition and still not feel ready because there would still be things to improve upon. We chase perfection but will never get there. If someone does say they are 100% ready for an audition and that there is nothing left to work on, they are lying to themselves and everyone. I have never felt totally ready for any audition I ever took, but I felt less pressure because I knew I did everything in my power to prepare. This question is not something we can answer ourselves as we cannot give an objective answer. It is best to ask a few honest teachers or colleagues for their input as they will have experience hearing you from the other side of things. Seriously take their input into account when informing your decision of whether to apply. If they recommend you not apply, ask why. Their reasons very well may be something you can improve for when another audition comes around.

If the answer to all the proposed questions is "yes," then applying for the audition is likely a good idea. There very well may be other factors that would inform this sort of decision, but these are the main three I consider before filling out any audition application.

Application

Let us assume that you meet the above criteria and qualify to apply for an audition. What you will first need to determine is how you will be required to apply. Most orchestras take applications directly on their website. For those that do not, they may require a printed copy of your résumé, a filled-out identification form, and a deposit check be physically mailed to them. Another option is directing you to another website to apply. Even online applications may require a deposit to reserve an audition spot (credit card or mailed check). Deposit checks should never be cashed unless you cancel after a set deadline or do not show up to the audition without notice. Credit card deposits are simply refunded, and check deposits are either destroyed or returned to you if you attend the audition. Be wary of auditions that charge an application fee or do not return your deposit. Such business tactics are predatory and present an unnecessary hurdle to applicants. I once auditioned for an orchestra that could not return my deposit check when I attended the audition because they claimed to have misplaced it. Following the audition, the check I mailed was cashed as though I had not shown up. I never did end up getting that money back.

Résumé

The single most important part of almost any audition application is your résumé. Typically, résumés are what audition committees blindly reference when determining who to invite to audition. Applicants with experience that shows the committee they can potentially meet the standard they are looking for are invited. There are some auditions that will invite anyone who applies regardless of experience, but those are less common as auditions are usually very constrained by time. The drawback of screening résumés is that a less-experienced applicant who the audition panel would consider hiring in the audition otherwise is sometimes overlooked.

Résumé Restrictions

Résumés do not usually need to be in a particular format, but do need to be clear, concise, and organized. Orchestras almost always require that your résumé be limited to one page. Sometimes they will even require you submit the file with a specific name. Be sure to follow their directions exactly. Not doing so will almost always result in disqualification from the audition. They are not only looking to hire the best musician possible, but also someone intelligent enough to follow simple instructions.

Résumé Structure

When structuring a résumé, be sure to maximize your relevant experience. Leave out anything irrelevant that will do nothing but take up space. Professional experience will always be preferred over student and community experience. When compiling experience, I like to divide it into three sections: performing, audition, and teaching.

Résumé Structure: Performance Experience

For performing experience, include ensemble engagements (full-time, acting, or substitute positions) and relevant solo engagements (placement in competitions or soloing with an orchestra). I include awards in the performing experience section, but a separate awards section can be added after teaching experience. This section should optimally be the largest on the résumé.

Résumé Structure: Audition Experience

Audition experience should only include reasonably successful results from professional auditions. Leave out auditions for schools. A strong résumé audition-wise will present consistent advances over a certain period. Try to aim for only presenting your strongest showings. Any audition where you made it to the final round or better (“superfinal” round, offered trial, named runner-up, or won the audition) should be included. Semifinal rounds are also good to include given they show that you advanced at an audition, but there is no need to include those if you have enough audition experience that goes beyond the semifinal round.

Résumé Structure: Teaching Experience

Teaching experience is not directly relevant to an orchestra audition, but I like to include it to show that I am a “well-rounded” musician that does more than perform. Include faculty positions and other teaching appointments. If you have too much relevant experience to fit on one page, include your most recent experience and what you believe to be the most important. With everything on the résumé, include start and end dates (month and year). Organize everything chronologically.

Résumé Format

As mentioned earlier, résumés do not need to be structured in a particular way, but the format that I like to use is on the following page.

Full Name**Instrument(s)**

Address

Phone Number

Email Address

Education:

School (City, State)

Start Date – End Date (Month, Year)

- Degree (Major)

Performing Experience:

Ensemble, organization, or competition (City, State)

Start Date – End Date (Month, Year)

- Position, title, placement, or award

Audition Experience:

Ensemble or organization (City, State)

Start Date – End Date (Month, Year)

- Round or result

Teaching Experience:

School or institution (City, State)

Start Date – End Date (Month, Year)

- Position or title

Although résumés are the most asked material for audition applications, some orchestras may require you submit a cover letter, curriculum vitae (CV), or recordings to supplement your application. For consistency, format your cover letter and CV the same way as your résumé. You can even start from your résumé and just add everything else to your CV from there. There is typically no limit to the length of a CV so feel free to include every bit of experience.

An application with a strong résumé does not always guarantee a spot at an audition. Spots are often limited, and you never know what guidelines are being followed behind the scenes. In the event you apply to an audition and are not invited, do not be discouraged. There are numerous routes you can take to appeal the committee's decision and be reconsidered for an invitation. One way is by providing a reference from a respected member of the music community, which is sometimes one of the materials asked for in the initial application. Be sure to ask someone who you respect and respects you who can vouch for your qualifications for this audition. If you do not want to go any of these routes (more below) or they prove unsuccessful, continue applying and gaining relevant experience and invitations will become more consistent.

Tape Round

Some orchestras require a tape (or recorded) round before hearing candidates live. This is typically done to sort through many applicants while saving time and money. There are also some auditions that can be totally recorded. This usually happens when a sudden vacancy appears in an orchestra that needs to be filled with a temporary musician as soon as possible. Some orchestras also offer a tape round option in the event they found your résumé not strong enough to warrant an invitation. Oftentimes, though, you will need to contact the orchestra (often their personnel manager) and express your interest in appealing the committee's decision. Sometimes, the committee will simply appeal their decision and invite you if they had enough cancellations from previously invited applicants but will most likely request recordings before making a second decision.

The tape round will almost always be a short recording consisting of a few musical selections. Typically, the orchestra will provide you with a list and the excerpts required for the recording. Follow all their guidelines exactly when recording. As mentioned earlier, they want someone who can both play well and follow simple instructions. Not doing so will almost absolutely result in disqualification. If not instructed to use specific audio equipment, record yourself with the highest quality equipment possible in the best performance space possible. The most accurate representation of your playing will give the panel the clearest look into you as a musician. If the recording requires video, be sure to present yourself well in good lighting. Refrain from editing the recording unless told to do so. Editing the recording can give an inaccurate representation of yourself and

will likely result in disappointment in the live audition as you will sound different from what the panel liked. It is also obvious, but you will be disqualified if the committee notices that your recording has been edited in any way other than instructed. Another obvious point is that your recording should sound extremely well-prepared and refined. Hold it to the same standard you would for any other round of the audition. Although not a live round, a tape round is still something that can stand between you and winning the position.

Do not be discouraged if your recording does not result in a live audition invitation. Audition committees are often strained for time to listen to the recordings and may have only one or two open spots they are allowed to fill (especially for résumé appeals).

Preparation

At this point, it is assumed you have been invited to audition live.

Auto-Advancing

Depending on the strength of your résumé and connections with the ensemble you are auditioning for, you may be invited directly to a round after the preliminary round. Most often, auto-advanced candidates are placed in the semifinal round, though can be placed in the final round or later depending on the orchestra. Being given an auto-advance can be an advantage in terms of reduced fatigue, more preparation time, and less competition, but only if you maintain the same amount of dedication and preparation that you would have if you were starting in the preliminary round. Using an auto-advance as an excuse to reduce the intensity of your preparation will only produce disappointing results. If you are not auto-advanced despite having a very strong résumé, do not be discouraged. Some orchestras do not auto-advance any candidates to even the playing field or only auto-advance candidates that have performed extensively with them. In some other instances, orchestras may present an optional tape round offering an auto-advance to successful candidates. If offered, always take this opportunity. You will have already been invited to the live preliminary round and can bypass that with a good recording. In the event your recording does not result in an auto-advance, you will still be allowed to audition in the preliminary round as normal. If you were not auto-advanced and believe you should have been, some orchestras offer an option to request to appeal the committee's decision. Do not have high hopes for the appeal to work, however. The chances of receiving an auto-advance through this method are extremely low.

