

Making Audition Recordings

With full-time orchestras attracting hundreds of applicants for one position, many applicants are asked to make a recording either for admittance or in lieu of a preliminary round. There are many reasons for this; the most prominent being that time is money. Most orchestras pay their musicians to listen to auditions. The ones that don't are more likely to severely limit the numbers they will hear. For most orchestras, using recorded auditions to screen applicants can save many hours. For major orchestras, most applicants who belong to ICSOM (International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians) orchestras are invited. All others are either rejected or asked to make a recording. There are, of course, orchestras that will listen to all applicants but this is rare, and often committees for these orchestras will listen to much less music from each candidate in the preliminary rounds to keep things moving. Alternately, they may use several different committees to listen to prelim rounds held in various spaces the same day (as with a recent Montreal Symphony audition). If your resume is not accepted and you are not invited to make a recording, the best thing you can do is to have a professional who knows your playing to call and speak to the section leader and/or the personnel manager on your behalf. My resume was rejected for what became my first job, so I asked my teacher at the time to call. His reputation and word were good enough to get an invitation.

In the Boston Symphony, the recorded round is taken very seriously. A large percentage of current orchestra members were required to make recordings before being accepted as applicants for their auditions. Recording requirements usually consist of 4 or 5 of the most standard excerpts and will cover contrasting styles. These requirements are usually sent out with at least a month's notice, so that applicants have time to make representative recordings.

After the recordings are received, they are numbered for anonymity and heard by the entire audition committee (usually 9-12 people) but not the music director. Here and in many places the music director won't arrive to listen to the auditions until the semi finals or finals. In the BSO, the current policy is to listen to the recordings all at once, behind closed doors on high quality stereo equipment. If one person on the committee feels the recording shows enough promise to merit a live audition, the applicant is accepted. If a candidate's recording is not accepted by the committee, the BSO has an appeal process through which the candidate might still gain an invitation for a live audition. Those who were invited by their recordings (or through the appeals process) will be in the same group of preliminary live auditions with those that are accepted by the strength of their resume, so how one gets to the preliminaries is unknown to the committee. Likewise, if you send a recording that is not accepted, because the recordings are anonymous, it will have no detrimental effect other than not being invited to audition.

What are committees looking for from a recording? It really depends with whom you speak. Some look for perfection. Some look for good fundamentals, style, and/or sound. The fairest way would be to require a recording that was a complete run-through of the

material with no editing. However with modern equipment capable of such sophisticated editing, enforcing this kind of rule would be next to impossible. So we are left with this system. Does it need to be perfect (no missed or cracked notes)? For the most part, yes (it does depend on the committee, of course). If it isn't there will always be someone on the committee that says, "Well, this person should have just spent more time on their recording." Sound unreasonable? OF COURSE IT IS!! The solution: start early and record often. Make the recording show the best/most accurate portrait of your playing. That may mean that your recording has a couple of chipped notes. Yes, it should be the best representation of your playing possible, but don't go crazy about it. If you aren't sure if the quality is high enough, play it for your teacher.

After listening to a recorded round for a BSO audition recently, several things came to light. The first excerpt started with a very basic arpeggio followed by a lyrical line that is traditionally played in tempo. If that first arpeggio was out of tune or the rhythm suspect, I found it very hard to vote for that candidate. However, if the fundamentals were good in the first excerpt, I almost always voted for their recording. Out of the 48 recorded auditions, 10 were advanced to the preliminary round.

New York Philharmonic Second Trumpet audition

After I got my job with the Kennedy Center, as it was an ICSOM orchestra, I wasn't asked to make a recording for any audition until in the summer of 2007, when I applied for the second trumpet position in the New York Philharmonic. This recording was in lieu of a preliminary round. I received my packet of materials from them in July and the recording was not due until early September. I was uncertain if my schedule would allow me to attend the semi-finals if my recording was accepted, but I decided to do it anyway. It was illuminating.

The required music was as follows:

Bitsch Etude #5 on B-flat trumpet,
Charlier Etude #2 on C trumpet,
Bartok - Concerto for Orchestra tpt. 2: mvt 5 201-248 and 549-573
Strauss - Don Quixote tpt. 2 #3- 5 before #4, 3 after 77 to three before 78.
Stravinsky - Petrouchka (1947) the piccolo trumpet solo at the end - both first
second parts combined.

I began work for the recording in my practice room three weeks before I had to leave for a European tour, the departure for which was a week before the recording deadline. I was performing a regular schedule of concerts with the BSO at Tanglewood and looked at my schedule to find times when I might record. I would be able to get into either the Shed or Ozawa Hall (two large performance spaces with good acoustics) only late at night and often after concerts. This was not the most ideal situation, but I thought if I gave myself enough time and scheduled enough sessions, this would be ok. Starting with this first step is critical - if you wait too long, available spaces can be hard to come by at the last minute. Of course, you don't need a great concert hall in which to make your recording -

just a big space with some reverberation. Your living room should be a LAST resort (think about how you sound in a nice room compared with a small room).

