# The Ins and Outs of a Positive Vocal Audition: How to Help Your Students Do Their Best

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**Scenerio**
Student (with great enthusiasm): "I want to audition for the Lionel Hampton School of Music!"
Teacher (with great enthusiasm): "Go for it!"

**Possible Realities**
Student:

1. Doesn't know what music would be appropriate for them and for the audition
2. Doesn't know how to learn it
3. Doesn't know how to set up an audition
4. Doesn't know who is going to accompany them
5. Doesn't know how the accompanist is going to get a copy of the music
6. Doesn't know how to dress
7. Doesn't know how to announce their piece
8. Doesn't know what their song is about
    a. if singing in a foreign language without having each word translated, they are singing nonsense syllables (i.e. "Blah, blah, blah.")

And, for some unknown reason, the student soon becomes totally stressed.

**How to Help**
Songs

- Check the website of the university that that the student is interested in. Usually you will find that literature taken from the Idaho Solo/Ensemble list works very well
- Two contrasting pieces is usually the requirement
- Be sure that the pieces suit the student and are
    - gender appropriate ("A Nun Takes the Veil" is not a good choice for guys – **even if they love it**)
    - in the right range for the voice (watch for areas of unease in voice – breaks)
    - appropriate for their level of musicality and vocal technique
        - if their runs sound more like sirens, a good choice is not "Rejoice Greatly"
        - a good choice is also not a choral part from a choral piece
        - bottom line is that the student sings something that they are comfortable with and shows them at their best

Learning the music

- Help the student find a good recording of the piece
    - the student might go to Youtube and listen to another student who isn't at a level that is acceptable
    - assume that the student will learn accurately from the recording that they listen to (mistakes and all)

- You can record the vocal line for them
- You can record the accompaniment for them to practice with
- Watch that they learn accurate pronunciation of any foreign words
    - students might think that their English will tell them how to pronounce the word in French
        - Paris – close enough in both languages, right?
- Have the student read the words of their song (in English) as if telling a story

Audition set-up

- The university will likely have an audition form to fill out on their website. This will put the student in the data base.
- Call the music office to set up a live audition (campus tours, class attendance and meetings with professors can be set up, as well)
- Find criteria for sending in an audition
    - It is generally better for student to audition live (get to meet people)

Accompanist

- Find out if they need to bring their own accompanist, or if one will be provided
    - If one is provided and the piece is very hard, have the student ask if they should send a copy so that the pianist can practice it
    - If the student needs to bring an accompanist, be sure that their best friend can actually play the piece and follow the singer
    - avoid the karaoke version with synthesizer and snare drum

Prepare music to give to pianist

- Back to back, hole-punched in a 3-ringed binder
    - Skip the plastic sleeves
    - Skip the staples
    - Do have music marked to indicate exactly what the student needs
    - Be sure that student knows the introduction
    - Be sure all of the music is there
        - check that the last line of each page can be read
        - no lead sheets
    - Be sure that the music is in the key in which the singer intends to sing it

Dress

- Ladies & Gentleman
    - Conservative, well-fitting, dressy clothes and shoes
    - Skip the flip-flops and athletic shoes
    - Hair away from face

- Ladies
  - Dressy pants and top
  - Skirt or dress no more than 3" above knee
- Gentleman
  - Suit and tie
  - Dressy shirt and dressy pants
  - If sending in a recorded audition (video), dress as for a live audition
    - no videos taken in doorway of bedroom with stuffed animals on bed

Movement in song

- Gestures are not necessary
  - Use if natural
    - avoid a Miss Idaho dance routine
    - avoid using a 'falling on the floor' dramatization

What to expect

- Auditioning in close quarters
- People writing while the student sings
- Family and friends will likely be invited to support the student from outside of the audition room
- The faculty will likely not clap
- Video camera running
- Friendly people

Usual Procedure

- Warm up before auditioning (you can arrive early and ask about practice rooms)
- Wait to be called into the audition room
- Enter with a smile and be ready to introduce yourself
  - Shaking hands is not out of line
- Walk to pianist and give them the binder of music
  - Explain tempos by singing a little of the piece softly
  - Point out any cuts that are taken
  - Point out anything that is done that is not marked in the song
    - i.e. skipping a verse in a strophic song
- Take a position in the crook of the piano (give yourself some room)
  - Remain basically in this area (for communication with pianist)
- Announce your first and last name & name of piece and composer
- Head down, and when composed raise head to signal the pianist
- When finished with first piece, announce second piece and composer
- When finished with singing, thank those present - with a special thanks to the pianist
  - Shaking hands is not out of line

Suggestions for the Student

- Act like you want to be at the audition
  - Confident, friendly, excited, happy to be singing for those listening
- Act like nothing went wrong, if something goes wrong
  - Keep singing from whatever place you can remember
    - let the pianist find you
    - keep repeating words, or maybe a different verse
    - ask to start over if necessary
      - do walk around and look at the music to find what you missed
- Practice singing the piece in front of people (more than once)
  - Practice singing above your audience's heads - rather than to them
- Video a practice session – watch it
- Tell your negative thoughts to wait until the singing is done
- Stress relievers
  - Be fully prepared
  - Shake off excess energy (nerves) literally by shaking your body
  - Redefine nervousness as excitement (same physical responses)
    - remember a rollercoaster ride
  - Breathe (before, during, after)
  - Smile

Pep Talk for Your Singers:
Remember that life as we know it will continue should things not go as planned. Find the fun in the singing of each song (even a sad song), and be determined to get the listeners to take the journey of the story with you. If you **try** your best at that moment, on that day, then you cannot ask more of yourself, so you have been successful!