Overlapping Auditions

It is important to figure out how to prepare for more than one audition at the same time. Optimally, it is best to put all your energy and focus into preparing for one audition at a time, but sometimes multiple auditions are scheduled close to one another. If I find there is more than one worthwhile audition coming up and their preparation periods will

overlap, I first make sure that I can attend them all. There needs to be enough time between the auditions for travel. Next, I look at the position each audition is for (principal, assistant principal, second, utility, or bass trombone). Each of these positions require a very different skillset and do not have much overlap in standard audition repertoire. As such, I believe that you should only choose auditions for one position per preparation period. This will assure that you do not overextend yourself and stay in the proper mindset for the position you are auditioning for. The audition repertoire will also likely be very similar between auditions for the same position, therefore allowing you to dive deeper. Taking a wide variety of auditions will certainly produce more opportunities to be hired, but the odds of them working out are slim if you are not able to totally commit to any of them. I believe that it is better to pass on a good audition opportunity if it allows you to completely immerse yourself in the preparation process of another.

Audition Preparation Before Invitation

I believe that you should begin preparing for an audition before you are even invited in most cases. Orchestras will usually process applications and send out invitations a month or two before the live auditions, but there are examples of orchestras sending out invitations with less than a month's or more than two months' notice. Regardless of audition status, I prefer beginning my preparation somewhere between two and three months before the audition. Two to three months gives me enough time to dive deep into the music and refine it to an audition-worthy standard. Anything less than two months will likely feel rushed and anything more than three months can result in burnout. It is imperative to keep the music feeling fresh and exciting. Burnout will destroy both your productivity and passion for the music you are being asked to prepare.

Repertoire List Preparation

If the repertoire list is not available at least three months before the audition, begin preparing by strengthening your fundamentals. Jump into the music as soon as it is available. Some orchestras provide both the repertoire list and copies of the music, though some only provide the repertoire list. In either case, orchestras do not usually provide copies of solo repertoire. Any copies of music that the orchestra does not provide are up to you to source. Take note of any specific editions they may require and where the music is cut. It may also be helpful to contact the orchestra and ask what editions they will be using for the audition. It is very important that the music you are preparing is the same music the audition panel will be reading. Many works will likely be available online in the public domain, but there may be copyrighted music that can only be sourced through purchase. Begin this process sooner rather than later because ordered music may be delayed in shipping. In addition to sourcing the required parts, also acquire the accompanying scores. They will be essential in your study. Compile the

repertoire list and required parts all in one place (physically, digitally, or both) to use for your preparation.

1) Early Preparation Stage

In a three-month preparation period, the first month is what I refer to as the early preparation stage. *The primary goal in this stage is to set the groundwork to make everything afterward a smoother process.*

Style and Context Study

This groundwork should include building a comprehensive understanding of the context and overarching style of each individual piece of music on the repertoire list (through listening and score study). Part of this study should go into determining tempi for every piece. For each piece, listen to five or more recordings, take note of the tempo for each one, and calculate the average of all the recordings to use as your default tempo. Also save the tempi of the fastest and slowest recordings and prepare those as options for if you are asked to change something in the audition. There are also sometimes written tempi in the part or score. It would be a good idea to prepare those as well in case the panel wants to hear exactly what is on the page. At the end of the day, you need to be able to perform cleanly and comfortably across your entire range of tempi.

Having a strong hold on the style and context of the music you are preparing is essential. These aspects of the music govern how everything should be played (articulations, dynamics, note lengths, etc.).

Playing something at a tempo that differs slightly from what is written or standard to stay in control will often convey to the panel that you are a mature musician who knows their limits and has their priorities in the right place. There is a limit to this, however. Showing up to an audition and playing a piece that is supposed to be extremely slow at a very fast tempo or playing something fast significantly slower will communicate to the panel that you did not properly prepare or learn that piece. In some cases, there may be a selection on the repertoire list that is relatively new or unperformed, therefore limiting the number of available recordings. If this happens, be extremely literal with regards to what is written on the page. Inform yourself with any recordings that are available, but understand that some members of the panel may not be familiar with the piece either, therefore making it especially important to show them exactly what they are reading. There are sometimes people on audition panels who will stare at a metronome or tuner the entire time and inevitably not want to hire anybody at the end of the process. These sorts of people are undoubtedly the worst musicians on the panel. Their priorities are misplaced with out of touch standards. *There is not, never has been, and never will be a musician who always performs with 100% perfect time and intonation.* If these people were held to their own standards when auditioning, they themselves would not have been hired. In a technical respect, a well-intentioned panel should be looking for

somebody who is exceptionally consistent but can recognize and correct their shortcomings. Focusing solely on the technical aspects of performing and expecting perfection loses sight of what being a musician truly means.

Context and Style Example

Two hypothetically identical phrases on paper could be played in totally different ways depending on the style and context of each one. An example of this can be found in the standard orchestral trombone repertoire; although not identical, some eighth note passages in both Gioachino Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra Overture* and Richard Strauss' *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* are marked to be played quick, accented (depending on the edition), and fortissimo. Not knowing the style, context, and history of both pieces would lead someone to believe that both pieces should be played the same way since they are marked as such. After some research, however, they will find that the Rossini is to be played significantly softer and lighter than the Strauss on account of accents and fortissimo meaning something totally different in early 19th century Italy compared to late 19th century Germany. There are parallels like this everywhere. Every single piece of music, no matter how short or insignificant it seems, is a widely different world and should be presented as such.

Playing with a Recording

Playing along with recordings is a good way to experience some of the subtleties between each piece. For works that may be asked as part of the section or ensemble portion of the audition, I like creating MIDI files of the rest of the section with my part removed and MIDI files of my part alone to play along with. Although less of an artistic way of practicing given these are MIDI files, intonation is one thing that will greatly improve. The files will always be in tune and will not adjust to you. Save the recordings and MIDI files offline on your cellphone for easy, portable access. With anything that you need to play along with while practicing (recordings, MIDI files, drones, etc.), it is best to have a wireless speaker that can be set to a very loud volume to play them through, so you have no trouble hearing them. Using this as a practice tool for almost everything is very helpful, audition preparation or not. Jumping into these "different worlds" of music can be overwhelming and difficult at times, so I like to think of one to three words describing each piece and assign them to it. When switching between pieces, they give me a certain feeling to focus on which allows me to bring out each work's distinct personality.

Reflecting on Fundamentals

At the same time as developing a sense of style and context, begin working through the music at its most fundamental level. Even if you are familiar with much of the music, pretend as though you have never seen any of it before. Leave no stone unturned when it comes to building every piece back up from nothing. You may catch something you

did not notice before. This is also a good way to eliminate any bad habits you may have developed earlier.

Best Habits

I believe that, if possible and comfortable, you should always stand in an audition (including all preparation). Doing so typically helps in generating both a better sound and more confidence. Some orchestras may require you to sit and stand for certain pieces, but the vast majority will not have a preference. Throughout every single preparation stage and practice session between now and the audition, be sure to record everything. Reviewing recordings of yourself is absolutely the best way to make progress. *When listening back, make no excuses for anything.* If something sounds wrong or odd, fix it.

It is important, however, to not overload yourself in your practice sessions. Aim to make slow, meaningful progress. At this stage, you should not be running down the repertoire list but instead making progress on one aspect of a few pieces every day. A tuner and a metronome should also be mainstays in every practice session. Although a small number of imperfections in time and intonation can be forgiven, the more consistent you are, the more likely the panel will consider hiring you. To offset fatigue and burnout, alternate heavy and light practice days. Up until the final preparation stage, it is also fine to take a day off here and there if you feel that your body needs it.