My plan was to start recording after around a week of preparation. It is extremely important to make sure you know the music well before recording – trying to work out issues while recording makes it nearly impossible to get good recorded material. In the first week, I spent most of my practice time cleaning up the Bitsch Etude and realized that this and the Charlier would be the most challenging to record. They would require the most time and endurance. I checked the other excerpts for rhythm and intonation by playing them through once and listening back on the recorder to see if I was off. I noted that in the long slow Strauss excerpt I was rushing the time in the long notes. I came to find the method of listening first to rhythm and fixing that first was the most effective way to start on the excerpts. Often, fixing the time made the phrases seem longer and smoother.

You don't necessarily need a professional recording engineer for this type of project. With the user-friendly equipment available now (mine cost a total of \$500); you might spend less on this equipment than on the engineer. Even if the equipment costs more than the engineer, what you gain in convenience of scheduling will more than make up the difference in price. The recorder that got me through many solo competitions in school and which helped me to prepare for auditions later was a Sony portable DAT recorder. Newer machines that use flash card technology have a simple interface with computers so you can arrange the music into tracks and burn to CD. I bought the Edirol R-09 and just used my old small Sony ECM 909 microphone with a 20-foot chord. As I would be recording late at night, I wanted to be able to do the whole thing myself. I had only two schedules to deal with – mine and the concert hall's. After some experimenting, I set the microphone so that it was about 8 feet in the air. The microphone cable would lead to the recorder which would sit directly adjacent to my chair (about ten feet from the microphone) – I could easily hit record and stop without walking across the room. This set-up seemed to capture a true sound with some reverberation from the room, while retaining a good amount of clarity. If you record in a room that is not so live, experimenting with moving the microphone closer or farther is worth the time. I made no effort to point my bell away from the microphone but tried to be consistent in the way I pointed (this also didn't matter as the NY Phil dictated that the recording should be recorded in mono).

When it was time to record, I had to decide what material to record based on how fresh I felt. Often, after concerts, I would be tired, so I spent that time recording the lower and easier excerpts. For sessions in which I recorded either the end of the Bartok or Petrouchka (the higher and more physically demanding excerpts), I would do the easier excerpts in the breaks. When I recorded the Charlier etude, (which is almost 4 minutes long) getting through it and sounding fresh after an orchestra service was tough. The take that I eventually used was recorded early in the morning.

The general pattern of my sessions would be to record an excerpt a few times, taking notes each time, and then go back and listen. The ones that were off rhythmically or in

some other way obviously flawed, I erased. There is no point in recording many takes if you get it right the first time. The good takes were saved to be heard again later when a final decision might be made. The goal was to have a short list of 5 or 6 takes per excerpt and choose from them later.

After about a week of recording sessions, I had a few options for all the material on the list, (and enough time to re-record anything that wasn't adequate). I sat down with the music in hand and the list of decent takes. For the etudes I had about three or four options each. I should pause to say that there were more than a few instances where I would start the etude and get two or three lines into it and stop, having made too many errors. Knowing when to stop is important. If you play a wrong note or have a huge clam near the beginning of the piece, stop the tape! If it is pretty good, let it roll and see what happens. With the shorter excerpts I went through them many times to make sure they sounded right to me. For those, I had more like six or seven options to choose from.

After listening to the different excerpts on my list, I found that I would need to re-record a couple of excerpts and the Charlier etude. This took place over the next five days. When I had everything recorded, I had about 45 tracks on my recorder. (Keep in mind that there were many tracks I had already deleted.) It is always better to have more options than not enough. I felt satisfied I had made a good recording and sent it off the next day. After I returned from Europe, I found that I had been invited to the semifinals with a half dozen or so other players. I wasn't able to attend the audition but I am glad I took the time to make the recording.

In summation, the most important thing in making a good recording is not to wait until the last minute to record it. In talking with students and young professional players, I find that almost across the board, they take far less time to make their recordings than I. Record in a good space on good equipment. Do not try to learn the music in your recording sessions – you should know how you want things to sound at that point. Take your time and make sure that the basics of performance are strong in the recording: good rhythm, intonation, sound, and articulation. Get the recording to the orchestra before the deadline and assume that it will be given full consideration.

