

Audition Manifesto

A GUIDE TO TAKING ORCHESTRAL AUDITIONS

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Knowledge is useless unless it is applied.



DIRECTIONS ON READING THIS GUIDE

This is not a novel. There is no character development or descriptive scenery. This is a guide, an instruction booklet - nothing more, nothing less. I have tried to make it as concise as possible, with as little fluff as possible. It is meant as a tool for a better understanding of what it takes to succeed in the audition journey. Please read it slowly.

OVERTURE

There was a time when I just didn't care. I had no need to work the craft of playing - feeling the music was all that mattered to me. Plainly put, if I felt it, then you felt it. As a result, things were not happening in my playing that I was convinced were happening. I look back on those days and I cannot believe some of the things I achieved. I can only assume I had enough natural ability to be able to keep up with the rest of the pack. But there came a time when keeping up was just not good enough to get where I wanted to be. I was going to have to find a way to move to the front of the pack - only then would I have enough control over my life. Only then would I feel justified in dreaming a better existence for myself, through a career in music. Looking back at my life, I can see all the human kindness and understanding directed towards me. It is in part the reason for me writing this guide. There were so many individuals and organizations that helped me, when I, during that time, would not even help myself. I felt it was time for me to give back and now help others. It is also important to note that by helping others, one enters a path of also helping one's self.

In the past, I would always do the minimum of what was required of me. Oddly enough, through a twisted irony, it is that mentality that creates a better player. The only problem is that you must first do the maximum so that you may know what the minimum is. The universal thought that questions, why stand when you can sit, and why sit when you can lay down, was full-heartedly embraced by me. I was doing the minimum not because I was wise, but because I was lazy. As a result, it was almost like a monkey pressing buttons on some system console. By chance, the monkey will get something right, but what do you think is happening the rest of the time? Put bluntly, I went from a monkey randomly operating a console, to building a console that better suited my needs.

And do you know what the real surprise of it was? - it was one of the easiest things I ever did. After all was said and done, I finally learned why and how the greatest maximum is a well-placed minimum. It is a concept that is easy to understand but very hard to believe. You can under-

stand something all you want, but if you don't believe what you understand, then you will never know. And I'm not talking about the fake believe either - the belief that came from forcing yourself to believe - or as it's otherwise known - a pep talk. If it's a pep talk, then it's bullshit. When you only understand something, you are still basically blind. As necessary as understanding is - and yes, it is very important - I'm afraid it's only but a stepping stone in the development of what is needed to succeed.

To truly believe is to know. When you believe, things become second nature. This guide is basically the blueprint on how I turned the concept of an intelligently well-placed minimum into second nature.

All the things I have mentioned, and will mention in this guide, come from my own experience. They come from true and tested trial and error. Some of the things I will write about might seem unnecessary or redundant, but you have to think of it like an appliance warning. For example, the operating manual of a blender might say, "Please don't put your fingers in the operating blender." It seems silly to have to mention that to a grown adult, but you know somewhere, someone did it, and now the company has to warn you. Well, trial and error also includes some stupidity. I have made some humdingers in the field of stupidity, but hopefully I can write this guide without having to show you all of my stupidity trophies in the field of music (or life, for that matter). As with all things art, the process never stops and the errors just keep falling, like pure white beautiful snow. Time to make snow angels.

out of 10 it is the jury who will show you the door. If you believe yourself to be a god of your instrument, prepare yourself to be exorcised.

Taking an audition has almost nothing to do with performing for an audience - the two beasts are at seemingly opposite poles from one another. In one, you are experienced by the listener - in the other, you are judged by the listener. Although there are some elements of each other on both sides, the distance remains great from one another. If you want to start doing well at auditions, you must learn one concept. This is the one concept that trumps all others. I decided it should mention it first because without it you will never be able to fully execute the rest of this guide. The king of all audition rules is that you must always re-produce. And I don't mean in the sense of "hey baby, we are the only two people left in the planet, so let's get it on". I mean you must re-create, you must copy, you must re-produce an already finished product. A very finished, etched in stone product. It must be a never changing product. It is re-production in the same sense that cloning or a photocopy is reproduction. No two performances are exactly the same because we allow the moment of the live performance to further inspire us. And, because we are never the same from one moment to another, then no two performances are the same. In contrast, each excerpt should sound identical to itself, every time it is played. Who you were in the practice room, and how you play in the practice room should be identical to whom you are when taking an audition and how you play when taking an audition.

I realize of course, that this opens up a small can of worms. Let's say you have a big concerto to prepare, for a very important performance. Well, I guess you better start practicing. But why are you practicing? What is the end goal of your practice? Is it a performance or an audition?

There is a learning part to practicing. You learn your part and teach your muscles how to do it. The more efficiently you practice, and the more dedicated you are, the quicker you learn and the more consistent you become with the piece. So, let's say now you "know" the piece and are ready to play it at a performance level. Great! You are now ready to bore the fleas of a dog. In the old days you didn't become a great swordsman to cut lettuce, you did it to win a fight - to

stay alive. When you play a piece of music you don't do it for the sake of only playing the notes. There are things you want to express.

There are things the composer wants to express. You have ideas, concepts, a thirst to show others what you are, who you are, what you are all about. If you don't practice and have a solid foundation, then all that stuff has nowhere to go. It's like reciting Shakespeare with a mouth full of crackers. When your muscles are not consistent, when they are like lightning and never strike the same place twice, your message gets buried amid the flurry of crumbs. But this is where we must part ways.

You see, both performance and audition start the same way. But when you practice for a performance, you are practicing so that at the end of it all, you have a strong foundation to deliver your musical message. You are essentially creating and sharing your opinion. Sometimes you have to shift gears between concentrating on your muscles (what you are physically doing) and the meaning of what you are trying to say - but in the end, it's all about the message. It's all about the "what", and the "why" of what you, and the composer, are trying to say through music.

When you prepare for an audition, all semblances of any messages must disappear. You are not practicing to have your inner voice heard. You are practicing for how you will be heard. You are practicing to match the preconceived way or idea the jury has about the piece you are playing. One more time, and with feeling this time.

You are practicing to match the preconceived way or idea the jury has about the piece you are playing. Leaving that artistic part of you behind, - the part that made you become a musician, the part you received from the musicians you heard while growing up, that free and beautiful flow of emotions, ideas, concepts, the thing that makes you close your eyes and instinctively look up because nothing you see could come close to the vast beautiful darkness behind your eyes - that is the hardest thing about taking an audition. You must strip yourself of all this and become an engineer. In an effort to offer further clarity, let me put it to you this way. Both the solo performer and audition candidate require a hefty amount of engineering in their practice. They both require a truly scientific approach to getting the notes and raising the

level of consistency. The difference is that for the solo performer it is all about what happens after the engineering. For the audition candidate, it is truly all about who is the best engineer. It's all about the engineering.

As we all know this might not necessarily be an absolute. There are soloists out there that are all about the engineering. They have made impressive careers out of just playing the notes. But the reality is that you always remember the performances that moved you, and not the ones that were measured with protractors. In turn, there are auditions here and there that are won by a soloist approach. But the greatest majority, are not. Let it be known, that this is coming from a guy who won his first job by playing like a soloist. I can only say that I truly lucked out. I have also learned a lot since my first audition. In my opinion, your chances of winning an audition are exponentially larger if you become a better engineer. Words like, passion, fulfillment, love, gravity, abundance, joy, melancholy, yearning etc. must all but disappear. Your new words are intonation, clarity, rhythm, vibrato, staccato, détaché, shift, tip, middle, frog, pattern, control, breathe, etc. Your aim is to be as solid as steel and consistent as an atomic clock – that's it. Stop thinking of yourself as a musician – believe it or not, the music also gets engineered.

I must admit that even writing these words makes me a little nauseous. All I want to do right now is stop writing. But this is how it is. Until a new system is in place, this is what you must do. The engineering is almost to the point of obsessiveness. How you approach every note, what you do once you get there, how you leave every note and how you get from one note to the other must all be put under a microscope and perfected to a molecular level. I have spent days on one bar. Not because I'm dense or can't play it, but because going from knowing something, to second nature, takes time. Because practicing something so that you play it the exact same way every time, with almost no variance in its execution, is not something that happens in five minutes. If you can get from one note to the next the same way every time, and under all the parameters that constitute good playing, only then are you ready to move on to the next note. Your focus should be such that you resemble a true Buddhist monk. There is one thing though, one concept I was

taught as a performer that does apply to auditions. The performance (or in this case, also the audition) does not begin with the first note.

Side Note: A word of caution for taking an audition for a principal solo spot. Make sure that you pay close attention to the engineering of the music. There are tutti excerpts and there are solo excerpts. When playing a solo excerpt one needs to make sure that there is a clear musical idea being presented. However, by no means should you suddenly ignore all the engineering rules just because the excerpt more closely resembles what one would expect from a solo performer ; all the engineering rules still apply. But, you need to make sure that you have a hefty amount of music incorporated into the fabric of your engineering. In contrast to a tutti excerpt where you want to be judged mostly by your craft and not necessarily your musicianship – when you play a solo excerpt, you will be judged on your craft and musicianship. One should approach the solo excerpt the same way you approach your audition solo piece.

CHAPTER 2

Think of the most wonderful moment in let's say a Brahms or Beethoven symphony. Some of us have had the good fortune of playing all those moments several times. But just in case you haven't, go get the recording. Find any recording that contains that favorite moment. Now fast-forward to a few seconds before the moment and listen to it. You immediately recognize the beauty and significance of the moment, not only from a theoretical approach, but also from how it made you feel. The reaction is instant. Remember that!

Remember how you were instantly transported into a place of musical bliss. Now play the recording from the beginning of the movement and just sit there and wait until the moment comes. Enjoy how it all works its way to the great moment you have chosen. When you do it that way, the great moment feels natural - it makes sense. It is just as beautiful, but different somehow. You are much more prepared to receive that moment, and because of it, you simply accept it for what it is. The moment becomes part of the natural process of things. You can receive the beauty of the moment both when you fast-forward to the moment and when you wait for it. But when you wait for the moment you also have a better understanding of it. Now we must take this analogy and turn it around.

Both performing for an audience and taking an audition start the same way. They both start weeks or months before you play the first note of the event. One of the major reasons for mentally preparing yourself so early on, is that you cannot allow yourself to become aware of performing or auditioning at the same time that you are doing it. Just like listening to the beautiful moment in our experiment a few seconds before it begins - just like the beauty of the moment hits you instantly, so can panic. Nobody feels bad when you get hit with instant beauty because it is such a wonderful experience. I'm not sure you can say the same about panic.

If you have to jump away because there is a chandelier that is about to come crashing down on you, you react instantly. After the moment is over you can still feel the rush of adrenaline coursing through your veins.

