

Creating a Successful Audition CD

The purpose of the following information is to help you record a quality audition CD for National Youth Band of Canada. The information has been divided into different topics in order to facilitate specific focus in these areas of the auditioning process. All of the information, hints and tips have come from music educators, university professors, and past participants of the National Youth Band.

Helpful Hints for all Instruments

1. Read all of the instructions well ahead of time and do what you can to follow all instructions as closely as possible.
2. Write down the date that the audition CD is due. Depending on where you have to mail the audition, plan to be finished at least 5 days before the final deadline.
3. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. Do not start the process of recording until you feel confident that you have mastered both the scales and etudes required of the audition. Scales are just as important as the etudes.
4. **Start early!** Give yourself several weeks to practice and prepare for the audition.
5. Begin the recording process well in advance of the deadline. Give yourself time to try again if you are not satisfied with the previous attempt. Keep a copy of your first attempt. Many students have recorded over that first attempt only to find that it was their best one!
6. It's a good idea to have a teacher or friend at the recording session to start/stop the recording or add track marks as you go. They could also keep a list of the tracks and make brief notes on the track (even just a checkmark beside the track you want to keep may save a lot of time when putting the final recording together).
7. Do not talk on the recording.
8. Be sure to WARM UP and TUNE CAREFULLY before recording. Make sure you tune to the piano if using one as your accompaniment.
9. Do not try to record in one sitting. Things will only become worse as you get frustrated! (You WILL become frustrated!). Stop and try again the next day.
10. Be sure to listen to the entire final product before handing it in. Make sure there is no talking, background noise, or extra material on the CD.

What the Adjudicator is Listening For

1. TONE (Beauty, Control, Characteristic Timbre, Volume, Embouchure)

Remember – Your sound is the first thing that an adjudicator judges. They will be listening for the clear, rich tone that is characteristic of your instrument. They will also be judging how well you control that tone in the different registers and at different dynamic levels.

2. INTONATION

This is your ability to play in tune. The adjudicator will be listening to your intonation in all registers, moving from one note to another, especially in large intervals, and intonation with piano (if you use one as accompaniment).

3. RHYTHMIC ACCURACY (Precision, Meter, Accents, Interpretation)

Be exact. Hold out the long notes long enough. Pay attention to details such as holding a whole note for 4 beats, holding the 4th beat over to the 1st beat of the next bar. Make sure your eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and triplets are precise, steady and even. There should absolutely be no question as to what your intentions are rhythmically! Double check and practice your timing with a metronome.

4. INTERPRETATION (Phrasing, Expression, Tempo, Dynamics, Style)

Here, the adjudicator will be interested in how musically you play. This will be determined by how much expression you use, how well you understand the style of the etude, the range of dynamic levels you can control and how well you understand the construction of the melodic lines and phrases. Aim for contrast in dynamics and style. Even when you are playing scales, make them musical and not just technical exercises.

5. TECHNIQUE (Accuracy, Facility, Articulation, Breathing)

It goes without saying you should play all of the right notes and rhythms. Although the adjudicator will not be able to see specific fingering you are using, they can tell how much agility and how much control you have by listening to how smoothly and evenly you play. Check out the possibility of alternate fingerings if you are having difficulties. Make sure that you play all marked articulations and dynamics. Mark in your breathing.

The Importance of Scales

Well prepared and polished scales are imperative to the success of your audition CD. It is important that you do not simply play the scales with technical precision, but that you play them musically as well. Doing so will leave a great first impression of your musicality and ability to the adjudicator. Some hints for preparing and recording your scales are:

1. Practice to achieve your top speed, but remember that accuracy and evenness is more important than speed. Do not record scales faster than you are able to play them evenly and accurately.
2. Read the directions carefully – Show your ability to play different articulation patterns by playing each scale with a different articulation.
3. Play scales at a healthy dynamic. A louder (but still controlled) dynamic will sound more confident and strong. It will also help remind you to use a fast, supported airstream. (If the air is not there your sound will suffer as will the consistency throughout the registers/octaves).

4. Play with a rich full tone on every single note and focus on clean and tasteful attacks and releases.
5. Practice with a tuner to ensure that every single note of the scale is in tune. Adjust with your embouchure as necessary.
6. Practice your scales with a metronome challenging yourself to play at faster speeds every single day.
Playing scales evenly and accurately is like building muscles at the gym – consistency every single day is how you will reach the most success. When it comes to recording day, only play as fast as you can evenly and musically.