To build endurance and consistency, though, it is preferred to play every day for more uninterrupted progress. Focused, mental practice and visualization can supplement physical practice sessions or be used to ease fatigue. Visualization can build comfort, especially if you imagine yourself auditioning the way you want to in the audition space. *Although totally in your head, increasing your mental strength is just as important as refining your musical abilities.* An incredible musician who is paralyzed in fear will have the same audition result as a confident one who just picked up the instrument for the first time in their life. Find a balance where you can maximize both the physical and mental sides of your playing.

Consistent Warm-up

At the beginning of every day at every stage of the process, it is recommended you do a carefully planned out, simple warm-up routine that covers every aspect of your playing. This warm-up should feel easy and simply get everything feeling ready to go. It should also be relatively quick to maximize channeling your practice toward the audition repertoire. Although the repertoire should be the primary focus, do not gloss over the quality of the warm-up. Treat it as a short fundamentals practice session before diving into everything else. Your fundamentals need to be secure to consistently play the audition repertoire at a high level. Use your warm-up as your first session of the day. I find it best to have some time between my warm-up and diving into audition preparation.

On light practice days, I typically have two sessions: my warm-up and an audition preparation session. For heavier practice days, I typically have three sessions: my warm-up and two audition preparation sessions. To stay feeling fresh and strong, I try to take twice as much time off from playing than I spent playing.

For example, if an audition preparation session took me an hour, I would take at least two hours off before playing again. Additionally, I like attaching a cooldown routine to the end of my final audition preparation session on any given day. This routine should be soft, low, and short. The purpose of this is to achieve some extra relaxation before coming back to the instrument the next day. Before any session where I am playing, I spend no more than five minutes practicing breath meditation. This is where you sit down, relax your body, and focus on nothing but your breath. Even if you have thoughts that distract you from your breath occasionally, guide yourself back to your breathing. Take full breaths in and out of your nose. A few minutes of this will not only calm you down physically, but it will also clear your mind and allow you to focus easier. Always be searching for new methods to increase your ease of playing while boosting productivity.

Mock Auditions with Colleagues and Teachers

Another crucial facet of audition preparation at every stage is doing mock auditions for trusted colleagues and teachers. The more you do, the better. With these, you can simulate almost any situation that may arise at an audition. It is preferable that you treat these as a real audition in the moment. Do not speak if it is blind (unless whispering to a proctor) and take the time needed between each piece. I try to take anywhere from 30 seconds to one minute between every piece. This gives me time to recover physically and mentally as well as focus on the descriptive words I have assigned to each work, allowing me to deliver my desired interpretation to the panel. Although it is best to do most mock auditions when you are feeling your best, it will also be helpful to do a few when you are fatigued or have little to no warm-up time. Adverse situations like this could very well happen and you should know how to handle them.

It will also be helpful to wear what you plan on wearing for the audition for these mock auditions. Choose an outfit that presents you in a positive light, but, more importantly, is comfortable and non-restricting. You never know who will see you at any point of an audition and being comfortable will always result in a better performance. Although looking nice is not all that important for a blind audition, I find it helps exude confidence, especially when other candidates around me are less dressed for the occasion. Mock auditions with and without a screen are also good ideas. Try to also stay consistently hydrated over this entire process. I recommend taking a reuseable water bottle with you into your mock auditions and the audition itself. Personally, I like taking a sip of water between every musical selection. This not only helps keep me hydrated, but also gives me another way to regain focus before moving on. Every audition I have ever taken has allowed me to bring a water bottle with me on stage, though there may be some out

there who will not allow it. Do a few of your mock auditions without a water bottle in case this happens in the audition.

A consistent schedule of quality sleep will only make things easier for you as well. Always try to sleep at the same time every evening and wake up at the same time every morning. The only time when I would deviate from this is if I am intentionally testing sleep-deprivation as a variable in a mock audition. Control and experiment with every possible variable when planning a mock audition. The more situations you can simulate and experience, the better.

Just like with practice sessions, it is also essential that you record your mock auditions for review. Take your mock audition panel's comments very seriously, especially in the early and mid-stages of preparation. Besides the psychological benefit of performing for people in advance of the audition, they may also hear things that you had never thought of. Many people take beta blockers to calm nerves for an audition or performance. *Please consult your doctor before taking beta blockers.* If you do take beta blockers for such things, I recommend you also take them for your mock auditions. You want to make it feel as close to the real thing as possible. My general rule regarding beta blockers is to take one tablet two hours before my audition block is supposed to start. That typically gives it a good amount of time to kick in, and it will likely be at its most effective around that time. Other controllable variables for mock auditions are what you eat beforehand, how hydrated you are, the amount of sleep you get, the time of day the mock audition is held, the space you play in, or even playing without a beta blocker in case you run out or forget them.

At the end of every day, practice session, mock audition, and reviewing session for your recordings, be sure to take detailed notes. Of course, take note of what you can improve, but also list what you did well or made progress on. Laying everything out to see can help you in identifying where to place your priorities the next time you play.

Memorization

Though not for everyone, I recommend practicing the music with one of your goals being to memorize everything. Memorize not only how the music sounds and feels, but also how it looks on the page. Try to absorb every detail down to the last drop of ink. Additionally, memorize the words you assigned to every piece. Having a copy of everything in your head will keep it all in your subconscious. I find myself mentally practicing things even when I am off doing something else. Although subconscious mental practice is not going to be as effective as focused physical or mental practice, having it happen without effort after those focused sessions can be beneficial. Memorization can also be helpful in the event you find yourself at the audition without music on stage or the audition panel asks for an additional piece that was not on the

round. Such a situation did happen to me once, but it still went well as I had everything memorized.

Instrument Maintenance

To maintain a consistently responsive and functional instrument, I recommend getting into a weekly cleaning routine, if you have not already. The last thing you need to have happen is a mechanical issue with your instrument that puts a stop to your progress, or even a stop to your audition. Before warming up every day, I recommend oiling and lubricating everything that needs it to further avoid any issues. All of this is something you should do even outside of audition preparation as it will keep everything in working condition and extend the longevity of your instrument.

Slow, steady progress is always the goal, but especially so in the early preparation stage. This is the stage where you want to catch every subtle detail so you can build the foundation for your unique takes on every piece of music. In building your schedule and routine, look for every detail that you can control. The more aspects of your preparation that you are consciously in control of, the more likely you will feel in control in the actual audition. The early preparation stage should be wrapped up with as many subtle details and fundamental issues identified and well into being worked out.

2) Mid-Preparation Stage

In a three-month preparation period, I like referring to the second month as the mid-preparation stage. Unlike the early preparation stage, *the main goal at this point is to ramp up preparations in a performative context, all while maintaining and building upon the foundation from the previous stage.* By now, you should optimally have developed a considerable amount of comfort with the repertoire list. As mentioned before, nobody feels 100% ready for an audition, so do not expect to achieve perfection at any stage of the process. Instead, acknowledge the progress you have made so far and continue stretching your limits.

Repertoire Run-Throughs

The only major change that this stage brings is the implementation of run-throughs of the repertoire list. Everything else from the early preparation stage should remain largely unchanged. Continue gradually working out issues as you come across them. These run-throughs should not happen every day. Instead, turn your first audition preparation session on a heavy day into a run-through. As with everything else, record these. Use the time between the run-through and your next audition preparation session to review the run-through recording to determine what needs work. Practice those in your upcoming session. *The reason for these run-throughs is to purposefully build endurance, consistency, and to get used to staying focused for longer periods.* You never know how long a round may be (especially later ones), and it is important to be in the right physical and mental shape to get through them. I once participated in a final

round for an audition that lasted more than an hour per candidate because they wanted us to run the list from beginning to end.

To offset fatigue, I recommend scheduling run-throughs and mock auditions on different days. Both are performative ways of practice and having both on the same day can be unnecessarily draining. Leave mock auditions for lighter days and leave run-throughs for heavier days. Similarly to mock auditions and visualization, imagine yourself in the audition while performing your run-throughs. Any way to gain familiarity and comfort with the audition process will help you. I will intentionally do my run-throughs in different orders. Typically, I cycle run-throughs as follows: top to bottom, bottom to top, and completely randomized. Cycling through everything will assure that you will be prepared for anything the audition panel throws at you.

