

# Thoughts About College Auditions

**Dr. Edwin Lacy**

*(Editor's note: Even though the title states "College Auditions", much of this applies to any competitive situation, even junior high or high school Solo & Ensemble Festivals)*

In the spirit of helpfulness, here are a few thoughts for all you high school students who are preparing to do auditions for admission to college. Just a few minutes ago, I sat on an auditioning committee for a student who was playing her audition. Several things occurred to me which might be useful, and I present them for your consideration.

First, it goes without saying that you must carefully prepare the materials you are going to play. Remember that what the committee wants to know about you varies from school to school; but generally, they want to try to determine if you will be able to learn in a four-year period what they want to teach you. Almost always, being able to demonstrate satisfying tone quality, good intonation and musical expressiveness will be much

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more important than fast fingers. Don't feel that you have to play a technically perfect performance in order to be accepted. If you were already a professional, they wouldn't have anything to teach you.

These basics out of the way, most of what I would like to say relates to more incidental matters, but important ones if you are going to be able to present your abilities in the best light.

**1** Find out what the audition requirements are for the school or schools to which you are applying. If they want a particular solo piece, or etudes, or certain scales played in a certain style or speed, know that before going into the audition room.

This information is not secret, and every good school will be pleased to tell you that in advance. If given free choice, get the advice of a good teacher and make appropriate selections. Do not take something like the 3<sup>rd</sup> clarinet part

or the 2<sup>nd</sup> bassoon part of a work from your band or orchestra folder as audition material.

**2** Take care of the fundamentals. Make sure your instrument is in good condition, and if you are a reed player, that you have a reed which works reasonably well. Warm up properly before going into the room, but by no means make the auditioning committee wait for you while you try to get in a little last-minute practicing. Be on campus early enough to find out where the audition room is. Be on time, or a few minutes early.

**3** Dress appropriately. Jeans, shorts, short skirts, sandals, t-shirts, etc. do not help make a good impression. Don't have your hair made over into a hip, movie-star or starlet style, and don't wear extremely heavy makeup. Be business-like. Dress comfortably, but presentably. For women, high heels are almost always a bad choice. If your knees begin to shake a little, this lesson will be brought home in a very real way.

**4** Remember that you are being assessed in many ways in addition to the evaluation of your musical performance. Be straightforward, respectful, direct and

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congenial, but not overly familiar. Try not to convey arrogance, fear, resentment, conceit or too much nonchalance. If someone offers their hand, shake hands firmly—no “dead fish” handshakes, please, and no “vise-grips.” Smile!

**5** Focus on the task at hand. Don't devote any mental energy to wondering what the auditioners are thinking about what you are doing. Stay in real-time. That is, don't think about any mistakes you may have made in the music, or any difficult passages coming up. Enjoy the music you are performing.

**6** If the auditioners ask you any questions, answer as completely but as concisely as you are able, in a firm tone of voice. Look directly at the person to whom you are talking. You can't be prepared for any and every question you may be asked, but prepare a little. Have a copy of your high school transcript or resume at hand. Prepare a repertoire list. Know the name and something about the background of your private teacher back home. Be able to pronounce correctly the title and the name of the composer of the music you are performing. Know what to say if asked what make and model of instrument you play, what kind of mouthpiece or reed you are using, etc.

**7** When you have finished and are excused, smile and say, “Thank you.”

**8** If you really want to make a good impression and be thought of as a truly special prospect, when you get home, send a brief note to someone at the school, perhaps your prospective major teacher, the head of the music department, or someone in the admissions office, thanking them for listening to your audition and for making you feel at home (if they did so.) Very few students do this, and it can make you stand out in their minds.

**9** Remember that those listening to you want to make you feel comfortable and at ease. If you feel that they are talking or laughing too much, they are probably trying to break the tension for you. They have their job to do in the audition, just as you do. It is not their intention or in their interest that you fail to do as well as you are able. They are on your side.

**10** Remember that the audition and acceptance process is a two-way street. You are auditioning the school as much as they are auditioning you. The whole purpose is to make a proper match between students and schools. Try to find an opportunity to establish communication with the person who may become your major teacher, as this person will exert a profound influence in your life.

I hope you find some of these items helpful.  
Good luck!

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