

HELPING STUDENTS PREPARE FOR MUSIC AUDITIONS

If you achieve a place you have come through a rigorous and exacting test – a microcosm of a career in music!

Congratulations!

CUKAS (Conservatoires UK Admissions Service) applicants will normally need to have auditions before the conservatoires can make their decisions. Following a recent comment from an adviser that some schools and colleges are not very familiar with CUKAS, we were prompted to include an article about preparing for auditions.

Jo Cole, Deputy Head of Strings at Royal Northern College of Music offers the following helpful advice you may want to pass on to any of your students who are applying to CUKAS conservatoires.

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 and 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 conservatoire(s) to give you an idea of the building and what to expect.

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 essential, 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 practise! 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 in advance.
- 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 for is genuinely your first choice.