Keep pushing forward and trusting in the process. The addition of these run-throughs can be taxing. Take care of yourself and continue to rest occasionally, if needed. However, as mentioned earlier, strive to continue working every day to maintain forward progress and endurance. This stage is the one where it should feel like you are working the most. Although there is a new part of the process now, the mid-preparation stage is no different from the early preparation stage besides increased intensity and a slightly restructured schedule. Maintain the same drive and energy you started with in the first stage.

3) Final Preparation Stage

At this point, the heaviest part of the process is behind us. As can now be assumed, I consider the final month of preparation to be the final preparation stage in a three-month process. *The primary goal at this stage is to maintain the results of your work from the previous two stages.* Of course, still work on and address issues as they arise, but *I do not recommend making any major changes to how you plan on performing anything anymore unless necessary.* The structure of this stage looks almost identical to that of the mid-preparation stage but is supposed to be scaled back in intensity for its final week. Up until the week before the audition, everything should look the same as the entirety of the mid-preparation stage. Continue with your mock audition and run-through schedule but take your mock audition panel's comments a little more lightly at this point. Most of their comments will still be easy, simple fixes most likely, but, if they suggest a major change, it may not be a good idea to follow through on it. You not only do not want to compromise the artistic identity you have developed over most of this process but also doing something new with little to no time to gradually refine it can spell disaster in the audition.

A Week Before the Audition

Exactly a week before you are to begin the audition should you start scaling things back. All seven days before the audition should all be converted into light practice days.

Still keep up on practicing, run-throughs, and mock auditions, but only do one of these per day besides your warm-up. It is recommended that you minimize the amount of time you are playing at this point. Anything beyond what is necessary will only work against you. *The goal here is to work out any tension and fatigue that may still be lingering.* When the audition comes around at the end of the week, you should feel completely fresh and strong. If you do take beta blockers, I recommend you take one before your main session every day for the week before the audition. This allows your body to get used to more consistent levels of the beta blocker in your system and work out any adverse side effects. I would also recommend that while still following the lubrication and maintenance routines for your instrument, you stop the full-scale cleaning routine starting this week through the end of the audition, if possible. Brass instruments especially can feel drastically different from one cleaning to another, even on a weekly basis. As such, stopping your cleaning routine the week before an audition should give you an instrument that will feel more consistent throughout the remainder of the audition process. However, if your instrument requires extremely frequent cleanings to stay functional or develops a blockage of some sort, then continue cleaning as necessary.

Schedule this week in a way that your life allows, but this is how I typically structure my remaining playing sessions:

Day 1: Mock audition

Day 2: Run-through

Day 3: Practice

Day 4: Mock audition

Day 5: Run-through

Day 6: Practice

Day 7: Warm-up only

Do take note that some of the later days of this final week can overlap with travelling to the audition. It is for this reason that I usually only schedule the lightest sessions on the later days because I can manage those while travelling, while the other options can be difficult. It is also worth noting that some orchestras may decide the preliminary round list before audition day. This often happens a week or so before the audition, if it happens at all. In some cases, they will disclose the list to the candidates. In even rarer instances, they will disclose the lists to more, or even all, of the rounds to the

candidates before the audition begins. Take whatever information you are given and run with it. Use anything and everything you know to aid in your preparation.

Be proud of yourself for all the progress you have made over the course of this process and for how far you have come. However, do not let up yet. Everything you have done in preparation will be put to the test very shortly and you will want to put your best foot forward.

Travel

Travelling to an audition for any musician will almost always cause unneeded stress. The most common way to travel to an audition is by plane. Although usually the fastest option, it is the worst in every other way. Your instrument should make it to the audition intact, which is why carrying it with you onto the plane is crucial. Most instruments can either fit under your seat, in an overhead bin, or in a coat closet, or, if they are too large for those options, can fit in an extra purchased seat.

Air Travel Preparations

If you plan on flying, choose an airline that has a better reputation with honoring their policies regarding musical instruments. It would also be a good idea to go online and save copies of the policies for flying with musical instruments by both the airline and the government. If given trouble by an employee, show them these policies and let them know that you are well within the law and guidelines by carrying your instrument onto the plane. When booking a flight, look at the model of plane that will be used. Figure out how much overhead bin space is available and if your instrument will even fit. Choose flights where your instrument will fit if you need to use that space.

A way to increase your chances of having access to open bin space is to pay for early boarding. Although early boarding is not typically worth it, I think it is if it increases my instrument's chance of survival. A way to get early boarding without paying is to ask the gate agent before boarding. Let them know that you have a fragile, expensive instrument that will not survive the flight if it is not given carry-on space. Some gate agents will understand your situation and allow you to board before your assigned boarding group. Sometimes, however, a flight may be extremely overcrowded with a surplus of carry-on baggage. You may get on the plane with your instrument but with no space left to put it in the overhead bins. If this is the case, ask a flight attendant if there is a coat closet that you could store your instrument in. Most planes do have one and flight attendants usually never have an issue storing an instrument in there.

Some extremely large instruments that will not even fit into an extra seat, however, do need to be transported under the plane. Musicians with such instruments use specially designed flight cases. These are large, heavy, and cumbersome, but are the only option in these instances. It is always best to travel with a small, light case when trying to carry

your instrument onto a plane. If you have multiple instruments that you need to transport, it may be wise to find a way to safely consolidate them into one case. Depending on the instruments, there are cases built specifically for this purpose. Your instrument(s) being lighter and taking up less space will decrease your chances of having issues.

Air Travel Drawbacks

The big issue with air travel is that airline carry-on policies vary, and airport employees do not typically know the specific policies regarding musical instruments. Most employees will see your instrument and either deem it too large or too oddly shaped to be a carry-on. They will then attempt to force you to check it as luggage under the plane. If you do this, your instrument will almost certainly be destroyed. Baggage handlers will not know or care that an expensive and fragile instrument is in that case. They will throw it around just as they would with any other piece of luggage. If your instrument is damaged by an airport or airline, you can file a claim with whichever company is responsible and request reimbursement. However, this process takes an extremely long time. The most likely outcomes of filing a claim are you needing to move on before hearing back and paying for the repairs out of pocket, the claim being approved but awarding you much less money than the value of your instrument or repair, the claim being denied and the company not taking responsibility for the damage, or not hearing back on the status of the claim at all. This process almost never results in a suitable settlement. Showing up to an audition without a functioning instrument will almost certainly disqualify you as you will be unable to play to the standard of the audition panel. You will be unable to see the entire preparation process through to fruition.

Additionally, air travel is often subject to massive delays. Delays can potentially be severe enough that you can be late to or miss the audition altogether.

Alternatives to Air Travel

Given flying can be a gamble on your instrument's life, if there is almost any other method of travel that you can take to the audition, do it. Some alternative methods of travel to auditions are by car and by train. Despite often being slower than an on-time flight, they are more reliable and do not have the same safety issues regarding your instrument. If you drive, you are not limited by baggage policies and can take whatever you want. Trains sometimes do have carry-on baggage policies, but musicians typically only run into issues when their instrument is very large. In such instances, a travel case in the baggage hold would be the solution again. Out of the three modes of travel that I presented, driving is by far the safest for your instrument. You are most in control and are not limited by rules restricting what you can and cannot bring with you. The drawback of driving, however, is that it is usually the slowest option of the three. No

matter what you do to get to the audition, your highest priority should be both you and your instrument getting there unscathed.

Packing for the Audition

Other than the usual travel essentials, pack your instrument(s), the outfit you plan on wearing to the audition, all the music you used in your preparation (and applicable chargers if digital), any accessories (required mutes, playing aids, etc.), any maintenance supplies that you might need in an emergency, a reuseable water bottle, beta blockers (if applicable), a medium-sized tote bag, a small, insulated lunch box, an icepack, your speaker and its charger from your practice sessions, and a practice mute (if applicable). I personally try to avoid using a practice mute because it often feels wildly different from playing normally, but there are situations where it is necessary (especially while travelling and staying in hotels).

