

SEATTLE YOUTH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRAS

Audition Preparation Help-Sheet

Placement auditions for Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestras provide the conductors with the ability to match prospective members with the most appropriate learning environment for future musical growth. The process need not be a stressful one and, if the student follows a few simple guidelines the potential to perform at your best will be maximized.

PREPARATION

The process of auditioning itself can take practice. If you are prone to nervousness try doing a few “mock auditions” for parents, friends and family members...anyone who is willing to listen! Gather your music together in a separate room. Have your mock audition “judges” seated and prepared. Walk in, introduce yourself, set up your music and play your scales and solo piece without stopping. Ask them how you did. The process will get you accustomed to performing under pressure with poise and confidence.

Another way to prepare for an audition is to record yourself doing a “mock audition” using a portable cassette player or your computer. Listen to your recording with a critical ear. Check your performance for evenness of tempo, accuracy in intonation and expressivity in lyrical passages. Self-criticism and evaluation is one of the most important aspects of musicianship.

DRESS

- Wear something neat but comfortable. It is not necessary to wear a coat and tie or a fancy outfit.
- You should be sure to wear clothes that will not restrict your range of motion if you play a string instrument. Try doing in “mock audition” or practicing in the type of outfit you are auditioning in.
- Never enter an audition chewing gum!
- Baseball caps are not allowed in rehearsals, so should not be worn in auditions.

SCALES

Scales and arpeggios are the “raw material” of all music. Scales demonstrate agility and, more importantly, an awareness of proper intonation. Playing scales out of tune will restrict a student’s prospects for entry into a higher-level ensemble. Practice scales SLOWLY listening for absolute accuracy of whole steps and half steps.

String players should check pitches with open strings when open-string notes occur within the scale. Playing a scale along with a piano simultaneously and matching each pitch also helps.

Wind players can check scale pitches with an inexpensive portable tuner (which all wind players should own). Woodwind instruments are imperfectly tuned by design, some notes are naturally flat or sharp and these notes should be corrected using embouchure modifications.

In the audition, announce the scales you will be performing; major first followed by minor. Guidelines for how many octaves are appropriate for entry into each orchestra are available on the SYSO website. Scales should be performed slowly and evenly! A good tempo is eighth-notes at approximately 72 beats per minute. Don’t rush scales! The judges will be listening for intonation and evenness.

SOLO SELECTION

The selection of your solo piece should be done with great care. Pick your solo selection well in advance to provide the maximum amount of time for preparation. You should choose a work you are familiar with, and have been studying with your teacher for an extended period of time so that you will have mastered the work's technical aspects and can concentrate on presenting a musically well thought-out, convincing performance. Choosing a work that is too difficult, and playing it in a sloppy manner is far worse than playing an easier piece well.

The solo selection should include a variety of technical passage-work, and lyrical sections. The judges will not hear more than approximately 2-4 minutes of music, so choose a section of the work which demonstrates the greatest variety. You may want to start in the middle of a work rather than at the beginning so as to provide a greater diversity of style. A perfect solo selection will include music comprised of scales and arpeggios, an assortment of rhythmic patterns and articulations, as well as a lyrical passage demonstrating your musicality.

Choose a manageable tempo which will show off your poise, musicianship and technical control. The most common mistakes students make in auditions are setting a tempo that is too fast, and rushing technical passages. Passages that are played evenly at a slower tempo are more impressive (and actually sound faster) than passages that are played unevenly or sloppily in a faster tempo. Practice your solo selection with a metronome. First find a manageable tempo for the technical passages, and then begin the piece at that tempo. Try to develop a "tempo memory" and practice beginning the selection at the right tempo checking yourself against the metronome after a few bars.

Before you begin your solo selection announce the work's title and composer to the judges. Audition judges are critical of students who don't know the name of the composer of their solo work.

SIGHT READING

Sight-reading is an important component of every audition. It enables the judges to evaluate basic musical skills. Sight-reading is a skill that should be practiced. Practicing sight-reading can be fun and enjoyable. Find new material by looking ahead in your method book or etude collection for unfamiliar pieces. Take a few minutes to look the piece over. Pay particular attention to key signature and accidentals. Plan any fingering adjustments in advance. Check the piece over for any unfamiliar rhythms, string shifts and crossings, or wide leaps. Set a metronome to a moderate tempo and stick with it! Do not stop! Audition judges are most concerned with rhythmic accuracy and tempo continuity in sight-reading.

Sight reading material is usually drawn from anthology books of orchestral excerpts. These books should be in the personal libraries of any serious orchestral musician and are available at music stores and online. Ask your teacher about the best editions and how to start making your own collection. Using excerpt books to practice sight-reading not only gives students a general familiarity with important passages in the orchestral repertoire, but also gives the serious orchestral player an advantage in sight-reading auditions