

## Performing Under Pressure – Tips for a Successful Audition

---

Technical Sgt. Kris Westrich, Cornet, Concert Band  
The United States Air Force Band, Washington, D.C.

---

Auditioning for a professional musical ensemble is often seen as an extremely intimidating process; one that requires technical and artistic perfection beyond the measure of one's normal means. This notion is often so heavily emphasized to students that the audition process becomes less of a musical interview and more of a psychological mind game. In my personal experience, overcoming the mental aspect was key to becoming a successful professional.

I think it's a pretty common problem at auditions to get overly worked up: To detract from one's abilities by adding extra pressure to be perfect. I had a bad case of the *perfectionist bug* at auditions, especially in my first few. The added weight of wanting every note to be perfect (the right sound, in tune, in time, worrying about breathing) took away from the big picture of the music. It wasn't until I sat on a couple of audition committees that a few light bulbs really went off:

- Good playing is good playing. Minor discrepancies are forgivable
- Missed notes happen! Recovering well from an error can be something that works in your favor
- Remember that the committee can always ask you to repeat an excerpt.

- The committee is on your side!  
They are looking for reasons to hire you, not to dismiss you.
- The big picture is what counts.  
Micromanaging your playing should be reserved for the practice room
- Auditions are a performance not to be analyzed until completed
- Attitude can make a huge difference in your performance. Nervousness and confidence can both be felt from behind a screen.

While false confidence could be the biggest audition killer, true faith in one's abilities is necessary for success. I always find that my preparation is either my biggest ally or my biggest enemy. So it's really simple: be so prepared, that there is no room for nerves! Certainly great preparation is extremely variable person to person, but I know that a couple of months of true diligence and study can greatly add to one's confidence. Conversely, unpreparedness always makes me nervous. The last thing to consider is that a poor audition is not the end of the world. Some of the best musicians in the world who hold huge positions in major organizations took many auditions before hitting their big break.

Remember that the harshest critic of your playing is yourself. Practice hard, practice smart, and good luck!