But if I told you that in two weeks the chandelier is going to fall, things are different. You would make sure everyone is out safely from the area of impact, and perhaps sell a few last minute tickets to the event. Your stress level is so low, that an event that is otherwise terrifying becomes like a sideshow. One cannot afford to think of performing or taking an audition in any other way. In the same way that you practice every day to become a master engineer for your audition, you must also visualize your part in the event. If you know the chandelier is going to fall, why would you put yourself in a situation of waiting for the last moment to jump away? Even if you are someone who takes a beta-blocker, your sense of inner balance or inner poise, will be affected by the lack of visualization.

You cannot afford to find yourself on stage and start thinking things like "oh my God what am I doing here" - "What the hell was I thinking that made me think I could actually pull this off" - "I can't believe I'm doing this." So remember, panic and fear can be just as immediate as beauty and joy. Just like listening to the beautiful moment from the beginning of the movement - when you mentally prepare for the pressure of the audition, you can diffuse an otherwise tense situation. Believe me, beauty and joy are not two words that I would use to describe auditions. But when you diffuse that tension, you essentially make the audition process feel more like a natural process or a natural arrival.

Even the most seasoned audition candidate will feel the stress of the moment. How much or how little depends on the work you did months ago. I realize that you have laundry to do or maybe children to cart off to play dates, but the moment must always be with you as you decide that you will be taking an audition. Your brain must split and become like a picture in picture TV set. Part of your mind must be with the events of your everyday life. This part keeps changing, because most of us are always on the go. But the part you have sectioned off for your visualization must always stay on, and on the same channel. You must have an intelligent conversation with your child's third-grade teacher, think of obscenities you wish you could scream at telemarketers who call you during dinner, and perhaps enjoy a glass of wine, all while visualizing yourself at the audi-

tion. Most importantly, recognizing how the thought of the audition makes you feel, and then imagining how you will feel or how you want to feel.

It's not an easy thing to strip oneself of music and morph into an engineer. I realize that scientists are actually very passionate people about what they do, but science itself - the concept of it - is emotionless. It is that aspect of it you must visualize, and embrace as your new truth. It feels like sacrilege to say it, but you must remove care from the equation. You must visualize how you will feel and be, while you re-produce what you practiced. By the time you get to the audition your state of mind should feel mundane to you. Being there should not come as a shock to you. Your heart and mind are saying, "this place hasn't changed a bit" even though you've never been there before.

I once heard from one of my teachers that it takes an average of about twenty-eight auditions to win a job. Although this is an average and does not necessarily apply to everyone, it is still a scary thought. If you want to do well at auditions, you have to learn how to keep things mundane while being focused. I know people that have been forced into a state of perfect mundaneness because they have taken so many auditions. They didn't start off that way, but after so many auditions they knew exactly what to expect when the next one came around. The whole situation became boring to them. I should mention that these individuals are actually very good players and have since won very prestigious positions. One of my friends got so good at auditioning, that he would hang out at the hotel pool a couple of hours before he played, shower, get to the audition, practice for half an hour and then walk on stage. I am trying to save you a lot of money and heartache by getting you to a state of mundaneness right off the bat. The only way to get there, without taking 20 or 30 auditions, is through disciplined, focused visualization.

Taking an audition is easy. It is you who makes it hard. When you try to find meaning in a process that is opposite to the reason of why you are a musician, you make it hard. The jury is looking for the best machine. Yes, yes, we all understand that eventually you will be expected to be what one would consider an artist - a musician. But they have to know you have a solid machine base. Art is very subjective, but machines

behave the same way all the time. Again, - yes, your art will be judged, you will be expected to move the audience, expected to do all the things you think of when you think of performing - but they need to know that there is solid engineering to back it up. No amount of heart and charisma will make the race driver win if he has a sub par car.

One more thing - I discussed how performing in public and taking an audition both start in the same place, and for the most part, as far as visualization goes, they go hand in hand. But, we need to go back to the symphony analogy. There was the "instant" and the "natural arrival" example. One of the hardest things to do in an audition comes from the separation of these concepts. When you perform a solo for an audience, the event itself is the culmination of the natural process.

But here's the thing, - so is the piece you are playing. You see, the piece you will perform, in itself, has a natural process of its own. The piece has a natural shape of its own. In other words, not only should the approach months before the event mimic the natural arrival process, but then the piece you are playing also does that. It's like running towards your goal and then hitting a wall of foam. You don't really hit, you comfortably slow down. It is a natural arrival within a natural arrival.

This is not the case with auditions. It is imperative that you recognize the irony, or paradox, or catch-22 of the audition expectation. The process of getting you there should feel like a natural arrival, but you are required to play an instant moment. This moment might not be a climax per se, but by sectioning it, by pulling it out of its natural place within the piece, you have turned it into an instant moment. But in order to play that instant moment very well, you must have the knowledge of its natural place within the piece and convince the jury that you are playing a natural arrival. The audition starts with "natural", only to play an "instant", that is supposed to sound like a "natural", which requires you to be "instant", and the only way to get there is to be "natural".

Sweet Alabama and a bucket of wings, is it any wonder people tend to do so horribly at auditions? In a typical audition you might hear about one hundred people. Usually that gets reduced to about three people to pick for the job. Trust me, there are a lot more than three

good players in those one hundred. Unfortunately, it is those three players who played by the engineering rules of the game. All the rest have some more music-shedding to do and more engineering to embrace.

So far we have covered the re-creation or re-production needed to do well at auditions. We also mentioned the shedding of your musicality and becoming a master engineer. But there are things around you that can confuse the issue. There is one more thing you need to shed – the world around you. Not only does your mind need to be a picture in picture TV set as you get ready for your audition, but once you are ready, you must separate yourself from your surroundings.

An audition might start months before the actual date – but the day or two spent getting to the audition, are just as important as the last two months of preparation. There is the “you” as you get ready, and then there is the “you” after you are ready. But what happens between being ready, and actually playing the audition, is just as important as the process that got you ready to begin with. You might be a great warrior, but if the road to the battlefield affected you or tired you out, then quite frankly, I would just hide behind a big rock. Being tired or unfocused makes you useless in the battlefield.

CHAPTER 3

The voyage to an audition is filled with distractions. Some of these distractions cannot only fatigue your mind, but also your body. In an average audition, from the beginning of preparation to the trip back home from the audition, I lose an average of five pounds. Keep in mind that during the usual two months it takes me, from beginning to end, I eat about one third more food than my average. I also stop any and all exercise for fear of how it will affect my body. All it takes is one push-up to many to “snap” something you were going to need for the audition. I must say, though, that’s just me. I know plenty of people that exercise until the very end. This kind of issue is a personal call. I’m the kind of person that really gets into the exercise. I can’t seem to find the happy medium between slight perspiration and dropping down in a pool of sweat while breathing like Darth Vader with asthma. So, to all of you who exercise and go for broke while doing it, perhaps a walk in the park is more suited during audition time. But I digress.

As I said, I actually eat more during the audition training time and I stop exercising. This is because I have entered into a state of absolute focus. It takes a lot of energy to stay focused 24/7. You spend a great deal of time practicing, but the focus also puts a lot of stress on your body. When your body is under stress, it burns through more calories. I can’t tell you how many people I have seen in tears (or at least holding back tears) after they have been told that they either are not moving on to the next round, or that they have won. In a matter of seconds your body releases all that stress and energy you have been storing up. Your body and mind purge themselves as if it were a bad case of salmonella. It’s not particularly healthy to carry all that stress, and your body and mind know it.

This leads me to two points that I need to mention. The first, is that you have to tune out the world around you the closer you get to the audition. The second, is that you have to acknowledge the stress. Let’s begin with tuning out the world. So you have been practicing, but the time has come to figure out how to get to the audition. You have to

invariably do some of these things: book a flight, book a hotel, rent a car, call your buddy to see if you can stay with him or her, plan out your drive there and back, pack, make sure you have supplies for your instrument, get money for a taxi, figure out how to get to the hall or wherever the audition might be - if you have dietary needs, what to eat and where to eat - if you take a late flight, are things going to be open? The list is long and tedious. The things I mention are not only examples of the list, but they are just the very tip of the iceberg. I have taken trips to auditions where the logistics were such that they truly rivaled the two months of preparation spent learning the repertoire. In an effort to balance being rested with being as careful as possible with expenses, I, along with many out there, have been put through the ringer.

But all of that is just the list of things to do. There is also a list of things you will experience during the trip. New sounds, sights, faces, smells, the weather, etc. Nothing about the trip is going to feel familiar. You spend most of the time during the practice portion of this “audition odyssey” surrounded by somewhat familiar things. Even your practice routine can become familiar. If you tend to practice in only one place, you get very used to that particular acoustic or sound. All your muscle memory is being shaped by the acoustics of your practice area. Between leaving your home for the audition, to the time you are playing your audition, you will probably experience playing in about 3 or 4 different acoustics. This is also one of the reasons you need to always re-produce. It also doesn’t hurt to practice in different places or different rooms of your house or apartment.

By changing the acoustics and surroundings of your practice area, you learn to hone in your re-production skills. There are orchestras that put everyone in a single large room to warm up. Some will then move you to a practice room, and then some time later, to yet another room that is closer to the audition room. Then finally you get to go into the audition room, or in most cases, the hall itself. Other orchestras just make you wait until about thirty minutes or so before you play before they even assign you a practice room. Some give you a room for an hour but then lead you to the audition only to wait in silence for ten or fifteen min-

utes before you play. I was once put in a room so small to warm up, that I could only bow in one direction, otherwise I would stab the wall with my bow. Is warming up in a glorified closet (who am I kidding – glorified box is more like it) your idea of something you would do to yourself before taking an audition? If you can get affected by playing in different acoustics, you will lose. You need that muscle memory to pull you through. I will talk more about this in the next chapter. You need that focus and obsessive stubbornness to keep you from doing anything else other than what you practiced. Even if the audition is in your hometown, because your entire being is more heightened, you will feel like you are in a new place.

When you prepare for an audition, you are not only practicing your excerpts, but you are also building a wall around you. You are building your own cocoon. For some of you, this journey could turn out to be like a house of cards. All that time of preparation, and all it takes is one card to fall. This is why the cocoon is so important. If you still have doubts about what I'm talking about, let me use an example that has happened to us all.

When you first start playing for people in a concert situation (most of us were very young then), you are very susceptible to nerves. There you are, playing away, when suddenly you miss a note or something happens that turns a beautiful moment into a crunchy one. Through experience you learn to dismiss the moment and move on with the performance. But when you are starting out, it could take you what seems like an eternity to get over it. As a result, the rest of your performance suffers for it. Because most people are not experienced in the field of taking auditions, they fall under the same category as the beginner when it comes to the psychology of the thing. You not only have to have the muscle memory, but you must also have the stability of mind behind the muscle memory.