On the day I begin travelling to the audition, I try to get in my playing for the day before leaving. This is to avoid unnecessary time with a practice mute. If travel takes more than one day, try to find a space where you can practice without a mute on any subsequent days. If you cannot, still do play with a practice mute, but only do what is necessary to maintain your current playing condition. It is important, however, to play as though there is not a mute there, so you do not unknowingly change anything about your playing.

Reserving a Place to Stay

Although not mentioned earlier, you should reserve a place to stay when you receive an audition invitation. Try choosing an option that is as close to the audition venue as possible and within your budget. The closer you are to the venue, the less likely you will have issues getting there. Hotels are the easiest and most common option, though there are others you can choose from.

Regardless of where you stay, check with an employee about whether you can practice without a mute or not. Some softer instruments will be fine no matter where you stay, but louder ones will have more issues generally. For hotels, ask the employee who is checking you in if there is a space where you could play. Most will say no, but there are some that will have somewhere for you to practice (often nicer hotels). If there is not extra space for you to play, spend no more time than necessary on a practice mute.

Also make sure you are playing comfortably and normally. Now is far beyond the deadline to start changing aspects of your playing. If having space to play without a mute is necessary for you, it would be wise to call hotels before booking to confirm that they do have space for that. No matter where you stay, make sure it is a quiet, comfortable place where you will not be distracted or bothered. Often-forgotten details like this can make all the difference between winning an audition or not.

Some people will split arrangements with others auditioning, which seems like a good idea on paper. However, I have found doing this to be distracting and stress-inducing. In my opinion, it is best to have your own space to sleep and collect yourself during this part of the audition process. Even if you are not one to compare yourself to others, it will almost certainly be unsettling to share arrangements with your competitors. You will be playing unnecessary mind games with yourself at a point where you should be at your most relaxed and confident.

The Night Before the Audition

Evening Meal

At this point, you should be settled into wherever you are staying over the course of the audition. Your first order of business should be finding a place to eat dinner. It is important to choose something that will leave you comfortably full and not upset your stomach. I recommend a larger, complex carbohydrate-rich meal the evening before an audition. It is more likely to leave you feeling full which will promote deeper sleep. Try eating this meal a few hours in advance of sleeping so your body has enough time to digest and process it. Eating too close to sleeping can disrupt your quality of sleep. After finishing dinner, stop somewhere to purchase healthy, energy-rich snacks to take to the audition tomorrow. Auditions can be unpredictable timing-wise, and you never know when you will have an opportunity to leave and eat.

Additional Dietary Tips

Also be sure to avoid caffeine the night before an audition so your heart rate remains low and falling asleep is easier. Refrain from drinking alcohol before the audition as well. It is crucial to stay in your best physical and mental state for the duration of the audition.

All things considered, only drink a healthy amount of water for the remainder of the audition process. The amount of water depends on the person, but drink enough throughout the day to consistently feel well-hydrated. Some performance issues can come solely from being dehydrated.

Last Practice and Checks

If you have not yet played today, wait one or two hours after dinner before doing so to let most of it digest. As mentioned earlier, search for and take any option that allows you to play comfortably without a practice mute. It was mentioned earlier, but if you are required to use a mute, treat it like there it is not there. This is to make sure that your playing does not change without it. It is beyond important to feel fresh, strong, and flexible tomorrow, so only work through your warm-up routine today. Maintain focus throughout the entire routine and keep the playing to 30 minutes or less. The duration of playing does not matter if it is your highest quality. As such, waste no time and conserve as much energy as possible.

It is also recommended that you look your instrument over and make sure that everything is in working order. Make any necessary improvements to ensure that your instrument will be totally reliable come tomorrow.

Before sleeping, limit your screentime as too much of it can inhibit falling asleep. Next, I advise that you take a shower to both feel fresh and to clear your mind before settling down for the night. If you are staying in a hotel and have not done so already, place your room's "do not disturb" sign on the outside of your door. Leave it there for the duration of the audition to avoid any extra distractions. Find a place to freeze your icepack, if you have not already. It may come in handy tomorrow. Be extremely careful setting your morning alarms. Check everything multiple times to make sure you will be waking up well in advance of the audition. Everyone's optimal sleep duration differs, but I feel my best after eight to nine hours. Do everything you can to make your arrangements as calming and distraction-free as possible. Everything makes a difference.

The Morning of the Audition

It is now the morning of the audition, and it is time to get ready. I recommend starting the morning with another shower to feel fresh again and to start the day with a clear mind. Continue with the remainder of your usual morning routine. If you are a brass musician that can grow facial hair, I would recommend you shave the area where your mouthpiece sits as part of your morning routine (both above and below your embouchure). Excess hair on a brass mouthpiece can cause the mouthpiece to slide and not have a proper seal. Just be gentle and be careful not to cut yourself as that could cause massive playing issues. I personally use a very safe and simple electric beard trimmer which has never cut my lip. Change into your desired audition outfit before heading somewhere for breakfast afterwards.

Similarly to last night's dinner, choose something that does not upset your stomach. However, instead of a large, complex carbohydrate-rich meal, go for something more reasonably-sized with a considerable amount of protein and a bit of natural sugars. You will want to feel satisfied but not overly full. This will help kickstart your energy levels for the day and not slow you down like the dinner plan can. As always, I recommend drinking of plenty of water only. If you are someone who requires morning coffee to have any energy for the day, you may drink it, but I have found that any amount of caffeine is likely to mess with the effectiveness of a beta blocker.

Now it is time to work through your warm-up routine. If you were able to play without a mute last night, take the same steps from earlier to do that again today. There should be no difference between last night's warm-up and the one today. Everything mentioned earlier still applies here. On audition day, I prefer having two hours between finishing my warm-up routine and the beginning of my audition block. As such, I schedule my

morning around finishing my warm-up routine. For example, if my audition block is scheduled to start at noon and check-in is an hour beforehand (11:00am), I will aim to start my warm-up at 9:30am and finish no later than 10:00am. It is when I finish my warm-up that I take my beta blocker. This will give it enough time to kick in before I go on stage.

The events before warming up should just fall in place; give yourself an hour and a half for breakfast (8:00am-9:30am) and an hour to shower, get through your morning routine, and change (7:00am-8:00am). These windows all account for travel to and from different places. Take as much of the time between finishing your warm-up routine and leaving for the audition to relax and collect yourself. This chunk of time is a good opportunity to practice some extra breath meditation. It should go without saying, but the more focused and calm you are, the better.

When exactly you leave for the audition depends on your proximity to the venue and when you have been asked to check-in. Some auditions have a set check-in time depending on what block you are scheduled in, some have one check-in time for everyone regardless of when they are supposed to play, and others may ask you to just show up any time before you are expected to play. My preferred time to check in is an hour before my audition block is supposed to start. This is the most scheduled option with regards to check-in times. If I am not given a specific time to check-in, I still arrive an hour before my block. However, if you are given a specific check-in time, follow it even if it is not what you prefer. Everything is scheduled very carefully to make the audition run as smoothly as possible and trying to change that can disrupt the process.

Although everything this morning has been scheduled around finishing your warm-up routine, adjust times as necessary to maintain two hours between warming up and the start of your audition block. If you are in a situation where there will be significantly more or less than two hours between your warm-up and the start of your audition block (required check-in is more than two hours before your block or the audition is severely delayed), do not panic. Adjust as to the situation as necessary and do only what you need to do to continually feel your best.

Before leaving for the venue, make sure you pack everything that you might need:

- Instrument(s) (in case(s))
- Audition outfit (wearing)
- Cellphone
- Tote bag
- Music (in case or tote bag)
- Chargers for digital music and cellphone (in case or tote bag)
- Speaker and charger (in case or tote bag)
- Required accessories (in case or tote bag)

- Maintenance supplies (in case or tote bag)
- Extra beta blockers (in case or tote bag)
- Filled reusable water bottle (in tote bag)
- Insulated lunch box (in tote bag)
- Frozen icepack (in insulated lunch box)
- Snacks (in insulated lunch box, case, or tote bag)
- Any other required materials for the audition

Most of these are obvious, but there has certainly been someone who has forgotten one of these at one point or another. Extra beta blockers are there for when things are running much further behind than you anticipated. The beta blocker I take is supposed to last anywhere between three and six hours on average. You could be waiting to play beyond this window, and your original tablet wore off. This could be because of delays or more than one round being scheduled on the same day. Take another when you feel things wearing off near the end of your beta blocker's window. Please note that my three to six hours may not be the same for you or your beta blocker.

