**Conservatoire Auditions – how to prepare, what to expect**

Auditioning for a place at a conservatoire can be a challenging experience for even the most confident musician. Advance preparation gives the best odds for a successful result. The basis of confidence is competence, which is generated by careful practice and real familiarity with the pieces you are going to play. Check the audition repertoire requirements, and start to study it as far ahead as possible of the audition period - which is usually November/ December. An audition is not the platform to try out a new piece! If you also play something of your own choice, select something in consultation with your teacher which shows you at your best and which you enjoy playing. Try to attend an Open Day at your chosen institution(s) to give you an idea of the building and what to expect.

Your personal statement should be about your aspirations, feelings about music and your experience. Showing understanding of today’s music profession, which is competitive and requires versatility is helpful, and indicates a suitable temperament. One of your references should be your specialist instrumental/vocal/composition teacher as they can give a professional indication of work-in-progress.

Have several ‘practice auditions’ to family and friends – include walking into the room, settling down and performing in unfamiliar settings. Playing from memory is not required by all conservatoires, but no musician should be ‘glued’ to the music. An accompanist will normally be provided but rehearsal may be limited. You should be completely familiar with the piano part.

Musicians are practical craftsmen and November and December can be very chilly: Wear gloves so cold hands don’t undermine your months of practice! Have a banana or something handy – even if you think you don’t want one. Low blood-sugar is detrimental to concentration and coordination, and exacerbates the negative side effects of adrenaline. Similarly don’t get dehydrated. If you have a cold, take tissues - don’t sniff - a cold doesn’t conceal talent so don’t dramatise it!

Make a list of the things you need to remember on the day. Avoid any situation that might increase your stress levels – allow plenty of time to get to the venue, making generous allowances for delayed trains or terrible traffic. Presentation is an important element of performance. Wear smart, comfortable clothes that you can play in with ease, jeans and trainers are not really suitable. Don’t experiment with a new outfit or wear high heels if you’re not used to them.

* On entering the room, smile at the panel (they should be ashamed if they don’t smile at you!) They will want you to do your best. It is unprofessional for conservatoire panels to make insensitive comments about your playing.
* Demonstrate an understanding of context of your music by pronouncing the names and composers of your pieces correctly. Tune carefully, quickly and quietly, to the piano in the room.
* Don’t be disconcerted if you don’t play everything, the panel may want to talk to you for longer.
* They are looking for potential and temperament – not a completed artist. Engage and interest the panel, keeping your performance fresh, with a wide dynamic range and sense of changes of mood and colour.
* Maintain musical interest in your repertoire - it is easy to slide into staleness. Avoid this! Try to demonstrate an interest in conveying the intentions of a composer and a love for the medium in which you are working. Panels can differentiate between mishaps caused by nerves, and elements of playing that are undeveloped.
* The interview questions may be about your performance and to see how good your critical faculties are. Think about this is advance.

 Adam Gorb, RNCM Head of Composition, gives the following additional advice to aspiring composers:

* Do send properly bound and clearly marked scores.
* Do keep scores separate from each other. Don’t bind the complete submission together.
* Don’t send loose sheets of paper.
* Don’t put paper or scores in a plastic folder.
* Recordings should be on CD and have the titles of the works clearly indicated.
* Please remember to put your name on every score and CD.
* At the audition do be positive, exude enthusiasm for the music you love and a curiosity for the music you would like to know about. Above all you must show a total commitment to composition way beyond anything you may have done for A level.
* Don’t be negative, arrogant, self pitying or unspecific (‘I love every kind of music’ never goes down well.)
* Don’t admit or show an over reliance on technology (‘Working on Sibelius made things a lot easier’ is another no-no.)

You should not feel pressurised at interview to say where you intend to take up a place, but do say if the place you are auditioning is genuinely your first choice