

Preparing for University Auditions

A Guide to the Audition Process

NICOLA LOGHRIN, JUNE 2014

Abstract

This document was created as an aid for Canadian students who are contemplating auditioning for music at the university level. After completing university auditions for the 2013-2014 season I wanted to take time to reflect on my own experiences by creating a step-by-step guide for students that outlined the university audition process. This document is a compilation of guidance from teachers, students and my own experiences throughout the audition year. I would like to thank Céline Cascanette (McGill), Jonathan Chambers (UBC), Taryn Chesson (Western), Alicia Gauvreau (Laurier), Vivien Kong (GGS) and Emma Wallace (U of T) for their contributions to the document. Special thanks to my music teachers Brennan Connolly, Steve Surian, and Jane Schultz-Janzen for helping me to prepare for my own auditions and for editing and contributing to this project.

Years Before

PREPARATION

- Private instruction is essential at least 1-2 years prior to your audition(s)

It is important to find a teacher for your instrument who has been through the university audition process themselves and who can help you to prepare for your audition(s)

- Private instruction in music theory is also recommended

RESEARCH

- Attend as many open houses/tours/webcasts as possible and take tours of university campuses
- Consider which school(s) would be the best match for you considering your instrument/program and narrow down your choices
- Research scholarship opportunities

Ask your guidance councilor for scholarships information and visit studentawards.com and scholarshipscanada.com for more Canadian scholarships

REPERTOIRE/REQUIREMENTS

Each university has a list of repertoire, theory prerequisites and any other requirements for music auditions on their website. The requirements are different for each university program and instrument.

- In conjunction with your private teacher, choose contrasting repertoire that fits the requirements and covers a variety of styles/eras/languages
- It is important to choose your repertoire well in advance to ensure that you have enough time to learn, practice and perfect your pieces
- If you are doing multiple auditions, choose repertoire that you can use for more than one audition so that you have fewer pieces to learn
- Monitor university websites on a regular basis as requirements/info can change at any time without warning
- Most university theory entrance exams test at the advanced rudiments level, aim to have advanced rudiments completed before the audition season

Possible Audition Requirements

- excerpts
- interview(s)
- reference letter(s)
- composition portfolio
- letter of intent/essay(s)
- music questionnaire
- resume
- repertoire list
- theory exam(s)
- ear training
- accompanists
- audition/accompanist fee(s)

PRACTICE

- If possible, plan a lighter high school schedule for your last year so that you have as much time as possible to prepare for auditions
- Consider taking courses that you think you will benefit from as a musician such as business and physics
- Research the prerequisites for entering the university music program

At most Canadian universities you must have an average of at least 70% and you must have at least an 80% in grade 12 university level English to be accepted into the music faculty

When practicing, practice efficiently and with purpose

- Do not focus solely on repertoire, spend lots of time on scales/technique and sight reading
- Remember to always play with good tone
- Know all major, natural minor, harmonic minor and melodic minor scales, arpeggios and dominant sevenths from memory
- Practice sight-reading
- Listen to recordings of your audition pieces and lots of other music written specifically for your instrument

Months Before

LESSON WITH A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

- Sometime before your audition try to schedule a private lesson with your potential university professor
- Having a lesson will allow you to meet the professor, learn more about the music program and help you to prepare for your audition

APPLICATIONS

- Apply via OUAC at least 1 month before the deadline to leave time to submit additional requirements
- In addition to applying you must make sure that you have submitted all of the additional audition materials to each University before the OUAC deadline
- Save a copy of all emails and documents from your applications
- If you are required to submit reference letters, follow up with your referees to make sure that all documents have been submitted
- Parts of your application may have to be sent by mail, so be sure to leave yourself enough time and use express shipping if needed
- If your program requires you to send a video for prescreening it may need to be sent before the OUAC deadline
- To book an audition and access the audition application, create an account using your OUAC ID on the university websites
- If you live more than 400km away, a recorded audition will usually be accepted however, a live audition is recommended
- In most cases you will not be emailed the audition/additional requirements info, it will be on the website
- Some websites are difficult to navigate so leave yourself enough time to complete applications carefully
- Find out audition and theory exam dates, locations, and times and make sure none overlap

