

Tips for Musical Auditions

By: Michael Tan

Working with an audition pianist is a skill and an art. It tells the audition panel how prepared and professional you are. Here are some tips to make your musical audition smoother.

Before the Audition

1. Make sure your music is completely copied.
 - Check to see that the bass line is complete at the bottom of the page.
 - Reduce standard-sized music books to 93% to fit on 8.5"x11" paper.
2. If the music is an excerpt, write the song's title, show and composer at the top to give the pianist a quick reference.
3. Make sure the music is in your key. Do not assume the pianist can sight transpose.
4. Pay attention to the difficulty of the music. Musicaltheatresongs.com (subscription site) assigns difficulty levels from 1 to 5. If the song is above a 3 and you don't know the pianist, pick something else. Be careful with songs by Jason Robert Brown and Stephen Sondheim.
5. Mark up your music for the accompanist. Clearly designate
 - Where to begin.
 - Do you want a measure or two of accompaniment before you start singing? Mark where you want the pianist to start.
 - Do you just want a bell tone (single note on your starting pitch) because you start *a cappella* then the pianist joins you? Mark it and tell the pianist.
 - Do you want your starting pitch before you sing (try not to do this unless you are beginning *a cappella*)?
 - Where to end.
 - Any place the tempo changes (*rit.*, *rall.*, *ten.*, *a tempo*). This is especially important if your interpretation is different than the markings in the score or well-known commercial recordings.
 - Any key changes or meter changes. Simply highlighting the new key signature or meter will help the pianist.
 - Try to erase or minimize technique or other markings that could distract the pianist. It can also signal your weak places, and I've paid attention to them.

The easier it is for a pianist to quickly read your music, the better they can play for you.

6. Be prepared to give the pianist the tempo of the piece. Singing a phrase is helpful. Avoid snapping your fingers or tapping your feet.
7. Have music that will
 - Stay open and upright.
 - Nothing is worse than music that changes pages or closes by itself and cannot stand up by itself.
 - If you have a photocopy, put it in a folder or binder so that the music will stay in one place and be easy to turn.
 - NEVER bring in a stack of loose pages – it's a recipe for disaster. More than 3 pages and the accompanist is juggling pages quickly. They tend to end up on the floor out of order.
 - Avoid staples. If one comes loose during a quick page turn, there could be blood.
 - Sheet protectors should be non-glare; I've had trouble reading music in bad or harsh lighting.
 - Minimize page turns.
 - 2 or 3 pages can be taped together or taped into a file folder so that the accompanist does not have to turn a page.
 - Double-sided copying is best. If you cannot do that, tape pages together so they are back-to-back.
 - If the piece is an even number of pages, photocopy so the first page is on the backside of a page and then double-sided after that. It reduces the number of page turns.

At the Audition

1. Approach the pianist first
 - unless instructed to do otherwise OR
 - you have not already given the panel your resume and headshot – do that first.
2. Have your music open to the correct page.
3. If you have a tablet, make sure it is unlocked and ready to go. Test to make sure that the pages turn correctly.
4. Hand the pianist your music and introduce yourself while you are doing it.

5. Ask if they are familiar with the piece and if they would like a tempo. If you are taking the song at an unusual tempo, definitely give them your tempo. Singing a short section will be helpful so the pianist gets a feel for the tempo and style of the music.
6. Point out anything odd – a quick key change or time signature change, if you speed up or slow down in places (these should be marked clearly in the music).
7. If you are going to start singing before the pianist plays, remember to ask for the starting pitch (bell tone) unless you have perfect pitch. Mark that in the music too (especially if your music is after your monologue).
8. If you are singing and doing a monologue, tell the pianist the order. If the music is after the monologue, write in a cue line at the top of the first page that will signal when you are finishing your monologue. That will save time in the transition to singing.
9. Do NOT rush. The time does not start until you slate. Take your time and get it right.
10. If something goes wrong, do not react. Do not glare at the pianist or roll your eyes. The audition panel is smart enough to know what is happening. They will be watching to see how you react. Things go wrong in performances all the time and the mettle and professionalism of an actor is crucial in those moments. Do not say anything negative about the pianist until you are in your car. People pay attention and roles have been lost over less.
11. Remember to get your music and thank the accompanist.