Even though the lunch box can hold snacks, it is primarily there to insulate the icepack. I recommend bringing an icepack for days when there is more than one round scheduled. Some rounds can be very heavy and taxing, and you may have to do it all over again in an hour or two. Use the icepack to reduce inflammation in any muscles that could benefit from it. For brass musicians, the embouchure is the primary target here. Some people use anti-inflammatory medications to reduce any resultant swelling, but I find that chemically reducing inflammation can mess with rebuilding the strength to play again that day. To still feel like myself, I only use an icepack during audition days.

Assuming you now have everything packed and ready to go, it is time to leave to check in. Double check any instructions that you may have been sent about entering the venue. Make sure that you leave with more than enough time to arrive on time. Lateness makes the audition process more difficult and delayed for every person involved, not to mention it also makes you look unprofessional as a first impression.

Check-in

When you arrive, you will usually be met with a table where one or two people will welcome you and proceed to check you in. Some may require that you provide a copy of your ID, but I have found that most will just ask for your name. If you were required to send a physical deposit check to secure an audition slot, this is likely the time when it will be returned to you (if they do not destroy it themselves). You will also probably be given a copy of the list and an assigned number for the round you arrived for. It is extremely important to make a good impression on every person in the audition process. As such, be kind and courteous to everyone you speak to and interact with, including people who you believe do not have a say in you being hired or not. Although

this is how you should act all the time, doing so as a first impression shows that you would be a good colleague if hired.

Waiting Room (Before)

Although being taken to a waiting room is the most common next step, some auditions may have the space and take you directly to a warm-up room. When you are taken to a waiting room, however, it is important to keep your composure. You may see other candidates that you know personally or candidates that you know are very successful in auditions. Do not let this distract you from the goal of doing well in this audition. Even the greatest musicians have days where they do not perform at their best, so do not think that someone with a very good reputation is guaranteed the job. In fact, nobody is ever guaranteed a job. For someone to be chosen as the winner, at least one person needs to play to the standard of the audition panel on that particular day. If someone wants to speak to you, be polite and speak back to them. However, to maintain the necessary focus to do well, I would recommend that you keep unnecessary conversation to a minimum. Most waiting rooms will not allow playing, but, if your does, block out anything you hear. Some people even bring noise-cancelling headphones just for this purpose. If beneficial, listen to music that helps you stay calm, or even music that you will be playing in the audition. Although only one person can typically win the audition, this is a very personal journey where you are competing against yourself. You should strive to play beyond your highest standards no matter what is thrown at you.

The amount of time you will spend in the waiting room depends heavily on the audition schedule and the availability of warm-up rooms. Most auditions will be running behind in some capacity (unless you are the first candidate), and warm-up space is generally very limited. Expect to spend a considerable amount of time here, from anywhere between a few minutes to a few hours. No matter how long you are there for, make sure that you stay calm and focused. Also be sure to maintain your energy levels by eating or drinking when you need it.

Warm-Up Room

At some point, someone will come and escort you to your designated warm-up space. Usually, this space will be something small like a single-person dressing room. It is very rare that you will have a large, resonant space to warm up in. When you have one of these smaller spaces, do not adjust your playing to the room. The actual audition space will almost certainly be significantly larger, and your sound needs to match that type of space. Although often overlooked, ask where the restroom is, if you are allowed to bring a water bottle with you on stage, and where you can refill your water bottle. You will want to feel comfortable with enough available water when it is time to go. I have also never encountered an audition where I was not allowed to bring a water bottle with me on stage. Being eliminated from an audition because of easily controllable factors like these will leave you with a lot of avoidable regret afterwards.

It is also very important to ask if there is music provided on stage. If there is, use that music. It will most likely be the exact music that the panel is reading which will best avoid any discrepancies and misunderstandings. There have been a few situations where I went on stage and noticed that the music on the stand was different from the music I was sent months earlier (different editions or markings). Some people swear by using the music from their own practice in the audition itself because of their personal markings, but I have never had an issue forgetting any of my practice markings due to deliberately memorizing everything. The only instance when I will bring my own music on stage is when either the orchestra is not providing music or there are a few selections that are not provided (most often solo repertoire). When in doubt, use the provided music.

Any well-structured audition will give you at least half an hour in a warm-up room, though you will usually get an hour or more. If you did not receive a list for the round at check-in, you will likely receive it here. No matter what, it is beyond important to not overplay at this stage of the audition. Do only what it takes to continuously feel ready and relaxed. Because I would have already warmed up in the morning, I will only need to play through a few key exercises from my warm-up again to feel physically really. As a quick check to make sure everything is working as I want it to, I will just play the start of every piece on the round's list. If there are pieces that would benefit from playing with a recording, MIDI file, or drone, then use your speaker to play those when touching the start of it. You will almost certainly hear other candidates around you running the list down repeatedly, especially in earlier rounds. No matter how tempting it is, do not ever do this. Not only will constantly running the list make you exhausted before even stepping on stage, but it also tells you that you are insecure and did not properly prepare for the audition.

Other than a few short exercises and touching the start of every piece, I will take most of the remaining time to practice breath meditation to better focus and lower my heartrate. Avoid unnecessary time on your phone or other devices that will take away from your focus. If enough time passes and I begin to feel that my mini warm-up is starting to wear off, I will touch the starts of one or two pieces again before returning to breath meditation.

You should always be ready to go at any time while in the warm-up room. For me, the hardest part of an audition is waiting at any stage. While in the warm-up room, I am typically ready to go after about ten minutes and want to get the audition over with at that point. No matter how you feel in there, keep your composure. You will usually receive a five-to-ten-minute warning before it is your time to go in a well-run audition. However, if you do not receive a warning, someone comes to cut your guaranteed warm-up time short, and you do not feel ready as a result, be firm in telling them that you were guaranteed a certain amount of time that has not yet passed. Orchestras tend

to do this to speed up the audition and avoid delays, but it should not come at the cost of the quality of your audition. You made the physical, mental, and financial sacrifices to get to this point, and should receive at least the accommodations that you were promised. Only agree to going early if you are totally convinced that you are ready and that extra time will not do you any good.

Preliminary Round

Someone is now at your warm-up room to retrieve and escort you to the stage. Some auditions require you to evacuate all your things out of the warm-up room immediately, but only bring on stage what is necessary.

What is necessary fluctuates from person to person, but this is what I bring with me into the audition:

- Instrument(s)
- Water bottle (full)
- Music (if necessary)

Many people are advocates for recording their auditions on their phone in their pocket. I do not do this because, although it can be helpful to review how I played in the audition afterwards, I noticed that I perform significantly worse knowing that I am being recorded. This situation is in an extremely high-pressure environment, and I find that being recorded adds an extra, unnecessary stressor to it. Yes, I am an advocate for recording yourself in the preparation stages but leaving it all on the stage in the actual audition gives you one less thing to worry about in the moment.

Some people also believe that you should “play it safe” in earlier rounds to focus solely on technique. I think this is an abysmal philosophy and demeans the very reason we are musicians in the first place. The panel wants to hear someone who is both musically compelling and technically sound. Audition panels that only listen for technique are severely misguided and are not people who will generally be enjoyable to work with. Being a good technician can only get you so far in your career before you hit a wall or lose enjoyment altogether. You prepared (or should have prepared) both the required technique and musical subtleties of every piece. There is absolutely no reason to hold back and not present everything you dedicated yourself to for months. I also find this round to be the hardest one to advance from. The panel will likely have to sort through a very large number of candidates, and it will be difficult to stand out from all of them. This further stresses the importance of putting your best foot forward and showing the panel everything you can do.