Allegro (♩ = 112)

5

f *staccato*

f

mf *cresc.* *f*

dim. *mf* *p*

cresc. *f*

(f) *p* *mf*

poco f *f*

f

Allegretto (M. M. 84 = ♩)

mf

p *f* *p* *mf* *cresc.*

p *Meno mosso* *dolce*

poco rit. *sous forme de récit*

poco rit. espressivo string.

cresc. *p*

rit. *mf* *retenir peu a peu*

sostenuto *p* *ad lib.* *mf* *Trillez avec 1^{er} et 2^e et 3^e*

* Voir G. BALAY: N^{os} 4-8-13; A. CHAVANNE: N^o 23; ARBAN: N^{os} 2-8-12; A. PETIT: N^{os} 4-8

2nd TRUMPET in C

Tranquillo

3 **148** 1 6 **155** 1 5 **161** *hd* etc.

più f

8 **171** 1 3 **175** 1 7 **183** 1 *1st Vln.* *Poco rall.* *Accel.* **188**

196 *al Tempo I (Presto)*

7 *1st Vln.*

201 *f*

211 8 *1st Trpt.* **221** *f*

231 *più f* *più f*

238 **244** *ff* **249** *ff*

Poco meno mosso **256** 1 **TACET** **349**

2 **356** 1 8 **365** 1 3 1 *1st Hn.*

370 1 1 *1st Vln.* *Trb.* **378** *Trb.*

Tempo I (Presto) **384** 1 9 **394** 1 7 **402** 1 *Hns.*

p *mf* **408** 3 **413** *f* *f* *ff*

3 *1st Vln.*

2nd TRUMPET in C

418 *ff* 426 6

433 1 7 441 1 7 Ist Vln. 449 *Tranquillo* 2 457 1 7

Sempre più tranquillo 3 468 1 1 475 1 6 482 1 6 489 1

8 498 1 9 508 con sord. 515

3 1 1 525 7 533 1 6 Ist Vln. pp

senza sord. 1 543 1 4 549

Lo stesso tempo, ma pesante 556 568

3 562 1 3 568

573 1 5 579 1 7 587 1 3 Ist Vln.

594 2 600 1 * 602 606

602 Alternative ending: accel. al tempo ff 609 6

621 625

* Instead of the original ending, the following alternative may be played from bar 602

Don Quixote.

Aufführungsrecht vorbehalten.

2. Trompete.

Richard Strauss, Op. 35.

in D.

Introduction.
Mässiges Zeitmass.

The musical score for the 2nd Trumpet part includes the following annotations and performance instructions:

- Staff 1:** *stacc.*, *2MP* (circled), *Hoboe I.*, *2*, *4*
- Staff 2:** *pp*, *mit Dämpfer.* (circled), *etwas lebhafter*, *3*, *2MP* (circled), *3*, *4*, *11*, *11*
- Staff 3:** *etwas zurückhaltend*, *früheres Zeitmass.*, *ff*, *4*, *10*, *2*
- Staff 4:** *1*, *3*, *5*, *I.*
- Staff 5:** *Hoboe.*, *6*, *10*, *mit Dämpfer.* (circled), *mf*, *ff*
- Staff 6:** *ff*, *3*, *mit Dämpfer.* (circled), *8*, *in F.*, *mf*, *5*
- Staff 7:** *in F. mit Dämpfer.* (circled), *9*, *4*, *2 Tromp. in D.*, *mf*, *ff*
- Staff 8:** *in D. ohne Dämpfer.* (circled), *10*, *f*, *dim.*, *f*, *11*, *14*, *14*, *dim.*, *pp*, *DLM* (circled)

2. Trompete.

Handwritten musical score for 2. Trompete, page 5. The score consists of ten staves of music with various performance instructions and markings.

- Staff 1:** Musical notation with triplets and dynamic markings *resc.* and *f*. A handwritten mark \downarrow is above the staff.
- Staff 2:** Musical notation with triplets and dynamic markings *f* and *ff*.
- Staff 3:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *fff*, *f*, and *ff*. Includes the instruction "69 beinahe doppelt so langsam" and a circled "ff".
- Staff 4:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *fff*, *f*, and *mf*. Includes the instruction "70".
- Staff 5:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *mf*, *dim.*, and *mf*. Includes the instruction "71".
- Staff 6:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *mf* and *dim.*. Includes the instruction "72 73 Bass-Clar.".
- Staff 7:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *f*, *ms*, *dim.*, and *p*. Includes the instruction "74 ohne Dämpfer." and a circled "mf".
- Staff 8:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *mf*, *pp*, and *p*. Includes the instruction "75 Engl. Clar." and "Bello Solo.".
- Staff 9:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *pp*, *mf*, *pp*, and *mf*. Includes the instruction "76 in D Solo." and "Signale. Sehr ruhig."
- Staff 10:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *pp*, *mf*, and *pp*. Includes the instruction "77 I. in D hervortretend, sehr gebunden" and "Solo".
- Staff 11:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *pp* and *f*. Includes the instruction "78 Bello Solo." and "zurückhaltend".
- Staff 12:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *pp* and *pp*. Includes the instruction "79 sehr ruhig".
- Staff 13:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *pp* and *pp*. Includes the instruction "80 81" and "82 Clar. I. in B."
- Staff 14:** Musical notation with dynamic markings *pp* and *pp*. Includes the instruction "Clar. I." and "39".