This is why it's so important to tune out the world. Tuning out the world helps you with the stability of your mind and focus. When you are in those practice rooms at the audition for example, you can hear other people playing. You can hear all the other ideas about how the excerpt should be played. You can hear others playing their respective concertos and you start sizing them up. You start to compare yourself with them. You start to second-guess what you have done. And this is also why it is

so very important to realize, that just because you hear someone who you tag as being better than you, it doesn't mean that they will be able to play that way when their moment comes. Good muscles without mind stability tends to create very insecure people both in the physical as well as the emotional level. Many people can get easily intimidated by the illusion or prospect that someone else could be better than they are. Even if it's not true, the damage is done. Again, you must tune out the world around you.

That is why when you go to an audition you should not speak to anyone. If someone approaches you, yes, of course, be polite - but keep it short. Try not to get involved in a conversation. Do not hang around in the group. If there is a chance you can be in complete isolation, take it! Of course you sort of have to keep an eye out for any announcements and such, but your goal is to not see, talk or hear anything that is not directly related to your audition process. You are looking for zero distractions. Also, although 99.9% of the people I happen to meet at auditions are good and decent human beings, I personally know people who will try to get you involved through conversation or through playing, in an attempt to distract, intimidate, or tire you out. You can't count on other people's moral standards when there is a competition - when there is winning at stake.

And again, I don't care if you just saw an image of Pavarotti wearing nothing but a cheese hat and a banana hammock all the while covered in honey and dancing a tango atop the Himalayas with a mountain goat in a prom dress - you must tune out the world around you. You must do it all throughout the trip. When you are sitting at the gate in the airport and that baby won't stop screaming (even though I've been there many a time with my own kid). When you have to go to the men's bathroom and you have to lug your instrument and backpack in there and hope you have enough room at the urinal with all that stuff hanging from your shoulders - or God forbid having to put your instrument on the men's bathroom floor. Going through security and having to wait for the guy who didn't take off his shoes or belt and is sur-

prised when he has to take them off because he has not turned on a freaking TV for the past 20 years (for the love of God – MOVE IT!).

When you finally get to the hotel room and it seems as though the Bates Motel would have been a better choice, but this is all you could afford. When the taxi driver's body odor makes you wish you could shove a deodorant stick up your nose to drown out the stench. When every fiber of your being is saying, "I just want to go back home"—you must regroup and tune out the world. You might not realize it, but little by little your focus is being erased. Before you know it, you are standing there looking at the stage door and trying to grasp your focus back – but it's gone, and why? – because you didn't tune out the world on your way to the audition - and/or - you did not have a focused visualization of your state of mind at the audition.

As I mentioned before, there were two points. One was tuning out the world and the other accepting the pressure. I put them together because there are very similar, but they are approached differently. One can almost say, that accepting the pressure leads to being able to tune out the world. You accept the pressure and stress, in order to tune it out. You see, stress is one of those funny things that goes against your instinct on how to fix it. Most of us instinctively try to fight it. If you try to fight it, you only reinforce the fact that you are stressed. But by opening to it, by embracing the monster, you then diminish its effect. Now, don't get me wrong – the stress is still there – but it's only as big as it really is and a lot more under your control. By recognizing the stress instead of fighting it, you keep yourself from exaggerating the situation. In order not to be stressed at all you would need to completely remove yourself from the situation – but you cannot do that. You really do have to stand there on the stage if you want the job. The audition fairy is not going to call you and just give you the job just because you want it. You have to fight for it, but if you concentrate your efforts where it really counts and don't add wood to the fire that is stress, your chance of success grows exponentially.

Stress is like someone else's five year old. Let's say a five year old comes to you and says something inappropriate to you. He or she might say something like "you are ugly" or something like that. If an

adult tells you that you are ugly, there is a chance you might tell them where to go. When a five year old insults you, you just diffuse the comment and let it go. Allowing the stress of an audition get the better of you is like letting the five year old get under your skin. Auditions come with a bag of stress. How much it affects you depends on how much you let it affect you. In other words, how much you let the five year old affect you is entirely up to you, the five year old is just being what a five year old is – what are you going to be?

The realization of how I should approach stress came to me during an orchestra rehearsal a long time ago. Although nowadays I think of stress management more as the five year old analogy, I'll share the other. I have been playing in professional orchestras since I was ten years old, so believe you me, I have seen my share of bad conductors. There are always those conductors that have nothing to say but to state the obvious. They get up there on the podium and they don't listen to what is happening right in front of them. They have no inner sense of music. They stop the orchestra just to say that there is a forte in bar 41." Yes, I know there is a forte in bar 41, that's why I played forte. What else do you have? Thank you for stating the obvious. Please, oh please, tell me there is more to you than a glorified Excel presentation". They have nothing to add to the fabric of music. And they do this all throughout the rehearsals. In the beginning you just want to take the baton, break it in half and scream at the top of your lungs "go back to music school, you !@#\$\$%^& dumbass!!!!".

One starts to get truly angry and stressed out at the display of mediocrity and waste of time that is before you. Then, your mind starts to become numb, and do you know what happens? – It's a thing of beauty – you start to tune them out. You just sit there and start thinking about your grocery list, all the while also thinking that you hope that guy in the first violins gets a grip, because there is no way that comb-over is not going to attract a flock of seagulls. When the conductor becomes obvious and predictable the orchestra musicians tune him or her out. Like stress in an audition – it's par for the course – it's obvious and predictable – it's something you just have to put up with - so just tune it out. Don't try to fix or find meaning in something that has

none. But remember, you must admit that the stress is there. You have to recognize it for what it is. Then and only then do you apply the analogy of the five year old. If you try to ignore the impending stress, you leave yourself open to have an instant panic attack when you least expect it. “Un-prepared for” stress, as it relates to performing, can be a key ingredient in feeling nervous, but it is not the cause of it.

As far as I am concerned there are two reasons as to why you would get nervous. Number one, you believe yourself to be unworthy of doing what you are doing. (You basically think everyone else is better than you.) Number two, because you instinctively know that there are things that you can't control. (In this scenario you are assuming something is going to happen that will make people think less of your playing.) In both cases you have a basic fear of the unknown. Stress comes from a basic fear of what you know will happen: You will have to play You will be judged You will compete with others But nerves come from a basic fear of what you don't know will happen: How will I play? How will I be judged? How will I compare with others? One must make things “known” so that you might be less afraid, and by consequence, less nervous or stressed. That is the secret behind experience. Experience is nothing more than the lessening of the unknown by making it known. The more experience you have the more confident you are - not because you are any different now than before - but because you know more, hence there are less things that are unknown to you, hence you are less afraid. And, the more you remove fear from the equation, the more you perform to the best of your abilities. Fear is at the other end of knowing. Still, you have to recognize fear, accept fear, let it cover you, let it wrap its ugly self around you - only then does fear reveal its true face as it relates to your story. Only then can you start to defeat it and start gaining a positive experience.

Whether or not your particular abilities come together to form a package that appeals to a particular orchestra, is a different story. But, if you can't even deliver your best abilities, then no orchestra will want you. You need to know more to fear less. This is why it's so important to tune out the world at the audition. You have, for a while now, been creating a bubble of “known” around you, a bubble of “this is what I know and this is

how I do it”. You have in essence created a bubble of courage and confidence through your learning of the repertoire. You have made a temporary world of the “known” in order to survive and hone the best of your abilities at the audition. You have taken that slider and bumped it further away from fear and closer to knowing. But you see, this slider doesn't have any notches on it to make it stay on a certain point- it is smooth.

Worst yet, there is a spring that always wants to pull you back to the side of fear. The more you know, the more experienced you are, then the farther you can push the slider to the “know” side - but it is temporary. Granted, it gets easier with time if you do it right, but never forget - that spring that pulls back to fear is always there and fully operational. When you allow distractions into your audition world, it's like playing with a real bubble sooner or later it will pop. Keep your concentration and protect the bubble at all costs.

Side note: There is something I do that helps me fight fear. I mentioned the two reasons why one can get nervous, and how they both stem from fear. I also mentioned how you have to admit to yourself and recognize what is happening in order to fight stress. I take it a step further. If I ever find myself in a state of fear, I say it out loud. I let myself actually hear the words of what I am feeling. When I speak the words “I am afraid”, I immediately feel a weight come off my shoulders. It's as if I have reached bottom and there is only way to go, which is up. Almost instinctively I start to fight and empower myself out of the hole. Oddly enough, this only truly happens when I actually say the words. There have been some instances where I have forgotten to say the words.

Although I have admitted to myself that I'm afraid and I am on a path to recovery, I am always surprised at how much faster the process to becoming fearless is, when I actually speak the words. I realize this is a personal technique that might not work for some. If my technique does not work for you, then you need to start looking for something that does work. Even if you can't seem to come up with something, the journey alone can make a difference.

CHAPTER 4

There is a phenomenon that happens to many of us. You can find it not only with performers, but athletes as well. Actually, you can find it in any field that involves the control of your body to achieve your goal. In some ways it is also found in the psychological world, and it can affect many people's perception of the world around them and their place in that world. Until I decided to get serious about my craft, I was unaware that this cancer existed. When I realized the existence of it, my world changed. I started to see things for what they really were and not by what I thought they were. It was one of the biggest aha moments of my life. I was also curious that it was never mentioned to me. I figured something that big would be lesson number one, but alas, it seems I had to come upon it on my own. I know that previously I gave you the number one rule never to do in an audition - produce. Well, this next topic is equally important when it comes to the craft of playing. It goes hand in hand with the concept of re-production, but it explains the dark side of it.

As you know, you spend a lot of time practicing for an audition. Actually, although we are concentrating on the audition side of things, this concept applies to almost all areas of our playing. From auditions to solo performers, it covers the gamut. You learn something so you can re-produce it as best you can. You brand your muscles with the memory of what you have learned. Through repetition and practice you acquire what's referred to as muscle memory. The better your muscles remember, the greater your chances of reproducing exactly what you want. But you see, there can be a big disconnect between your muscle memory and controlling that memory. The one thing nobody tells you is that muscle memory is a double edge sword. I will now try to explain what I refer to as unconscious sabotage. This is one of the least talked about subjects and one of the most important ones out

there. I will go slowly and try to be as clear as I can. If for some reason you don't understand it, please hesitate to call me - just kidding.

Let's suppose you get a list of repertoire to prepare that is unknown to you. Although unconscious sabotage is best seen when you have to learn something without the aid of a guide, such as a recording or teacher, we will pretend that you get a recording. So there you are, you have the unknown music on your stand, and you have familiarized yourself with how it goes via a recording. You pick up your instrument and have a go at it. Little by little, note by note, you start to get a better feel for what's in store for you. You start to practice and get progressively better. Depending on your skills this can happen quickly or take forever, but unconscious sabotage happens to both groups of people. You feel good about yourself because you are doing things the way life has taught you how you should do it. Step-by-step, push by push, day by day, you work steadily to achieve your goal. Your guard is down because you feel... - no - because you know you are on the right path. Your conscience is clean, but your subconscious is hard at work and very dirty.

If you are a normal human being, I would assume that your goal is to be able to play whatever passage you were practicing so that it feels easy, or like second nature.