If you are bringing your own music on stage and it is in a digital format, be sure that your device is fully charged, silenced, and set to “do not disturb” or disconnected from the internet entirely. I know of someone who used a tablet in their audition, but received

a call in between pieces while their ringer was on. They were promptly cut off and eliminated from the audition. Even if you do not receive a call in the middle of an audition, silently receiving a text or notification can also be very distracting.

Before walking on stage, you will probably be met with the audition proctor. Their job is to be the line of communication between you and the panel in a blind audition. When it is time for you to go, the proctor will open the door and follow you into the audition space before announcing your assigned number to the panel. Walking in, always stay on the carpet (if there is one). This is done to preserve anonymity in blind auditions by silencing candidates' shoes.

While walking in and when you get to the music stand, take in the space. Look for a point at the back of the hall to focus on to give you an accurate representation of the space (an exit sign is an easy one). Doing this will prevent you from getting tunnel vision, which can be detrimental to delivering a compelling performance. Also, if the audition is blind, do not speak in a way that is audible to the panel. Your point of contact with the panel is the proctor. It is their job to communicate with the panel on your behalf. If you need to speak, whisper so that only the proctor can hear you. If the panel hears you speak in this context, you may be eliminated from the audition. Once you reach the music stand, set your water bottle off to the side where it will both be easily accessible and not in your way. Also do not be afraid to rearrange music stands, chairs, or other furniture in your proximity to be more comfortable. If you are using the orchestra's provided music, take a moment to crosscheck it with the list to make sure that it matches and is in the correct order.

If you play a directional instrument, point your instrument in the direction that you were instructed to before walking on stage. If you were not given a particular direction to point toward, point out into the audition space but in the direction of the middle of the panel. Some people will play a few notes to get used to the space before formally starting the audition, but I highly recommend against doing this. Any notes that are not part of the audition will only work against you. The panel will not care how good those notes sound, but they will care if they do not sound good. Everything you do is under a microscope while you are on stage, and you do not want to give the panel more chances to find a problem than required. Any extra notes in an audition (including those while switching between different instruments) also exude a sense of insecurity to the audition panel that can be avoided by simply not playing them. Before playing the first piece, take 30 seconds or so to think of your assigned words to it and settle into its emotional character. Once you are ready, go ahead and start the audition just as you had prepared.

Between each piece, take anywhere from 30 seconds to a minute to take a sip of water, recenter yourself, and change character. One minute will seem like a long time in an

audition, but is not unreasonable. It is even acceptable to take more than a minute if you are required to change instruments between selections. *Even though you are the one auditioning, the panel is on your time. You are not on their time.* Like was mentioned earlier, you made the sacrifices to be there. As such, the panel should be willing to let you do what you need to perform at your best (within reason, of course). Taking much too long of a time between pieces will often communicate to the panel that you are insecure, however.

We all want the audition to go exactly as we envisioned, of course, but this is never the case. If something that you played was significantly below your standard, you are allowed to turn to the proctor and tell them you would like to repeat it. The proctor will ask the panel if you would be allowed to repeat that selection, and the answer is almost always yes. Be careful when asking to repeat anything, though. Only ask to repeat something if you are convinced that it will sound better the next time. If it does not, the panel will likely think that you have a major flaw preventing you from playing that piece well.

At any point in the round, the panel can also ask for you to repeat things. Often, a request to change something about your playing will come along with that. If asked to change something, totally commit to it. Make the difference extremely obvious to the panel and show them that you understood and can do exactly what they asked for. If you find their request difficult to understand, tell the proctor to ask the panel to clarify. Do not try to change something when you do not understand what is being asked. There are instances when audition committees will require sightreading from standard repertoire that was not provided on the main repertoire list. This is typically done to weed out less experienced candidates who are otherwise not very familiar with anything besides the music they are being asked to prepare. I have experienced sightreading in only one section round, though it can happen at any point in any audition, albeit uncommon. Always be curious about the repertoire available to your instrument and familiarize yourself with it. You never know when it will come in handy.

The round is never over until you hear a clear “thank you” from someone on the audition panel. Do not try to leave the stage until you hear this. When you do hear this, the proctor will open the door for you to leave. Do understand, however, that not every candidate will be given a chance to play everything on the list. If the audition panel determines that the candidate they are hearing is not who they are looking for, they reserve the right to end that person’s audition early to save time. This would also be signaled by a clear “thank you,” but instead sometime in the middle of the round. Whenever your audition slot comes to an end, gather everything you brought with you and quietly exit the stage.

Waiting Room (After)

Having gathered everything, you will likely be directed back to the waiting room. There are instances when orchestras will communicate results to you via phone or email to reduce congestion in the building, but receiving results in person in the waiting room is most common.

At this point, maintaining total focus is less important as the round itself is over. If there is not another round directly after this, feel free to talk with other candidates in the room if you are acquainted with any of them. Even if you were cut off in the audition, I recommend staying to hear the results. Although being cut off usually communicates an early elimination, there are instances where the panel will do this to save time instead of eliminating candidates. Do your best to wind down from the high-pressure environment you were just in. Waiting for results can take a very long time and be very stressful. I particularly find this to be harder to deal with than the audition itself. Distracting yourself is a good way to put off the unnecessary nerves.

When someone comes into the room to communicate the results of your round, everyone will typically be referred to by their number for that round. It is important to remember the number you were assigned. If you cannot remember your number, someone should have both your name and number documented. If the results are in your favor, speak with the person who delivered them to you. They should have details regarding the next round. If the results were not in your favor, gather your things and leave the audition venue. Although disappointing, be proud in the work you put in and how you have grown over the course of this process. Whenever an audition comes to an end for you, treat yourself to something that you enjoy. You need to reward yourself for all your progress. It is also important to reach out to the orchestra (likely their personnel manager) and ask if anyone on the audition panel would be willing to share their written comments for your audition with you. Be sure to remember your assigned number(s) for reference. These can be extremely helpful in determining why the audition went the way it did for you. Be aware, however, that requesting comments on your audition will not always ensure that you receive them. You are more likely to receive comments if you made it to a later round. Even then, you will most likely never hear back. Out of every audition I have ever done, I only received comments three times.

At any point in an audition, be aware that the panel can determine that none of the candidates met their standards. When this happens, the audition is ruled a “no-hire.” Not hiring at an audition is generally frowned upon and can usually be avoided, but it does happen from time to time. Another audition will need to be scheduled in the future. Out of every audition I have ever taken, five of those resulted in nobody being hired. Some orchestras have reputations of not hiring more than hiring at auditions, and I

would typically try to avoid these auditions as it can indicate internal issues with the organization or a hostile work environment.

Between Rounds

If you have multiple rounds scheduled on the same day, it is extremely important to conserve energy. You want every round you play to sound like your strongest. I recommend finding something to eat an hour or two before you need to be back at the audition venue. This should be something following the audition day guidelines detailed above. If there is a considerable amount of time, it may even be helpful to take a short nap to both relax and reset. Make sure, however, that it is not too long and does not leave you feeling slow and groggy. Continue to drink plenty of water as well.

If the rounds are too close together and do not allow you to leave, take advantage of the snacks you packed. When it is time to get back into the audition mindset, repeat the process that is to be done before leaving for the audition venue for the first time.

The audition process starting at check-in again should mostly feel the same for every round. You should also not feel the need to completely warm up again. A few short exercises from your warm-up routine should be enough to get you back into shape while conserving as much energy as possible. There should not be a need to play in between rounds until you are in the warm-up room again. Depending on the window in which your beta blocker is effective, it may be a good idea to take another one if that window will have passed by the time your next round is supposed to happen. Regardless, you need to feel the same as you did before to replicate the success you had in the previous round.

Semifinal Round

The semifinal round should feel the same as the preliminary round. It will probably be blind with the only likely differences being a longer audition list and a smaller pool of candidates. Treat it the same as you would any other round. Present your absolute best every second you are on stage and totally commit to anything the panel asks you to do. Generally, the further along you are in an audition, the more likely you are to be asked to do something differently by the committee to test your artistic flexibility. Although extremely uncommon, there are instances where orchestras have elected to hire someone following this round. This only happens when there is no question about who to hire and the panel believes any later rounds would be unnecessary. However, almost every audition will wait to hire anyone until after the final round.