Choosing Solo/Etude

When choosing music to play for your audition, you want to be sure that you are highlighting both your technical abilities, as well as your ability to play lyrically and beautifully. Therefore your choice should consist of music that shows off both of these skills. Some other tips:

1. Look carefully at the range of notes in both the pieces of music you choose. Ensure that the music you chose covers not only your mid range, but also your high range and low range. Auditioners will be listening to hear if you can play in tune at the top and the bottom of your range! Push yourself to play higher and lower than you think you can, but work to play in tune always in whatever the range.
2. Choose a piece of music that shows off fast technique. Not only is it important that you can show off playing fast, but more importantly is that you can play evenly with all the correct notes and rhythms! If you find yourself playing wrong notes – SLOW DOWN in your practice until they are all correct.
3. Choose a piece of music that shows off your tone and musicality. A piece of music or etude with long notes, slurs, ties, and large range would be a good contrast. Speed is not important in this selection. Here the adjudicator is narrowing their listening to your musicality. More specifically they will be listening to dynamics, articulations, use of vibrato, sensitivity to attacks and releases, timing, use of rubato, and presence of emotion in your playing.
4. Remember to always apply musicality, expression and technique to any piece of music you choose – adjudicators will be listening for dynamics and musicality in a fast piece and for evenness and good technique in a slow piece as well!
5. Choose music that shows off your strengths. Know what you are best at, and choose music that will help you show that off.

Recording Tips

1. As you listen to the tracks, keep a list of each one and make comments about the performance. This will save time when selecting the track you want to use (and if there are many takes it will help you choose the best one)

2. If possible, recruit help from another person to help out on recording days. They will not only be able to press the start and stop button for you, but will help with organizing tracks, and supporting you with opinions and support!
3. Use fresh batteries; you do not want to find out that your batteries died mid-session!
4. In terms of choosing equipment to use, a high quality recording device is preferable but a computer program and laptop can be fine as long as you use a good microphone.
5. Use a room with some resonance (not all carpet and curtains). Usually the kitchen is a good place at home to do it.
6. Place your recording device about 5 to 10 feet in front of you so that the sound is clear, (not distant) and also bring in a bit of the room's acoustic reverb so that it doesn't sound too 'dry'.

How to Stand Out On Your Recording

When auditioning for a band, we know that there are other musicians auditioning for the same spot in the band. Therefore it is important to stand out in your recording! The following is a list of ideas and suggestions from successful participants of the National Youth Band of Canada on how to accomplish that:

1. The best auditions to listen to are the ones that show the player has plenty of confidence and commitment, and can also make the most of the music they are playing. Keep in mind that the NYB adjudicators are looking for the best musicians, not just the best flute, tuba, clarinet player.
2. You must be confident and organized!
3. **Know** your music. This goes beyond notes, rhythms, markings, tempo, performance practise, etc... It is not a live audition and you have the opportunity to redo anything you wish, and so your adjudicators will be less forgiving of mistakes than in a live audition. Just as with any performance, music is all about communication and is a means of self-expression. Showing who you are as an instrumentalist, a musician and a person is more important than what is on the page (the page is just the first step). Take ownership of your music. Think about what you want to “say” and how to say it (dynamics, phrasing, colours, emphasis, etc...). Be sure this comes across as you listen to your recording. This is what will set your playing apart from the crowd.
4. When playing portions of a piece or excerpts, omit long rests (and possibly long accompaniment sections—choose sections that feature your instrument, if uncertain, ask a teacher to help you choose what you should include/omit).
5. Record with an accompanist. It helps you play with more expression, dynamics and in tune.
6. Play like you're right
7. Play the music as if you were telling a story to someone. Each note leads to the next and is part of the whole just like each letter of a word is part of a sentence that makes up paragraphs that make up the whole story.

8. If you're struggling through a piece, take a break, get a drink of water, calm your thoughts and then try it again. Be positive!

Submitting/Mailing Your Audition

1. Read the directions!!!
2. Make sure you have included your application. Be sure that all the information requested is filled out and is legible.
3. Mark your CD Jacket, not the CD.
4. Include music, with recorded sections marked. Music submitted will not be returned!
5. Be sure to include your check/money order made out to the Canadian Band association for your audition fees.
6. Be sure to have your audition postmarked on or before the specified date on the application.