You are in essence "working-the-hard-out" of the passage so that you can feel confident when you play it. You want it to feel as if though it is the most natural and easiest thing to play. You don't want to be in a position of sweating it out, or being at all paranoid and concerned about your execution when it's time to play the passage. Right? Now let's go back to the music on the stand right before you start practicing it for the first time. As you start to practice, you slowly teach your muscles the memory they will need later. What people don't realize is that you are also branding, imprinting, searing into your muscles the memory of your opinion of the passage. During the first few hours you unconsciously label the passage with a level of hardness or easiness. You unconsciously say to yourself something like "this feels like an 8 out of 10" were 10 is the hardest and 0 is your body at rest. How you practice (muscles) and what you tell yourself, or think, while you practice (mind), are equally important. People have this

concept that regardless of what you think, if you teach your muscles what to do, your mind will follow. They think that through the conquering of the body you also conquer the mind. WRONG!!!! So you say that a particular passage feels like an 8 out of 10. Well, I guess you should start practicing. And you practice and practice and practice (and you still don't get to Carnegie Hall). But here's the problem, you never reassessed the hardness level. The last thing you told yourself was that it was an 8 out of 10 hard, and through your unconscious, your body makes sure that it always stays that way. And you practice and practice and practice to the point where you can play it. But just because you can play it, does not mean that you are comfortable playing it – or feel secure playing it – or know it's going to be there every time you play it. As I mentioned before, just because you can play it does not mean you have control over it. You can play it but you still view it as hard. I don't know about you, but I don't find much comfort in that. The last thing you told yourself was 8 out of 10 hard! The more you practice, the more you etch in stone that number. You are now in what I call a sabotage level of 8. Every passage has a number, and depending on who you are, that number also changes, but the number is always there.

Even if you intuitively recognize the fact that it's no longer an 8, since you never truly reassessed the hardness level, you still perceive it as 8. I used to call this the X factor because every passage had a number attached to it and you filled in the X value with your own personal number. But the name was too generic. What is truly happening is unconscious sabotage. I guess now it's called an S value.

So let's say it took you two weeks to be able to play what you thought was a very hard passage. It could have taken you far less, but it took you 2 weeks and what's worse the S value will continue to haunt you through the rest of your life until you become aware of it and consciously reassess that value. Your muscles (and yes, just for clarity, I will separate it from the mind for now) were able to play it perhaps even two or three days after you started practicing. But, because you gave it an S value of 8, it took you 2 weeks, and it will forever feel like S8. The reason it will always feel like S8 is because your mind will make sure that it does what it has to, so as to make it feel S8. I will write that

again - your mind will make sure that it does what it has to, so as to make it feel S8. This is the basic concept of unconscious sabotage.

The type of sabotage can be a whole number of things. It can be as many things as you can imagine. Perhaps you will start playing the passage slightly faster than before, you will press more, for no reason you will start to feel sick, you will get unfocused, – the list of things your mind can come up with is truly endless. Not only can you come up with an endless array of stumbling blocks, but you will also make yourself believe it. But it's all unconscious, and because of that you don't recognize that it is you sabotaging yourself.

If you start playing something or preparing for an audition – even with excerpts you already know (or think you know) – and some time later (it could be a day or three weeks) you start to sound bad, and your muscles are not doing what they are supposed to do, and you feel like you're either stuck or going backwards from where you were a week ago – you are in the midst of an episode of unconscious sabotage!!!! Oddly enough the same thing can happen in reverse. You don't play for a while (days, weeks) – let's say you go on a week vacation without your instrument. You come back, pick up your instrument and start playing. At first it sounds really good. You might even comment on how good you feel while playing, even though, it has been a week since you touched your instrument. Little by little you start playing things over and over because you really like how good it feels – and better yet – how good you sound. You want to make sure it's not an accident. So you keep playing. But the more you play the worst it gets. Little by little that joy starts to go away. So you keep playing and playing and playing not really understanding what's happening, always hoping to go back to how it felt at the beginning.

But it's gone. The whole neurotic cycle starts again, and you start doubting yourself, and you tell yourself that it really was an accident and that you have to keep practicing because you are not there yet. And before you know it you are back to associat-

ing S values, and your body starts adjusting itself to always feeling the numbers you associated to the passages you are playing.

It can almost be said that unconscious sabotage is like an unattainable drug high for a drug addict. A drug addict will keep taking more and more drugs to try to reach a preconceived notion of what a high is supposed to feel like. In most cases they are trying to feel like the first time they took the drug. Similarly, you will sabotage yourself so that a passage will always feel the way you think it should feel – the way you told yourself it should feel. The only problem is that if you gave a passage a high S value you will not be happy unless it always feels at that S value. The sad part is that if you are an accomplished musician, an expert let's say, it doesn't take long for a passage to feel like an S value of one or two. But in order to get there you have to be aware, and sadly most people are clueless to the problem. But if you are aware of what's happening you can start your journey towards how easy and good it felt when you played for the first time after not playing for a while. Back when you took a vacation from yourself. Back when for a split second you were playing without realizing that what you were playing was supposed to be hard.

I remember when I first delved into fixing and re-assessing my S values. Once I understood what I was doing, it was very easy to fix. The hardest part was actually believing it was so easy to fix, and now, so easy to play! Imagine! Something feeling easy was okay. It felt strange having things be so easy. It was one of those “no, really, are you kidding me – that's all I have to do” moments I'll never forget. Now to be clear, when I said those words to myself, I was referring to the actual playing. I was referring to what my fingers were doing – to what my body was doing. I shed so much unwanted and unnecessary crap, that playing my instrument felt like child's play. I finally and truly understood the phrase I introduced earlier – the greatest maximum is a well-placed minimum. Instead of getting a big wrecking ball to bring down a stone wall, just stop and think for a minute, and locate and remove the one stone that will bring down the whole wall. How we approach our instrument, should be no different. Instead of blindly practicing hoping that pure repetition will make you learn it, find the source of the problem

and deal with that – and only that. It is the same concept as finding a good fingering or bowing. Finding the right shift or fingering can set you up for an entire passage. Without the right fingering, you would simply work unnecessarily harder. Because of that one fingering (single stone) you were able to more easily execute the passage (stone wall). Unconscious sabotage is the same concept, but as it relates to your psychological approach to the passage and how it relates to what your muscles are doing. That is why after you fix something, you have to reassess the S value. Every practice session has to have the fixing of the problem and the reassessment of the S value. If you do this, then the rest just falls into place. It seems silly to have to say this, doesn't it – but if you suffer from any of the symptoms of unconscious sabotage, well then, you are not doing that – are you? Again, just because you know something, doesn't mean you are doing it – or will do it. So, how do you fix unconscious sabotage? – use a goddamn metronome!!!! – at least for starters.

You see, you are not a machine – but your body operates like one. This includes the muscles you use to play your instrument. Although your muscles and your mind are truly one and the same, when it comes to playing your instrument, they are two separate things – at least when you try to control them. I know, I know, how can something be the same yet two different things – yeah, yeah a paradox – get over it. When you are operating at maximum efficiency, muscle and mind are one and the same, but each requires a different approach for controlling. Think of it this way. The human body is a bunch of separate systems operating together. But, when you see someone, you only see the one – the single entity. The body is just the sum of its parts, but we don't see ourselves that way – we see ourselves as being more than the sum of our parts. Nevertheless, you still have parts and you have to take care of them. The one and the many are all one and the same.

The metronome concentrates solely on the parts. Yes, using a metronome is highly annoying, but that's just the “I am more than the sum of my parts” talking. It's the part of you that doesn't want to admit that your humanity has moving parts – just like a machine. The metronome can be the difference between having a career in music and wanting a

career in music. If there is one thing that can keep those S values down, is the metronome. “ Oh, but the metronome will suck the music right out of me” - if that’s true, then there was nothing there to begin with, so do art, and all of us a favor, and become something else. When you take an audition, that is exactly what you want - you want to suck the music out of you (by now I thought it would get easier to write that, but it doesn’t). I will grant you that when I use a metronome for preparing a live performance, I use it for both its purposes. I use it to keep me accurate and consistent, but at the same time to see how much I can get away with - to see how far I can “bend” the rules. But when used for an audition, it has to be used for one purpose - keep you accurate and consistent. By always maintaining the same level of accurateness and consistency you invariably start to pull down those S value numbers. When you use a metronome, the more you practice the easier it gets - and it stays that way! Even at the final round of an audition, you can hear the click of the metronome coming from my warm-up room. If I were to give a percentage value to how much you would improve by using a metronome, I would have to give it about a 90% for most people I hear at an audition. In other words, if you gave something an S value of about 8, it would now feel like more or less S1. Unless you are a masochist, that should be a welcomed goal (being a musician, though, I will understand if you need to beat yourself to make up for the difference). The other thing that is just as important as the metronome is playing for people.

You must practice what you practiced. Again, just because you know something does not mean that you will be able to do it when the time comes. Playing for people is an integral part of your practice routine. Although I strongly recommend that you take advantage of our modern world and regularly record yourself, I find that playing for people is better yet. When you record yourself, as good a tool as it is and as much as I highly recommend it, you still only get your own opinion. Now, some things might be clear and self evident as to what needs to be fixed, but because it’s you judging yourself, it can also be bias. When you play for people, you not only get a different point of view, but it mimics the real situation you will be doing later. Also,

things can go the other way. When you record yourself, as good a tool as it is and as much as I highly recommend it - blah, blah - one can get to a point of being overly critical, and that can, and probably will, freeze you. You essentially become a victim of your own psychosis.

CHAPTER 5

There are three things that I live by when I am on stage taking an audition. There are so many things that one has to think about during the audition that it becomes very hard to know what exactly you should be thinking of. Every day is different, who you are changes all the time, every hall is different, every jury etc. But no matter what, I find that if I stick to these three things, everything else seems to fall into place. Mind you though, only if you have done your homework – provided you have done all the things I have talked about in this guide so far. It is possible that you might need to tweak things, but these three things are what do it for me. They keep me in line. These are the things I think about and make myself conscious of when I am literally standing there seconds away from making the first sound.

Most of the time there is a curtain that separates you from the jury. There is also a stand for your music, and a representative of the orchestra who will show you anything you need to know concerning changes. Or, if you need to respond to the jury in case they ask you a question, he or she is there to relay the message. In some cases there might also be a long carpet runner from the stage entrance to the stand so the jury can't tell if you're a man or woman based on the sound of your shoes. So, the first thing I make sure to do - is to never predict how I will play. Although you have infused your muscles with the memory they will need to be consistent - every moment is different. You should not assume anything about your playing. Take every moment as it comes, as is, and not as you want it to be. Don't confuse being prepared with automatic success. Being more prepared does not always equate to a better performance. You don't prepare for the straight pitch, that's easy - you prepare for the curveball. It's just like wedding vows. You don't take the vows for the good times -everybody has a suc-

cessful marriage during the good times. You take the vows for the bad times. You prepare because you don't know what is going to happen.

