

## Audition's Don't Have to be Scary

How many of you have experienced the following situation: Standing aside the stage door, you look around at the others waiting with you, fellow trumpeters reviewing pieces or orchestral excerpts that must be played. Everyone looks mad at the next person for some reason or another. Until this point, you have felt calm and collected. Nothing could steer your course astray this time, not after all of the work you put into practicing. Then suddenly your name is called, and you have no more time to think. It is time to do; suddenly you are not sure of anything, including how to relax.

It is no wonder that we musicians get so nervous when placed in an audition environment. Anyone put in the same situation would be. If one broke down the events of a student or professional audition into a basic chronology, it might go something like this: first you receive the audition list or required piece in the mail, spend hour after hour preparing the repertoire requested, listen to all required recordings of the repertoire, drive or fly to the city in which the audition will take place, sit in a room for two hours with sixty other people that all think they are better than you and when your name is finally called, you walk into another room where behind a table sit the judges who seem to be looking at you as if you are an empty Pepsi can on the side walk. You are nothing to anyone in this room, and you know it. Then begins the hard part, because this is the time when you must pick up your trumpet and prove to the judges, who have already heard twenty-three auditions of the same six excerpts or solo piece, that you can play them better than anyone else on the planet, and you must make them wonder how they have survived without you for so long. Oh, and this all must be accomplished during a four-minute audition. Seems impossible, doesn't it?

Ok, calm down. It's not as bad as it seems. The first thing to remember is that judges are not hoping you play your worst, they are hoping you play your best. It may be a shock, but think about how awful it would be to judge a competition where everyone played poorly. It would be like American Idol with only the horrible auditions. Chances are that you won't be in a huge holding room to warm up with sixty other people. In fact, most auditions are run in a smooth, relaxing way, the personnel doing their best to make sure everyone is comfortable. There are, however, nerve-racking situations that present themselves, and we, as aspiring students at one level or another, must be prepared to deal with them. So here are some techniques that can really help when the going gets tough.

The first way to control nervousness and succeed in an audition is simple: breathe. Sounds too easy, right? Wrong! The simplest way to control your body's reaction to the

threat of an audition is by stopping all activity and thought to observe your breath. While you are sitting in the waiting room, observing all of those unfriendly, condescending faces, your brain interprets your surroundings as a physical threat to your body and reacts by making us nervous through the "fight or flight" method. To make matters worse, as we notice these nervous reactions in our own bodies, we subconsciously tell ourselves to go into "overdrive," producing even stronger responses and making ourselves more and more nervous. It is a vicious cycle, and obviously, not a beneficial one to the musician ready to perform. Your brain is thinking, "fight, fight, fight" while you are thinking "don't forget the C-sharps, don't forget to play musically, don't mess up!!!" Who will win this argument? Well, if you first remember to breathe, you will increase your chances tremendously. Opening up your airways, and breathing slower and deeper puts more oxygen into your bloodstream, which calms the body and slows or stops nervousness. By doing the preceding, we can actually learn to change our own body's reaction to stress; after all, people who practice yoga have been doing it for centuries.

Sometimes the best way to combat the nervousness experienced during an audition occurs in the practice room the weeks prior to the audition. I know many musicians, some in high school and some in college, who "practice to practice" and "perform to perform." This will never result in a positive audition experience or performance in general because the two mindsets are conditioned to be completely different. To practice performing and perform while practicing is the only way this can be accomplished. Only when these two techniques are thoroughly intertwined will the end result be natural, fun, and easy. Push yourself hard while practicing, and do not accept anything but perfection. If you are working on Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, and you play it flawlessly, make that wonderful performance the benchmark from which you will now build upon. If you continue to raise the quality of "bad" in a practice situation, your bad will far surpass other players' "good." Further, when you think that the piece or excerpts that you are preparing for the audition are as good as they can be, find a friend who can sit near you while you play through the pieces. This will inevitably cause you to be a bit nervous and make some mistakes. Always perform, even if you are the only person who can hear you. Pretend Phil Smith or Bud Herseth was sitting in the next room. How would you like to sound in front of these great artists? Sound like that all of the time.

Finally, a simple trick that I've used with great success for many auditions, from district band to playing onstage at the Kennedy Center or Avery Fischer Hall: write the name of your favorite trumpet player at the top of the page of music and pretend that you are that person. This of course requires that you listen to many different trumpeters to figure out which ones are your favorite, but once you find him or her, pretend that you are that

person. I always wrote "Bud Herseth" at the top of my district band solo music in high school to inspire me to play like Bud. To this day I write names like Bud, Phil Smith, Paul Merkelo, Chris Martin, and Mark Gould on my music to inspire me. Try it; it just might work for you too!

No matter what kind of audition you are taking, whether it is for the middle school concert band or the New York Philharmonic, nerves will inevitably creep into the equation of whether or not we play to the best of our ability. The test of an audition is not only to find out what you can do on the trumpet, but also how well you can handle stress. With this in mind, and with careful consideration of the techniques described above, your next audition experience is guaranteed to be much more positive. Have fun and keep practicing. or should I say, start performing!

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