Final Round

The final round will typically have some larger differences from the previous two, but you should still treat it with the same importance. Although called the “final” round, it is

often not the last round played in an audition. Compared to the two earlier rounds, the list for this round will likely be the longest. This round may be unscreened if the panel wants it to be. If it is unscreened, be polite and acknowledge the panel. Converse with them if they would like you to and thank them for their time when you are finished. Packing and wearing a presentable outfit comes in handy for this as well. Things like this go a long way in addition to your playing.

This is also usually when solo repertoire will be introduced, though this can happen in any round. Whenever solo repertoire is asked, you will often be given a few minutes to rehearse with a pianist beforehand. Make this time efficient and play as little as possible. More discussion than playing will generally suffice. It is extremely important in your preparation months before the audition to study the accompaniment to your solo repertoire in case this happens. If auditions are pressed for time, however, you may not be given rehearsal time. If this is the case, take any time you have to discuss your plan with the pianist to assure the smoothest performance possible. Although I advise against playing any extra notes in the audition, I do recommend playing a tuning note with the piano. Being eliminated because you and the piano do not match is easily avoidable. There are instances when there will not be a pianist and you will simply play without accompaniment. Some orchestras will specify on the repertoire list if you are to be expected to play with or without accompaniment, but most will not. It is best to prepare as if you will be expected to play with accompaniment regardless as it will give you a more immersive preparation experience. During the months leading up to the audition, find a trusted pianist to rehearse with.

“Superfinal” Round

A “superfinal” round specifies any round that is played beyond the preliminary, semifinal, and final rounds of an audition. These are typically done when the audition committee has not yet determined a candidate to declare as the winner of the audition. Lists for this round are oftentimes shorter than the one from the final round, and sometimes even the semifinal round. Although there is usually less to play, do not take it easy now. As you should know for every round, every detail matters. For now, and the final round, this is even more true. At this point, the panel is winding down to decide on a candidate, and it is a game of inches. One seemingly insignificant detail can be the difference between going home with nothing and winning.

Section Round

Some instruments may have section playing as a possibility in an audition (i.e. low brass). Most of the time, a section round will be synonymous with a “superfinal” round. However, there are times when section playing will be inserted into the middle of the final round. Usually, music for a section round will just be selected from what is on the

repertoire list, though sightreading from the standard repertoire can happen. As such, your preparation should include understanding your role in the section for every piece. During the months leading up to the audition, rehearse with a section of trusted colleagues if possible.

Section rounds will almost always be unscreened as the section you will be playing with needs to see you. As with any unscreened round, be polite to everyone. Greet and firmly shake the hands of everyone in the section and do not be afraid to discuss how things will be played. If you will be leading the section, be extremely clear when explaining how loud something should be played, what articulation to use, how you will cue things, what tempo to use and where it will change, and what sound to use, just to name a few things. If you are going to be playing in the section and following someone else, be sure to ask the principal musician about these details. In addition to discussing these things, be sure to demonstrate them in your playing as well. Showing the audition committee that your playing matches exactly what is in your head will help win them over.

When doing a section round, the panel is looking for the best fit within that section. Use your musical intuition to fit in and lead as needed. You will almost certainly be asked to play most pieces more than once. The committee will likely use this time to test your flexibility within the section and see how they can get you to fit in better. As you would for any unscreened round, thank everyone for their time when the round is over.

Final Results

The results at the end of someone's audition can vary, but the most common results following the committee's decision are winning the position outright, being offered a trial period with the orchestra, being named runner-up to a winner, trialist, or higher-ranked runner-up, or simply being eliminated from contention. Making it to the final round of an audition sometimes makes you eligible to join the orchestra's substitute list as well. When named a runner-up, this means that the committee found you to be qualified for the position but not quite as qualified as the winner. Depending on the orchestra, being a runner-up can mean that you are still in consideration for the position. You may be offered the position or a trial if the candidate that is ranked above you does not accept or earn the job offer. This all relies on the orchestra's audition policies outlined in their contract and collective bargaining agreement. Some will be allowed to default to a runner-up if needed and others will not. Naming a runner-up is never required and, again, is only done when the panel identifies more than one qualified candidate.

Trial

Being offered a trial can mean a few things. The most frequent reason for the panel offering a trial before hiring someone is that they were not totally convinced in hiring a

candidate based solely on their audition but would like to see how they fit into the orchestra. Another common reason is that they could not decide between multiple candidates in the audition and offered each of them trials to inform their hiring decision. Although less common, some orchestras are required to offer a trial before hiring any candidate, regardless of whether said candidate received a unanimous vote to win or not. Trial periods can vary in length, ranging anywhere from one week to an entire season.

If you find yourself in a trial situation, treat it as though you already have the job. Prepare as you would for any other workweek and be a reliable and pleasant coworker. Do your best to fit in and only be noticed when you need to be. Being noticed and sticking out to the music director or other members of the ensemble when you should not will not bode well for you. Most trials will happen at a date considerably after the initial audition and you will likely know the repertoire for your trial period well in advance. However, there are some cases where the turnaround from the audition to the trial period is extremely quick, sometimes even starting the next day. This is a situation where having a strong grasp on the standard repertoire can come in handy. You will not have much (if any) time to prepare and will likely need to jump in and sound as though you are adequately prepared. Something like this happened to me following an audition. I won the audition and was then asked to start a mandatory trial period the following day. As such, I spent the remainder of the evening preparing what I could of the repertoire, all of which I thankfully had performed before and was familiar with.

Jumping into an ensemble that you are unfamiliar with can be a very daunting experience, especially if it is the last thing standing between you and being offered the position. However, understand that this ensemble sees something in you and wants you to do well. Do not dwell on any mistakes you make and instead focus on exuding a noticeable sense of confidence in yourself. Other musicians will pick up on that and appreciate it.

A decision is usually made directly after the trial period comes to an end. If there was more than one candidate left, the candidate that appeared to be the best fit will have been offered the position. Although unfortunate, most orchestras are not required to offer the position to anyone if they found none of the candidates to be a good fit.

After the Audition

Once the entire audition process comes to an end, reward yourself regardless of the result. If you won the audition, see if you can celebrate with any members of the audition panel so you can get to know your new coworkers better. If you did not win, still do something you enjoy. Now is time to decompress and bask in the results of your months of work and preparation.

If you have been offered the job, negotiate a starting date that is feasible for you. Most orchestras will expect you to start at the beginning of their next season, though some will want you to start right away. Work with them and figure out a date that can make both of you happy. It should go without saying but continue to be a courteous and pleasant colleague. Just because you have the job now does not mean you are entitled to keeping it. Being a great musician is only half of the equation in keeping your new job. The other half is being someone who is easy to work with and promotes a productive work environment.

If your life allows for it, take some time off from playing altogether. After all this work, your body deserves some much-needed rest. Over the next few days, instead take the time to review your experience and results from this audition. Look for any takeaways that you can use to inform preparations for the next one. Your process should always be evolving as you learn more about yourself. In a lot of ways, this process can feel like trial and error as we figure out what works well and what does not. If something clearly did not work for you, do not keep trying to force it to work. Look for another solution and give it a try. Almost every problem has an infinite number of solutions, and it is our job to find which one speaks to us the most.

Understand that the audition process is almost never linear for anybody. Most people will experience ups and downs with some of those downs being very devastating. Although breaks are good following tough losses, it is crucial to eventually pick yourself up and continue from where you left off. Remind yourself why you are going through this brutal process in the first place. Each of us have differing personal reasons, but most musicians are doing this because there is a wide range of expression and emotion that cannot be found anywhere except in music. It speaks to us on a level much deeper than physical and has convinced us to commit our lives to it. Being drawn into music is no accident. We do live in a small world, yes, but there is room for all of us. How long it takes each of us to find our place in this artform is up to our goals and the steps we take to exceed them.