When you predict, you hand over your control. When something unexpected happens that goes contrary to your prediction of the event, the journey back to reality, and being able to fix the situation, is a much longer journey than if you had just been in the present and taken the moment without any predictions of what you thought the moment would be. Most of the time, when you predict, the journey back is too long for you to have time to fix it if something happens. Not only that, but in a split second you create a sense of panic that in many cases is very hard to overcome. Your audition just finished - you just lost. When you don't know what's coming at you, your mind is much more malleable and open to different avenues of counterattack. When you predict, you are essentially on train tracks -unable to budge or go, but in one direction. At an audition, the phrase "go with the flow" is always more powerful than "visualize success". I remind you again, this is only true if you did your homework and truly prepared yourself.

Believe it or not, when it comes to prediction, sometimes the opposite effect is more detrimental. I called the opposite effect a "backwards prediction". A backwards prediction is the realization that you are doing really well or doing very poorly. For the purposes of explanation, let's say you are doing really well. There you are playing away and you start to judge what you have done so far. "Wow, I nailed that"- "So far so good"- "Just keep it up" - "It felt a little fast, but I think I did ok" and so on and so forth. Unlike the first prediction I talked about (essentially a forward or future prediction), where you have one foot in the present and one in the future, a backward prediction has one foot in the present and one in the past. Sometimes a backward prediction is more detrimental because it will also launch you into a future prediction. You are doing really well, so you start to expect that you will continue to do really well. If you think you are doing well, it means that you are in the past, because you are judging what already happened. If you expect to do well, you are thinking about the future. Then if something happens you find yourself with one foot in the past, one foot in the future (and noth-

ing but a cool breeze between your legs - sorry, it had to be said). It was bad enough to have only one foot in the present, but now you are completely out of control. If something happens, the journey back to center is almost impossible in the time needed to get there. Leave time travel to the sci-fi channel and keep both feet in the present moment. Think of prediction, or backwards prediction, as the wick of a stick of dynamite. The moment you start doing it, it's only a matter of time before it blows up in your face. Call it a forward prediction or a backward prediction - it makes no difference, but because you are not in the present, dealing with things as they happen and letting them go when they have gone- good or bad - chances are you will fail. Only a very, very experienced player can sometimes get away with prediction. For the purposes of this guide, assume you suck and don't do it - I certainly don't.

The second thing I put in my pocket when I am standing there, is the perception of speed. Your mind can go faster than your perception of the fastest speed. No example in life better describes that, than a rush of adrenaline. How many times have you heard someone launch into an explanation of something that happened to them, but the explanation lasts half an hour when the actual moment of the event, as described by them, was a matter of a second or two. They say something along the lines of - "so there I was driving down the road, when all of a sudden this car - comes out of nowhere and crosses in front of me. I slammed on my brakes. I could see the whites of the other driver's eyes, and I think to myself - oh shit I hope my seatbelt works - and then I noticed there was a child in the other car and I was thankful he was sitting on the other side that I was going to hit. I was also thankful the kid had on his seatbelt. Both cars were squealing in order to avoid the accident - and for a moment I thought we might avoid the accident, but then...".

The amount of information that the person's brain was able to process in that 1 or 2 seconds was mind-boggling. The storyteller became hyper-aware of every detail of every moment. And

all those words and all that time the person spends explaining the incident to you, happened in the blink of an eye.

Now take all the number of thoughts the driver was having and place them all right before you play the next note. All those thoughts, all that fast energy, all that brain power is now concentrated in one action. You have but one thing to do - play that note. Your brain can accommodate that one action, plus fifty more thoughts about that one action - all in the same space of time. Normally, a lot of this brain activity is reserved for the "behind the scenes" part of your brain. The scary part is that when you are placed in a situation like taking an audition, all those thoughts come to the forefront of your mind and you become conscious of them. In most cases, if you were to record your audition and compare it to the speed you thought you were going, you would be amazed at the how much faster it was in reality. Your ability to control your perception of speed is essential. You need to consciously know, and be aware of, the difference between your perception of speed and your actual speed. Through experience, I have figured out that if I play something at an audition (or in a concert for that matter) and I feel like I am about two clicks too slow on the metronome - it's just about right. That is how much faster my perception of the event is, versus the speed I had chosen in the practice room. It wasn't always like that, but with experience I have reduced it to that difference. Obviously it varies from person to person, but this phenomenon happens to everyone. But if I don't perform for a while, the effect worsens, and I have to go back to that knowledge of speed perception. When I first started dealing with speed perception, I was embarrassed by how far from reality I was. I thought I was playing at a rather moderate tempo, when in fact I was giving a jet-plane a run for its money. Granted, I am sure there was a lot of S value involved there. Still, the difference was so great, that it took me a long time to believe it - even with hard evidence staring me in the face. Unfortunately, this is not something that is easy to prove to oneself because recording devices are not allowed in auditions. But if you play regularly for people, I would encourage

recording it - and most importantly remembering how fast or slow you thought you were going at the performance - so you can later compare.

The third thing I take with me on stage is the recognition of the curtain before me. For me the curtain has become very comforting. It gives me something at which to aim. It has become my bull's-eye. I always play for the curtain. As far as I'm concerned, the hall ends at the curtain - it is a wall with nothing behind it. If I aim my sound at the curtain and pretend it has no further to go, I assure myself that I am not pushing my sound. It helps me stay firmly in the "re-production" camp as opposed to the "production" pitfall. I walk out and immediately create a boundary for myself - a box. The curtain becomes not only one side of the box, but also the most important side of the box. Not so much because the jury is behind that side of the box, but because it is a real side to your box. If you wanted to, you could touch it (but don't). Although you have to imagine the other sides of the box, with the curtain you don't have to. The curtain is right there - no imagination needed - one less thing I have to think about. So much energy is directed at that curtain, that the other sides are almost nonexistent - but they are definitely there. The size of this box should be the distance between you and the curtain and about three feet in all other directions (including the ceiling). The curtain makes me feel cozy - it reminds me of being in my practice area. The more I feel like I am in my practice area, the better I feel - the better I feel the better I do, and the more open to being in the moment I can be. But, regardless of how it makes you feel, you should definitely use it as a barrier - more exactly, as the goal. Play to the curtain, play for the curtain - nothing else exists. If however, the curtain is placed far away from you, let's say 10 feet or more away from you, then you must play to an imaginary curtain. In my experience, most of the time the curtain is within 10 feet or less from where you are standing. However, there are times when the logistics of a hall or room require the curtain to be much further away. In these situations you unfortunately do have to work a little extra and imagine the curtain being within a 10 foot range of you. But, regardless of whether the curtain is there or imagined, the point is to make sure you always set a destination to your

sound. Aim your sound at a very specific point in space. When taking an audition it is best if that point is no more than 10 feet away from you.

Side Note: This side note is a tricky one. I mentioned re-production, and how one should never deviate from what you practiced. I also mention playing for the curtain and creating a box. Well... there is one very small exception or tweak to those rules. If after playing the first round (adhering to all the rules) you feel that the hall is exceedingly boomy or exceedingly dry, it is ok to adjust slightly. I re-emphasize that this should only happen after the first round. I realize that in order to sense the acoustics of the place one has to temporarily leave the box and expand their perception to a much greater area. This is why this should only be done by players who have a great deal of experience under their belt. If it's very boomy, you should play things a little shorter and crisper, and definitively a little slower. If you play a fast passage under boomy conditions the notes get garbled and the clashing overtones can make things seem out of tune. When faced with very dry acoustics, play things a little longer but leave the speed alone.

CHAPTER 6

There is an issue that affects us all. It doesn't matter if you are preparing for an audition or performance; this issue affects your ability to be at your best. I have covered many topics like Picture in Picture, S value, re-producing not producing, and I tried to convey the importance behind these topics. But like many things in life there are many layers upon layers of knowledge and understanding. Although this next topic is not about playing an audition per se, it is very related to your state of mind - before, during, and after the audition. I am referring to, plain and simple - excuses. There are excuses, and then there are excuses. In many cases there are very valid reasons for someone being a certain way or thinking a certain way. These are not the type of excuses I am talking about. I am talking about the type of excuse that specifically relates to not being able to see things for what they are. In essence, I am referring to the type of excuse that is created by lying to oneself in order to protect oneself from the disappointment, or pain of failure. Now, I am no psychiatrist, but I can certainly imagine situations where perhaps lying to oneself, or not wanting to see the truth for what it is, can be a lifesaver. I can see how extreme circumstances in your life can create extreme survival psychological skills - but these are extremes that we need not venture into. The excuses I am referring to are less severe, but nevertheless very important to recognize and fix. Just like our determination to win is strong, so is our need to protect ourselves when we fail. Although I am not opposed to excuses, I am opposed to not being able to see or call something for what it is. Let's start with a very easy to digest example. This is something that if it hasn't happened to you, then you at least know somebody to whom it has happened.

You have somewhere to be at 8 AM in the morning. The night before, you set your alarm and go to bed. The next morning you wake up at 8:30 AM because your alarm either didn't go off, or you didn't hear it (or didn't want to hear it). You run to where you were supposed to be - or call - or do something to alert the world that you are late. Let's suppose it's a class

or a lesson. Eventually you speak to the teacher and apologize for your tardiness or no-show. You then proceed to tell the teacher that it was because your alarm didn't go off. The teacher looks at you as if you just told him or her that your dog ate your homework. Your teacher is looking at you that way, not necessarily because they don't believe you, but because they are disappointed for you. You see, even if they completely and truly believe you, it still does not change the fact that you were not there. In other words, understanding something cerebrally or intellectually does not necessarily mean that it emotionally changes the situation. This is why you have to deal with the emotional side. If all you do is hang your hat on the cerebral aspect of the situation and never deal with the emotional side, you teach yourself that it's okay to push guilt aside.

Regardless of how it happened and the circumstances of why you were not there, the fact still remains that at the end of the day it is completely your fault. You and only you are to blame. You can tell your story as often as you like in an effort to find comfort in the validation of others. Or, you can vilify the alarm clock all you want - you and only you are to blame. This is not necessarily a bad or a good thing, you just need to be able to see it for what it is. You need to work through the guilt to become a more responsible person.

It is a very reasonable thing to happen to someone - it actually happens all the time, but like I said, it was you who was not there when you needed to be there. If you don't, at the very least, see it for what it was - not only do you not take steps to fix the problem for next time, but you start on a road of blaming everything else except yourself. You start on the road of never feeling guilty for anything you do. It's always somebody or something else's fault. When you don't take responsibility for your own actions you create a losing attitude. You do that enough times, and you get to the point where you can't understand why things are not working out for you. Just like you brand your opinion of a passage into your muscle memory, when you don't assume responsibility for your actions, you brand yourself a loser.

