

Prepare for College Audition Success

Once again this year, I have heard a number of auditions of prospective university harp students, young harpists with big hopes and dreams for their futures, varying cases of nervousness and in very different stages of preparation. Allowing for the fact that everyone gets nervous and bad days happen to us all from time to time, there are a few things any student preparing for college auditions can do to increase her chance of success. Some of these things are very basic. Others are inside pointers, things that can make the difference in whether or not you are accepted to the school of your choice and how big a scholarship you might be awarded.

1. **Be sure you have read (and followed) the audition requirements.** Believe it or not, sometimes students forget the most basic thing of all – to read the list of required or suggested audition materials. Every school posts lists of audition music on its website. The audition panel will expect you play music from that list. If for any reason you wish to play something else, be sure to email **in advance** the instructor who will be hearing your audition and ask if he or she will allow the substitution. The audition panel is likely to interpret failure to follow the repertoire instructions as either laziness or disrespect, neither of which will improve your chances of acceptance.

With this in mind, when you are planning your college auditions, check out each school's list and plan your repertoire for maximum efficiency. Where you are allowed to choose your pieces, let your teacher help you choose the music that would show off your musical strengths. The key word here is PLAN. Start considering your repertoire no later than the summer before you plan to take your auditions.

2. **Know your scales and arpeggios.** Some colleges will state requirements for scales and arpeggios on their audition lists, but even if they don't, you should be comfortable with basic scales and arpeggios. After all, these are fundamental skills that any prospective college student should have mastered. It is excusable to draw a blank on a key signature, but the finger patterns should be second nature. Personally, I have reservations about any candidate who can't demonstrate a working knowledge of scales and arpeggios.
3. **Don't panic over sightreading.** Sightreading is not always a part of auditions, but it is used occasionally when an instructor wants to learn a little more about a particular candidate. It is not usually meant as a scare tactic, but unfortunately some students see it that way! You should realize that the teacher is not looking for a perfect performance, but a better understanding of you and your musical fluency. Once again, the key to success here is having a plan. If you are given something to sightread, have a plan in place for how you will begin. Check the key and your pedals, the time signature, the tempo indication and the general idea of the piece before you begin. A careful start will get you the best results.

These are the basic things to get you on the road to a good audition. But there are some other small points that can make a very big difference. Read on...

- 4. Know your goals.** You should be able to tell the audition panel what goals you have in your music study. For instance, do you want to play in a professional orchestra, teach junior high school music students, become a chamber musician? Even if you have written goals on your resume and the panel has the resume in front of them, be prepared with a sentence or two that clearly says where you think you are going. The committee knows this isn't written in stone; you are always allowed to change your mind later. But your thoughts about your future help the committee think about whether their school's music program will be a good fit for you. Be as definite as you can. After all, every music department wants students who are excited about their future.

- 5. Know why you are auditioning at that school.** Back when you started choosing colleges you might like to attend, you carefully selected schools that you thought would be a good fit for you. You looked at the music department, the harp teacher, the campus, the degree programs, the cost, the student life, the distance from home and many other considerations for each school. You probably had a long list at first, and then narrowed it down to a number of colleges where you would actually apply and audition.

Audition committees are always interested in why a student chose their school. They like to know what the student saw that attracted them enough to audition there. When a committee asks you why you are auditioning there, you should have a response prepared that is truthful, thoughtful and shows the committee that you have some idea of what their school is like. A half-hearted "I don't really know" kind of answer doesn't inspire any teacher to pull out their big scholarship money for you. On the other hand, a clear, honest response, whether it's "my parents went here," or "I really like the campus," or "I really admire this teacher," assuming you do really admire the teacher, helps the teacher and the audition committee understand more about you.

One additional consideration – many schools include a pre-audition form of some sort. Often included on this questionnaire is the question, "What colleges or universities are you applying to, and what is your order of preference?" This question is mostly used so the music department can assess the kind of schools you're comparing it with, but your answers here carry some weight with the audition committee. There are two things to remember as you answer this potentially tricky question. First, honesty is always the best policy. Second, don't forget to list the school that asked you the question!

- 6. Dress for success.** In this case, dressing for success means wearing clothes that are not casual school clothes, but are moderately "professional." Imagine what you would wear if these people were hiring you for a job. That's not so far from the truth, after all; you would like these people to give you thousands of dollars of scholarship money. The least you can do is look like you'd be a credit to their university. Do remember to wear clothes that are appropriate and comfortable enough for playing (like good harp shoes, for example).

And did I forget to mention... practice???