BOOKING AUDITIONS

- Booking auditions generally happens online but some universities may ask you to mail in an audition form and cheque
- Book early to get your preferred date
- Your audition fee is paid directly to the university, it is not covered in your OUAC fee
- Check if you need to hire an accompanist (the price for an accompanist varies)
- Consider what time you would like your audition to be. What time of day do you perform best?
- Pick weekend dates where possible, especially if you need to travel far to get to your audition
- If a school has not sent you an audition date within 3 weeks of booking, contact them directly
- Reply to the email confirmation for all of your auditions

PREPARE, PERFORM, PERFECT

- Research the history/background of your pieces
- Play your pieces for your high school music teachers and private teachers and get feedback
- Perform as much as possible in front of friends, family etc.
- If possible, start practicing with your accompanist
- Record your practice sessions and reflect on weaknesses and strengths in your playing
- Practice being interviewed: create a list of possible interview questions, have someone ask them to you

Weeks Before

PRACTICE ROUTINE

- Continue with your regular practice routine
- It is important not to over play, you could potentially get an injury
- If you start to feel particularly sore, take a break and come back to practicing hours or days later

ORGANIZATION

- Make sure that all components of your application have been submitted
- Be aware of your audition and theory exam dates, times and locations/directions
- Contact each university to confirm if and when you may use a practice room on the day of your audition
- See if it is possible to rehearse with your accompanist before your audition
- Keep the faculty's contact info on you at all times (most universities respond faster by email than phone)
- Create repertoire booklets for the audition panel (some universities may ask for original copies)
- Include a cover page which lists repertoire, composer/arranger and publisher
- Take time to make photocopies that are legible and that look professional
- A list of past performed repertoire may be required, make a list of your best/most difficult pieces

Days Before

REVIEW

- Develop a good practice routine
- Review all difficult passages in your pieces
- Practice in the clothes and shoes that you are going to wear to your audition, make sure you feel comfortable and look professional
- Continue to perform for others and to record your practice sessions

The Day Of

BEFORE THE AUDITION

- Make sure you have everything that you need (see audition checklist)
 - There is a chance that you may not have access to a practice space, be sure to warm up before your audition
 - Arrive approximately 1 hour before your audition time, and sign in at the auditions table
 - If time permits, run your pieces with your accompanist
 - Note: you will not always be able to practice with an accompanist before your audition
 - Music students from the faculty will likely be there to answer any questions and to lead you around campus
 - Warm up/play your pieces in the practice room (do not over play, save your energy for the audition)

Audition checklist:

- ✓ instrument
- ✓ music/photocopies
- ✓ photo ID
- ✓ OUAC Number
- ✓ Extra copies of your application documents
- ✓ pencils/erasers for theory exam
- ✓ water/food

DURING THE AUDITION

- Relax, smile, and be confident
- Greet the panel, provide them with a copy of the music you will be performing
- Take time to get set up, do not rush to start
- Show the panel what you are capable of

Performance

- Play with good tone, correct notes, and good intonation
- Play steady and correct rhythm
- Follow all articulation markings
- Play with steady time, subdivide, feel the pulse
- Play with emotion
- Play with good dynamics
- Phrase with motion

INTERVIEW

- Keep your answers brief but informative
- The panel will have copies of the documents that you have already submitted, questions could be asked regarding your letter of intent, reference letters etc.
- Give them information about your musical background
- What separates you from other musicians?
- *Have questions prepared to ask the panel about their music program*

AFTER THE AUDITION

- Reflect on what you did well and what you can improve on for the next audition
- Explore the campus, talk to students/teachers, see if it is possible to take a tour

Sample Interview Questions:

- How many years have you been playing your instrument?
- Who are you studying with?
- What is your current level of theory?
- What grade are you in for piano?
- What music do you listen to?
- What ensembles are you a part of?
- What concerts have you performed in?
- What concerts have you attended
- What are your hobbies other than music?
- What courses are you taking?
- What is your average?
- Why would you like to study music in university?
- What is your top university and why?

Choosing a University to Attend

ASK QUESTIONS

- Get in touch with students/professors/alumni to ask any additional questions that you might have regarding the program
- Make a list of pros and cons for each University

WHAT TO CONSIDER

- Performance opportunities
- Program size
- Courses
- Teachers
- Ensembles
- Private lesson time
- Housing
- Special services
- Facilities
- Practice space
- Concert halls
- Medical plans
- Bus pass
- Residence
- Location
- Scholarships/Financial Aid
- Tuition