Here is another example. You have been lying on a hospital bed for three days because you caught god knows what. This was not your

fault and there was really nothing you could have done to prevent it. You have an audition in two weeks and you just lost three practice days. On the fourth day you start practicing again because you're all better, but you are still feeling sorry for yourself. You say to yourself - "let me take it easy for a day or two while I get back in the swing of things". You immediately latch on to the - "I lost three days" - excuse, and create a fall-back situation for why you might have lost the audition, even though the audition has not happened yet. The truth is that if you were cutting it so close that three days made that big a difference, then there is a chance you should not have taken the audition to begin with.

-“Well, Bob-I lost three precious practice days but I'll take the audition anyway just to see what happens. I guess it's a good experience no matter what - right?” How many times have I heard that line. You either want to win or you don't want to win there is no in-between. Do you know what lies in the middle of those two states of thought - wanting to win or not wanting to win - Excuses.

Here is one last example. This excuse is one we all know and love. If you have never done or seen this, then let me enlighten you. So, you walk out on stage for a solo performance. Before you start playing you rub your wrist, or make a motion as if the back of your neck is hurting, or you rub your shoulder, or you look at your instrument and slightly shake your head in a disapproving manner. You are letting the audience know that there is a chance something is not quite right either with you or your instrument.

Why? Because you are setting yourself up to have an excuse in case things don't turn out the way you expected them to turn out. The concert ends and the conversation backstage afterwards go something like this.

-“ Bravo Bob” ---“ Well Julie, I must say, I was feeling a little off”
-“What do you mean?” ---“Well, my right wrist was bothering me a bit and I felt I sort of had to compensate. I couldn't really relax and let the music happen - you know” -“ Yes, I saw you were rubbing your wrist before you started playing” ---“Yeah - well - you know, I did the best I could under the circumstances” -“ Is it serious?” ---“No, I'm sure I'll be okay after a few days” Yeah, yeah, you are such a hero. Oh you valiant thing, you who muscle your way through a hand that is basically

falling off your arm. Soldiers in the battlefield aspire to have your fortitude and valor. You either want to be on stage or you don't want to be on stage - the rest is absolute bullshit. There are people with real injuries caused by playing this next part is also for all of you.

When you walk out onto the stage, whether it be for an audition or a performance, you are there for one reason in the eyes of the jury or audience. In the case of an audition you are there to be judged on what is heard and seen. In the performance, you are there to be experienced on what is heard and seen. No one cares about your problems. They don't care if you have a headache, a wrist ache, whether you have the flu or if your dog just died. If you are injured, then you just don't play until you heal. If you know you can't play your best, then don't play. If you choose to play anyway, then be responsible for the performance and make no excuses. I realize that this is a rather severe statement, but I paint it thick to illustrate the point. To this day, I have yet to see a true professional complain after a performance. Let's say that a true professional had an off day and you were there to experience it. After the concert you decide to go backstage to meet and shake the hand of the professional. You might say something like bravo, or that was very beautiful, or congratulations - your choice of words is unimportant. Now, a true professional knows that their performance may not have gone as well as they might have wanted. But, do you know what the professional does? They shake your hand back and say thank you. They don't suddenly break into a monologue about how it was an off day and why it was an off day. They just say thank you and move on. They wanted to be on stage that evening and they take full responsibility for their actions and performance without complaint or remorse. They don't have to be comforted by you, or even themselves, - why? - because they wanted to be there. When things don't go right - that too is part of wanting to be there. No excuses. I suppose that later, after the dust has settled and you are talking to someone who is close to you, you might let go about certain things concerning the performance or your state of mind - it's okay, so long as you still accept responsibility for your actions. Maybe you were part of a group and after the performance you compare notes with one another - this is okay, so long as you don't use

it as an excuse for your performance. When was the last time you just said thank you, without wanting to explain what you thought was wrong about your performance? You have to see things for what they are so that you can learn two things - when it's okay to learn from your mistakes - and when those mistakes happened because you were making excuses for yourself. Learning from mistakes that were created as a direct consequence of you making excuses, is pointless. There is nothing to learn from these mistakes. These types of mistakes are very preventable. All you had to do was essentially, pay attention and be responsible for yourself. A true mistake one hardly ever sees coming. This is why when you make a true mistake, you have to sit down and think about it. This is a necessary step so the mistake doesn't reoccur. True mistakes catch you by surprise, and it takes a while to figure out the chain of events that led to the mistake. But when you make mistakes because you live in a world of excuses, then those mistakes as far as I'm concerned - don't count. They don't count because you can see them coming a mile away. When you decide to take an audition or become a performer, you either step up or get off - there is no in-between. I know it doesn't feel great to lose or do poorly, but if it happens while you were in the path of no excuses, you become exponentially stronger. Regardless of whether you protect yourself from losing by the excuses and lies you tell yourself, or if you take the path of no excuses - when you lose or don't do well, it's going to hurt anyway. If you take the path of no excuses, after the pain subsides, you are left with a stronger and wiser you. In the field of auditions and performance, the Darwinian concept is very palpable - only the strongest survive.

CHAPTER 7

I have sat on my fair share of audition committees. I have also received my fair share of comments from members of audition committees for whom I have auditioned. Invariably, there are certain items that always pop up. I am sure there are many more items than this list, but these seem to be the most common culprits. Also, I include some points that don't require lengthy discussions, but that need to be mentioned. Although I have decided to present them in a number list format, they are by no means in order of importance. Only you can determine what order they should be in, based on your performance record. Unlike the first part of this guide, I consider these to be more down to earth issues.

#1 Forte means only forte, but piano means really piano. Most people at an audition tend to play everything at the same level. There doesn't seem to be much dynamic contrast. This tends to put the jury members into a further state of a zombie-ness. One needs to understand that playing a beautiful forte is great, but playing a true piano makes a far bigger impression on the jury. Most people are judged on how well they can play the soft and not the strong. Although I am not a fan of making a point of something through my playing, when it comes to a piano dynamic, I would be willing to make a slight and careful exception.

Side Note: When I say making a point through playing, I mean blindly "over doing" something so that you show others your adherence to the score. For example, when your average "point maker" sees a forte, well then by golly they are going to show you what a great musician they are by over exaggerating the crap out of that forte. "Look, look, there was a forte there and I did it! - did you hear me?" Exaggeration can lead to very beautiful moments. It can actually lead to moments of absolute bliss. But these moments need to be very carefully thought out and executed. Blindly making points with your playing through the over exaggeration of the score just shows your neediness to be

noticed, your ignorance of a basic musicianship, and well, quite frankly - it makes you sound like a pig. Thus ends the side note... let's continue.

There are moments in a real orchestral performance situation, where piano is not really played as a piano dynamic, but rather something stronger. In these cases you should carefully show that you know there is a piano there, and then slightly raise the dynamic intensity as the excerpt continues. Mind you though, there are very few moments where that is true. When in doubt about what kind of a piano dynamic it is, play really piano and keep it there. Again, a great soft is always more impressive than a beautiful loud - even if the beautiful loud was in itself impressive.

#2 Play the solo piece like an excerpt. I'll admit, this point is a bit tricky and a bit of a gray area, but remember, everything in an audition gets engineered. You learned your solo piece to be performed for an audience in a concert venue. This fact brings with it certain characteristics that do not belong in an audition. I have been told twice, in two different final rounds, in two different orchestral auditions, that my solo piece was too soloistic. My initial response was "you have got to be kidding me" - but I now understand.

One has to remember that the orchestra is not only looking for a great player, but one that also plays well with others and can follow direction. Letting it all hang out with the solo piece, can be a bit of a turn off for a jury. It creates doubt as to the - playing well with others and taking direction - aspect. Even if you played great, it would still be cause for caution. Granted, this might not be the case for every orchestra, but I believe it to be for most. Let me put it this way. You are interviewing people to counsel victims of abuse. Candidate A and B have the strongest credentials and are the best so far. Candidate A is very passionate about helping others, but that passion comes with a bit of a foul mouth. Candidate B is slightly less passionate but has no foul mouth and is very well spoken. Candidate A assures you that they would never use foul language when counseling someone. Your average jury says - who cares. Why would we take a chance with candidate A (as good as he or she is) when candidate B is also a very good choice. Your solo piece is your true resumé. It shows the jury what kind of player you are. It pro-

vides them with a blueprint of your playing and approach so far in your life. It establishes the baseline from which your excerpts will be judged against. I am not suggesting you become a robot with your solo piece - being boring is not a good thing - but certainly be very cautious how far you take things. The committee is looking for a good engineer and someone who knows what it's like to be in an orchestra. A good start on how to approach your solo piece is this: Pretend that you are filling in for someone else at a concert situation. The orchestra has had no rehearsal with you and they have never heard you play. How would you have to play, in order to ensure, that the orchestra could understand and follow you at all times. I don't know about you, but I would stick to the default approach of playing the piece. If there is an expected way of playing something, then do that. If the way you normally play the piece breaks with the norm, then you need to change that and play the norm. Don't give the jury an opportunity to judge your interpretation... only you're playing. In an audition, the traditional default of playing something rules supreme. No curveballs, only straight pitches. Don't try to show the jury what a great musician you are (if you are a great musician, it always comes through in your playing), just show them how well you can execute.

What about when the curtain comes down? - you ask. Should I play differently? Well, quite frankly - no, but at this point you should feel free to show something with your body language. But beware. The main reason for an orchestra dropping the curtain is to finally see who you are, and make sure you fall within the realm of normal. They want to see your body in motion. If you decide to give more than is needed and start flailing about with your body language, you will do more damage than good. Yes, show your musical intent with your body language, but make sure elegance always prevails. This is not a show, or a performance - this is a job interview.

#3 If you are a string player, when it comes to the excerpts, don't use harmonics or slides unless the composer writes them. I know that sometimes a harmonic can get you out of a fingering or intonation dilemma, but that information, or trick, is also known by the jury. It might get the note you want, but to some, it is also per-

ceived as a copout. In an audition, the use of harmonics and slides should come with an "in case of emergency only" warning.

#4 One of the most annoying things you can do when you walk out on stage at an audition is to tune your instrument. If something happens while you are on stage and your instrument is suddenly completely off, then it's okay to tune. Otherwise, do it backstage before you walk in. You have probably been in the building for at least an hour, but you decide the best time to tune is on stage, when you are supposed to be playing. What the hell were you doing backstage that made it impossible for you to tune your instrument. You haven't played a note, and half the jury is already annoyed by you. Do you know what they are saying to themselves? They are saying "stop wasting my time and start playing the excerpts, we still have a long way to go and you're not helping." #5 Don't ask to play something again. Sometimes we feel that we did poorly and we would like a second chance because we know we can do better. If the jury wants to hear it again, believe me, they will ask. Sometimes they will ask because they heard something that they felt merited it, or maybe they are just being nice. At times, they want you to play it in a certain manner that is more in line to the way that particular orchestra plays it. Regardless of why the jury might ask you play something again is irrelevant. If you choose to ask to play something again, all I can tell you is that it better be god-like. If it is not exponentially better than the first time you played it, two basic things happen. One, the jury feels that you just wasted their time. Two, you just showed the jury that the first time was not a mistake - that the first time, was really, as good as it gets. Don't put a nail in your coffin. Allow the jury to give you the benefit of the doubt.

