

Clemson University Symphony Orchestra

HOW TO PREPARE AN EXCERPT FOR YOUR AUDITION

Preparing an orchestral excerpt is different from other types of practicing. Because of this, it allows an audition committee to see a bit deeper into your potential for being successful in the orchestra, in addition to playing a great solo. Below are some ideas for preparing with depth and attention to detail (not necessarily in order).

- Listen to recordings of the piece, ideally of several different orchestras, until the sound is really inside you. Make sure you find the specific part of the recording where your excerpt happens and listen to that part with your music. If you have trouble, look online for a full part or a score, and read along from the beginning of the movement. Most or all of these pieces are available at imslp.org.
- Check the key signature more than once. Check your clefs. Transposing instruments, check to see whether you need to transpose (please play in the correct key if you are able).
- Count through each section and make sure you are clear on each and every rhythm, including rests.
- Play with a metronome, even if you can't play it up to tempo yet.
- For your CUSO audition, note that goal tempos are provided. Start at a tempo you can play cleanly and work up as close as you can to the tempo provided. Remember that these are goals – if you can't get to that tempo for your audition, choose a tempo where you can play your best and your cleanest. We can tell much more about your playing at a tempo that suits you.
- Dynamics in an excerpt should be precise. *mf* is always less than *f*, etc. Same with accents, staccatos, and other articulations. Pay attention to how orchestras play these on the recordings you listen to. String players, think about what part of the bow you should be playing in.
- Listen for intonation as you practice. If you aren't sure, play for someone or check in with a tuner.
- Make sure you have good fingerings. String players, write them in your part. I have not bowed these excerpts – feel free to adjust a bowing here or there for facility, but follow the main idea of what is printed.
- For technical challenges, play slowly, relax your body, and be creative – use your problem solving skills to find more than one approach to fixing something. This usually leads to a better sounding and more reliable piece of music.
- If you are able, play for someone. A teacher, a friend, a family member. Get some feedback or even just find out how you perform in the heat of battle, without stopping.
- These excerpts are short, but they take some work. Take some time to figure out how your part fits in with the whole, take some time to address technical challenges, and try to capture the feel of this particular piece, and what you like about it.