#6 Mind your endings. Just like having a great piano dynamic is more effective than a beautiful forte, so is how you end a note. Most people concentrate their energy on how to start a note, and what sound they want right off the start. Part of the problem is that most people feel it ends there. Let's say they played the beginning of the note just right, and just like they wanted. At this point, they then start thinking about the next challenge, instead of thinking about how to end the note. How you end a note makes a bigger impression than how you start a note. It can be said,

that you are a truly refined player, only when you take as much care of the end of the note as you did about the start of the note. If you have too many unrefined moments, you start to sound like an amateur. Have you ever noticed how most of time you eat something, and feel there is something missing, that it's usually salt? In the same way, when a jury member feels like there's just something missing about the playing that sounds unrefined, it's usually because your endings have not been taken care of.

#7 This next one has to be mentioned, especially after the topic of the previous point. It is the exception to the rule of -"mind your endings". Yes, how you end the note makes a stronger impression than how you start the note, except for the very first note you play. When you walk out on stage, the most important note or sound is the very first one you make. No other sound is as important. This is then followed by the first "sound moment".

The first note must be perfect, followed in close second to the first phrase or musical thought that is associated with that first note. I was taught at a very early age that it is harder to prove oneself after a bad beginning, than after making a mistake with a good beginning. Let me try saying it another way. You walk on stage and start playing. Right from the start you sound great, but let's say a minute later you make a small mistake. You are still okay. Just like the S value we talked about earlier, you branded the listener with a favorable opinion of your playing before you made the mistake. The mistake at this point is easily forgiven (just don't do it again). But, if you make a mistake right off the bat, you brand the listener with an unfavorable opinion of your playing. Even if you play very well after the mistake, the damage is done. The road to changing the opinion of the listener is a very steep one. In a performance situation, where you are going to be on stage for a while, it can be fixed. In a seven minute allotted time period at an audition, it is almost impossible. This is not to say you won't get the necessary votes to go on, especially if you play the rest of the audition really well. But, it does create an element of question in the minds of the jury. It only takes about five seconds for the jury

to know if you might be what they are looking for. The rest of the time, the candidate who is auditioning is making sure those five seconds stick.

#8 If you have ever heard old recordings, you know that many of the styles of playing have changed through time. Some things come back, and others disappear altogether. Who taught you, and in what country you were taught, also makes a difference. The approach to music styles change all the time. The same thing happens with the audition process over time. What juries are looking for seems to be slightly tweaked every ten years or so. Even the process of the audition itself changes. It used to be, that if a conductor liked you're playing, you could be hired on the spot, for whatever position the conductor deemed appropriate - just like that. Being at the right place at the right time was glaringly so in the past. You still have to be at the right place and time, but nowadays there are a few more hurdles you have to overcome. We have gone from no curtain at all, to what seems to be a jail lockdown process. It is very important that you keep yourself current. The rules and playing styles change. Keeping current can be done in several ways, but the most effective is to play for the people who are in the business. These are the very people who are changing the rules and styles depending on their experience of what the common trend is. Even something as simple as knowing what "A" a particular orchestra tunes to, is beneficial. If you know that a particular orchestra will have an opening for your instrument, and you have a chance to play for the principal, or anybody else in the section for that matter, then do it. If you feel that this is weird or perhaps even beneath you, well then I'm afraid no one can help you. You have bigger and deeper problems. I will play for anybody I have to. I happen to be the principal of the section - but so what. If I needed to go to another orchestra, for whatever reason, I would probably contact the principal of that orchestra and ask if I can play for him or her. If that is not possible, I will then keep looking for someone in the section to play for. If it so happens that the only person I can find is an ex-student of mine who happens to play in the orchestra, well then, that's who I play for. They know more about what that particular orchestra is looking for than I do. You see, even though an orchestral audition is won by

the best engineers, every orchestra has a slightly different version of what constitutes a good engineer. Although I have a good understanding of the audition process, and what it takes to win auditions, knowing specifics about that particular orchestra can certainly make the difference. Although this is not a necessity, if you can do it, I highly recommend it. It makes no difference who you are or who you think you are. If you know that your audition days are not over, you need to stay in the loop.

#9 Once a candidate has been determined to be a worthy contender, the jury tends to get picky. Up until this point it has been somewhat clear-cut as to who is worthy and who is not. When most of the jury agrees that this is someone worth listening to, knowing your musical styles comes into play. Bach is not Mozart, Mozart is not Brahms, and Beethoven is all of them. I know it might sound unusual that such an important part of how one plays is left for later in the decision-making process - but it also makes sense. A lot of people tend to show up at auditions, furthermore, there is a lot of bad playing out there. At the beginning, the jury is looking for a strong engineering base. They are looking for the structural blueprint to be sound. In the early stages of an audition the jury is just weeding the good from the bad. But when the time comes, usually towards the end of the audition, to weed the good from the better - then, knowing your styles becomes extremely important. Always start with the default style associated with each composer. You might like your Mozart on steroids, but if you know that about yourself, then you also know where the non-steroidal line is. For the most part, provided the orchestra is not populated mainly by assholes, if they like what they hear, there will ask you to play it again, in a way that is more in-line with what they are looking for. Even when you find yourself playing for a forgiving committee, I would still advise you to play the default style, and not hope that there are enough people in the jury that like it your way.

#10 There is one thing that never changes. It has been so for many, many decades. It is such a strong condiment to the dish of music and good playing, that if it is not there, you can kiss your career in music goodbye. Ladies and gentlemen, you must learn how to play in tune. I don't care if you can put one leg behind your ear, smash grapes with the other,

keep a hula hoop going around your neck, all the while playing a solo arrangement of Siegfried's death - if it's out of tune, you might as well pass gas and give the image some aroma. Hearing candidate after candidate play out of tune, after sitting there for hours on end, makes me want to put a plastic bag over my head and go running. Now that I got that off my chest, let's proceed! So much time is spent making sure we can play the notes with great facility, and making sure we have a beautiful tone, that intonation gets pushed aside. It is not an average sound or missing notes that makes things painful to hear, it's the out of tune-ness that makes it hurt. Just like the thirteen year old who grabs a broom, stands in front of a mirror, and air guitars like he is Van Halen - so too is the approach of many instrumentalists in classical music. They want to be able to wow themselves with the fireworks of the thing. How fast can you play, how loud, and how much passion can you throw at it, seems to be the main game. All the while, one of the most important aspects of the playing crafts is pushed aside - playing in tune. Now don't get me wrong. If it has been a long day, or your mind is elsewhere, and you play a little out of tune here and there - I can forgive that. Even at an audition, if I know the candidates are tired and have been pushed to the extremes, I can forgive some intonation issues. On the other hand, I cannot deal with those individuals who have a chronic issue with it, and take no steps to fix it. Intonation needs to always be practiced and cared for. It is not like riding a bike. There are some things, once learned, that can be depended on when you need them. Intonation is not one of them. If there is one thing that can guarantee you 100% failure at an audition, it is playing out of tune. Everything else in this guide that has to do with the audition process can have an exception to the rule (yes, even the part with all the never, never, nevers). If you play too fast, with wrong rhythms, produce too much, take too many musical liberties, give the occasional scratchy sound, or even fall off your fingerboard completely - none of these things will guarantee you an automatic dismissal. If you are an out-of-tune player, you might as well strap a rocket ship to yourself, lite the fuse, and point it at the exit door.

#11 You need to know how long it takes you to warm up, and how long it takes you to cool down. Many people make the mistake of approach-

ing an audition the same way they approach a science test in high school that they haven't quite studied for. Because there is so much to do and learn, we tend to study hard the night before, and then quickly before it goes away, we spew all the knowledge we were able to muster the night before at the exam the next day. Even though you know your excerpts, one can still get into this panic mode right before the audition. You start playing things over and over as if though you were going to forget something. You allow yourself into a state of uncertainty about your readiness and ability to perform. There seems to be some sort of idea that you are going to somehow finally etch-in-stone your knowledge of what you are playing. Apparently, for the amateur, this only happens moments before an audition. If you are still practicing at the audition, you are approaching the audition with considerable immaturity, and chances are you will do poorly. The only thing that playing yourself into a frenzy accomplishes is to tire you out. At this point, you are not learning anything - you are only sabotaging yourself. And yes, just in case you were wondering, this is a lesson I learned the hard way. I know it can be a challenge to control oneself and believe that you know all you need to know. It is especially hard when you can hear other people playing and warming up around you - and you are just sitting there. One can get the "departure gate" syndrome.

Have you ever noticed that when you are waiting for your plane to start boarding, as soon as one person gets in line, the rest of the boarding area seems to follow. There might still be forty five minutes left before they start boarding - and everybody there knows that - but one person gets in line and it's not long before the rest follow. I suppose they are probably thinking, that the first person must know something they don't know.

When you hear the panic through everyone else's constant playing, you yourself can start to question your composure. If they are practicing, then you guess you should also be practicing. By the way, something else you should know. The person you have to be worried about

in an audition is not the loudest one who is playing Paganini caprices to warm up. It's the person sitting in the corner watching you sweat.

I don't care if you are fifteen years old or recently retired, your muscles can only go so far. Your muscles have a finite amount of energy in them before you have to recharge them. If you do well at an audition, you could go in at 9 AM and not come out until 11 PM. This is why it is imperative that you always keep your composure, and regardless of what is going on around you, stick with what works for your muscles. This is the formula I use when I take an audition, or when I perform a solo performance. I know it takes me twenty minutes from the time I pick up my instrument to when I feel my muscles are at their maximum performance level - otherwise known as being warmed up. If my audition time is between 10 AM and 11 AM, I get to the place at 9 AM. I do this so my instrument has a chance to get accustomed to the climate of the place. Chances are they don't have a room ready for me, so I just sit there until they do. Once you get closer to the audition time, the backstage personnel has a better idea of a more specific playing time for you. Let's say that I will be on stage playing my audition at 10:40 AM. You need to understand that there can be a variance of about fifteen minutes either way, depending on how fast or slow the committee is being. Nevertheless, 10:40 AM is the information I have. I start the warming up process at 10:10 AM. I know it takes me twenty minutes to be warmed up and I always add an extra ten minutes just in case I go slightly earlier. By this time you should have been told what excerpts and solo you are playing. Keep in mind that some orchestras don't tell you what you are playing until you are on stage ready to play. In any event, the warm-up process is still the same. For the first ten minutes, I take it very easy. After that, I gradually increase the intensity until the twenty minutes are up. At this point I re-assess when I will be playing. When I am certain there are about ten minutes left, then and only then, do I start playing like I am in the middle of giving a recital at Carnegie Hall. Only ten minutes before I play, do I allow myself to be physically and mentally at a kick ass level. Although I have been extremely focused throughout the entire process, only about ten minutes or so before I play does every fiber of my being become concentrated on a single point of energy.

That point remains constant all throughout the round. After walking off stage, the energy begins to dissipate - ready to be honed in again for the next round. When the next round comes, the process gets repeated one more time, and so on and so forth. The process, as far as the timing is concerned, is what works for me. You have to do some homework and learn what timing works for you. Once you figure out what works for you, please stick to it like glue. Focus and stay true to what you know works for you.

I also mentioned that you have to know how long it takes you to cool down. There is a very good reason for that - audition committees are unpredictable. If they can't seem to decide about a candidate, it is within their right to call you back, even after the audition process has completed the last round. Even between rounds, they can ask you to come back and re-play something. Make sure and keep track of how much time has gone by since you walked offstage. Chances are that if they want to hear you again, for some unknown reason, they are not really going to give you much warm up time - if any. If you still don't know if you will be proceeding on to the next round (or have won the audition for that matter), you need to start refocusing your energy to the same point you were ten minutes before you walked on stage. This will at least get you psychologically ready to go on again if need be. A word of caution, in an effort to remain focused, resist the urge to pick up your instrument. I learned early in my audition career, when I was unable to play the fourth round at my best, to conserve energy.

CHAPTER 8

We all wish that the jury was comprised of our friends; people who care about us, and are closely related to our life story. It would make things so much easier and pleasant if you were judged by someone who knows how hard you have worked. Someone who knows all the sacrifices you have made to get to this point in your life. Well... you might be in luck - but we will talk about that later. In truth, the jury is comprised of doers and has-beens, angry people and happy people, individuals who want to be there and don't want to be there, the occasional lost soul or conductor and everything in between. Most of the time there are at least ten members, and in some instances, the entire orchestra is welcome to hear and vote on a candidate. It is because of the great diversity of judging styles that you must have a non-offensive, default-like, polished execution at an audition. In the previous chapter, I outlined some points in a number list and said that it was up to you to put them in the order that makes more sense to your story - the same is true for the things each judge finds important. Each committee member will come with their own set of pet peeves and rules on what constitutes good playing. Some of these are based on their experience of playing in an orchestra, but some also come from a darker side of their psyche.

There are judges who bark really loud about the things they themselves can't do, or are not very good at doing. Some individuals who judge auditions use the opportunity to lash out about their own insecurities through the torment of the candidate. Granted, they have a loose wire concerning their humanity, but as we all know, we can find this type of individual almost anywhere in life. What you as the candidate must understand, is that there will always be an element of subpar humanity coming from some members of the jury. I think I should mention, in defense of these individuals, that in many cases they are not even aware of what they are doing. In most cases it is not intentional pettiness or insecurity that comes out of these committee members. They have issues that are buried deep in their subconscious and tend to be triggered at

auditions, or when an opportunity to feel superior arises. Regardless, it is there. Do you remember that mean teacher you had in school? Let's suppose you are in the eighth grade and Mr. R.U. Compensating is just about the meanest math teacher ever. How would you behave in that class? I would probably not want him even looking at me. I would try to just become part of the background so as not to call attention to myself. In essence, my entire being would become a chameleon that is there but cannot be seen. The least he sees me, the greater my chances of survival in the class. This same example arises at the audition. When playing for the jury, you must include some chameleon-like qualities. You do not want to give the bad apples in the jury an excuse to make an example out of you. This is one of the reasons why re-producing instead of producing is so important. When you produce, you are in essence performing. When you perform, you open yourself to more criticism than is needed, especially from the bad angry apples. Again, your playing must be non-offensive, default-like and very polished. That is the only antidote you have to fight the dark side of the jury. On the other hand, you must know that they are not all bad. Most people in a jury have a high degree of normalcy to their humanity. But even they differ from one another.

If you have ever discussed anything with a group of friends, you know what I am talking about. The next time you find yourself in that situation, pay attention to the diversity of opinions from one person to another - even if they all agree on the same basic points as you. For example, even though you all might see the color red, and agree that it is indeed red, some might see it slightly more orange or yellow or cyan than you do. Some might even comment on different brightness values. But you all still recognize it as red. Most people tend to think that everybody else thinks like they do. Almost nothing creates more friction between people than that little phenomenon. The same thing happens in a jury. It takes a while sometimes, when discussing a candidate, for committee members to think well with others with the same effectiveness as we do when we play well with others.

There is so much diversity of what each juror deems to be important, that it can be said, that this entire guide has been written so

you can sway the majority of those opinions in your favor. Some concentrate on rhythm and will lightly tap the beat as you are playing (never loud enough so you can hear it). Others hone in on dynamics or speed or sound, etc. It usually takes at least 1/2 to 2/3 of the committee as a minimum to pass a candidate to the next round. Just because you passed to the next round does not mean they love you.

Many times a jury will hear anywhere from six to eight candidates before making judgment on those candidates. It could be, that the reason you were passed to the next round has more to do with how you compared to the people who were close to your audition time, rather than the overall performance of the candidates so far. It doesn't matter - you passed. The person who got closest to the expectations of what the jury was looking for wins the audition. Seldom is it unanimous, and seldom has every criteria been met by the candidate. Having said that, you should know that a jury as a whole tends to have a favorite, especially towards the end. You might be backstage and see, let's say, ten remaining candidates including you. Perhaps this makes you feel that you are at the same level than the rest. It does not mean that at all. Sometimes, you are the one most jurors seem to be hanging their hopes on, and other times you are there to appease a particular juror who, for some unknown reason, really liked you - even though nobody else did.

"I really liked number 33. I also liked number 57 and number 82, but I think number 33 is the one for me, but let's see what happens". When the number of people has been dwindled down to less than ten, this is the type of thought an average jury member is having about the remaining candidates. Before choosing a winner, each committee member already knows who they think is the winner. If the jury is mainly sound, then chances are that at least 6 out of 4 our thinking the same thing. If number 33 can keep it up, he or she might be the winner. I said, might be the winner. Regardless of the fact that number 33 is indeed the best player, unfortunately the word might still needs to be used.

There are two things that can happen. The first thing is the introduction of members from that particular orchestra joining the audition. It has become rather customary at auditions to allow members of the

"home" orchestra to join the rest of the applicants at the final round. This, of course, usually happens when the audition is for a principal spot and they are trying to move up from the section. But what does this mean to you? It means that if you are number 33 and you just made it to the finals, there is a chance two or three members from the section you are auditioning for will join the audition and compete against you. It could also happen that players who have done well on previous auditions for that orchestra, are invited to the final round. Some orchestras invite people to start at the semi final round and other orchestras invite for the final round. It all depends on the merits of the individual as to where an orchestra might place them at the audition. It also depends on the orchestra itself. The argument is that if one is truly worthy of the position, then it should make no difference at what point others join you.

The other thing that candidate number 33 has to deal with is politics. Yes, politics exist and it will be with us for an unspecified time. Some orchestras engage in politics, others go through great efforts to diminish them. Due to this, some orchestras don't use a curtain and others keep it up through the entire process. Most, though, have the curtain up for all rounds except the very last one. This is where the shit hits the fan in the political arena. From nepotism, to personal favors, it is all fair game to some. One of the most typical political moves is choosing a winner because they are the student of the principal, or are in some way closely related to the organization that is giving the audition. There are arguments on either side about the pros and cons of allowing politics to interfere. The truth is that no matter what you believe concerning politics, it is to this day a very real thing that has to be reckoned with.

Occasionally a jury member, upon realizing that one of the remaining candidates has a close association with them, will remove themselves from the voting on that particular candidate. On the other hand, there are some jurors (or even the conductor at times), who will rally for someone because they are closely associated with that person. Some-

times they keep the association to themselves and pretend they don't know the person, and other times they could care less who is aware.

You might think politics is a bad thing, but sometimes it is a very necessary and useful tool. Knowing a quality, either good or bad, about a candidate, can be the difference between making the orchestra a stronger group or adding a weak link. Politics is not necessarily the problem. It is the abuse of politics that causes damage. It does not matter what profession you choose, there will always be politics. With that in mind here are a few things that might help you when the curtain comes down. It might not fix the politics, but it will give you a little more of an edge in your favor.

Points for when the curtain comes down: #1 Dress for the occasion. The best attire you can have is business casual. If you walk out on stage wearing a tuxedo, or for women something that closely resembles a ballroom gown - once the committee's inner laughter subsides - there is a chance of appearing rather stuffy and stiff. If you decide to walk out in jeans, T-shirt, and flip-flops there is a chance you will not be taken seriously. You want to wear something that does not call attention to what you are wearing. Business casual seems to do the trick.

#2 Be very careful what you show with your body language. Remember this is not a performance, even though it is presented as one. Having said that, there is one good thing about this not being a performance. When you perform, and things are not going your way, one must never show the audience your opinion of how you think you are doing. In an audition, there is a very tiny sliver of an exception to that rule. If you truly bomb an excerpt, don't ask to play it again. However, if you let them know that you were not pleased with it by using your body language, it might not be a bad thing. If you can't keep that opinion (the one you are going to give with your body language) to a truly subliminal amount, then I would rather you hide your disappointment. Also, I would not portray your disappointment more than once. If you do, then you are entering a realm of letting the jury know that you have no consistency in your playing. You get one "sorry about that" bullet. Use it well.

#3 Be organized with your sheet music and stage presence. If your playing is excellent, but your mannerisms give an air of being dishev-

eled, disorganized, or easily flustered, it is almost as bad as wearing flip-flops. Move with purpose and confidence, but beware. If you overdo confidence, it is as bad as wearing a tuxedo to an audition.

#4 If the jury asks you a question, always be truthful. Most of the time we know people who know you. The world of music is a very small community. With the advent of such things as e-mail, twitter, texting, and Facebook, chances are, we will eventually learn the truth anyway.

#5 Always say hello when you walk in, and thank you when you walk out. It seems like a small thing, but the niceties can make us seem a little more human. When you say hello and thank you, you chip away a little of the severity of the moment and it makes everyone a little more comfortable. At this point, softening the heart of the jury is a good thing. If the jury asks you a question, relax, smile, and answer the question as though you were talking to your teacher. Be relaxed, but always respectful. The very first professional audition I ever took, I almost lost because of my comments at the final round. It was a viola audition and I was exceedingly tired, having never done a professional audition before and not knowing what to expect. After I was finished playing, a female juror asked me how big my instrument was. I responded with "that's a rather personal question". All the men in the committee bent over in disbelief of what I had just said (including the conductor), and at that moment, I realized what I had done. My attempt at being funny almost cost me the job. To make matters worse, I eventually had to answer the question. It didn't help matters when I told her my instrument was 16 1/2 inches long. By this point everyone's mind was rolling around in the gutter, and I thought it was all over for me. But I did win, and almost 20 years later (and a lot of disappointments and triumphs later), I am writing this guide.

(Cue to sappy music) When it comes to auditions and the way most orchestras conduct them nowadays, it can be said, that it is one of the fairest ways of getting a job, especially when compared to other professions.

FINE.
