

# Orchestral Audition Success

## Trombone Master Class SDSU 5/11/08

*For all great solo endeavors, the individual must improvise his or her own recipe for success. Below is an outline of mine that I derived over years of trial error and recommendations from those whose success I admire.*

### I. Find Out about Vacancies

- a. International Musician – [www.afm.org](http://www.afm.org)
- b. Das Orchester - [www.dasorchester.de/](http://www.dasorchester.de/)
- c. Musical Chairs - [www.musicalchairs.info/](http://www.musicalchairs.info/)

### II. Get invited

- a. To get invited to audition for anything one typically needs to provide the following
  - i. A cover letter (see attached)
    1. It is important that a cover letter acknowledges the position and shows your request to be invited. Be succinct.
  - ii. A resume (see attached)
    1. Show professional experience and education listing primary teachers and a history of success/Performing Employment
  - iii. Sometimes a letter of recommendation – *European auditions especially*
    1. Occasional US auditions require recommendations if the resume is inconsistent with the level of other invitees.
    2. A Recommendation letter for European auditions will only further your cause as these are sometimes very exclusive. Per example, a short letter from David Zinman from when you were at Aspen will go a long way in getting you invited to an audition in Germany.

### III. Get Prepared

- a. You must eat, breath, sleep (etc) the music you are required to perform while you endeavor to eat well, exercise and get plenty of rest. The suggestions below are as much to help you feel confident on game – day as they are to aid in preparation.
  - i. Compile a listening list of the repertoire required
    1. A listening list is probably the most important thing you can do in your preparation. ***Your job is to have a very strong and researched opinion for the repertoire required.*** For this reason, have a least 2 great recordings by notable orchestras per each work.
      - a. *Listen often and much as you prepare – in your car, with friends etc. I get to a point where the repertoire is so engrained that the music is in my head wakes me up in the morning like a song you cant get out of your mind.*
    2. Enjoy and get excited about demonstrating a few things per each recording that ensembles/trombone section does that makes the recording musically satisfying
      - a. Loud playing is not reason enough to make exerpts musically satisfying ☺ Listen for articulation, phrase architecture, and dynamic pacing etc.

- ii. Compile a packet of audition materials
  1. Always use actual parts, clean of errant pencil markings.
  2. It will be helpful to make a visit to Kinkos to bind a complete collection of audition materials that includes all necessary parts as well as any communication with the audition coordinator. Be sure to include extra pages for relevant notes as you track your progress.
  3. If you have the budget, at least one extra copy will be helpful for teachers and mock audition panels to refer to while you play.
  
- iii. Pull out the Metronome and the Tuner and put it on the stand while you practice.
  1. A good audition has great music **and:**
    - a. Good time, is in tune, and with a good tone.
  2. For the first week or two it will be very very helpful to practice all the excerpts at half tempo with sixteenth note subdivisions even if you already have the music memorized. You must be able to play with good time such that an entire panel is not distracted by unconvincing rhythm.
    - a. Playing excerpts at half tempo will have added benefits of building endurance, but also will help you regulate your loud phrases because it will be impossible to play loud for very long with inefficient or bad tone.
  3. Keep tuner and metronome as reference as you slowly speed things up to accomplish musical goals you have well defined by listening and 2 weeks of practice at slower tempi.
  
- iv. Mock Auditions
  1. Play mock auditions for as many people as you can – especially your tape recorder. This will accomplish several goals in your preparation.
    - a. You will gain necessary performance experience under varying degrees of stress.
    - b. You will need to listen to comments and demonstrate an ability to change your musical interpretation under pressure.

*Note: be mindful of who you play for and guard your confidence closely as the audition day grows near. Playing well has a good deal to do with how well you think of yourself.*
  
- v. Additionally I've found great help from certain books on related topics.
  1. The Art of War – Sun Tzu
  2. Peak Performance – Charles A. Garfield
  3. Audition Success – Don Greene

#### IV. **Leading up to Game Day**

- a. Starting a week or possibly 2 weeks out from the audition date, begin to taper your practice and exercise with the goal of being fresh and supple when you audition.
  
- b. It is also very helpful to do some mental rehearsal.
  - i. I've had the best results just talking to someone specifically about how I want things to go. Do this a few times.
  - ii. I like to watch some movies that put me in a winning frame of mind. Per example, Bond films work really well to reinforce a smooth way of handling a high – pressure situation.
    1. The Legend of Bagger Vance
    2. The Chronicles of Riddick
    3. What the *Bleep* do we know?
    4. Rocky 3
    5. Any Sean Connery James Bond film.

- c. Auditions typically involve flight travel which will likely dehydrate you so active hydration is key at this point. If you haven't already, begin to drink lots of water every day and especially on the plane.
- d. For me, it usually works best to arrive in the early evening the day before I audition. Travel usually makes me just tired enough that I will sleep through the night instead of laying awake when I want to rest. This and other issues are different for everyone but for me I get more nervous the more time I have to myself so I've had the best results with just enough time to:
  - i. Get dinner
  - ii. Shine and lube the trombone and lay out my suit for the next day
  - iii. Have some quiet time with the sheet music and MP3 player going over some of the tougher excerpts in my mind.
- e. This is the time to treat yourself very very well.

## V. Game Day

- a. **Through your preparation, the audition should just be a regular day.**
  - i. To win a job is extraordinary *and* I think I've had only one audition that went better than I could have imagined (and I didn't win). I've found a great deal of peace from nervousness if I set my expectations to have a regular day than an amazing one. If you've done the right preparation then the audition, win or lose, should be only a matter of repetition of your daily life at a different venue. Have a regular day and don't get overly excited about distractions like nerves, other players etc., You can only control you and your playing.
- b. There are a lot of unknowns so it's best to make all the things within your control as you normally would.
  - i. Make sure your breakfast includes 2 or 3 bananas.
  - ii. If you drink coffee, do so as much as you normally would but no more.
  - iii. Make sure your tummy is happy before you leave your hotel room – 'nuff said.
- c. Aim to show up for the audition about an hour before you will go on stage.
  - i. Auditions typically run late, but in case they're not, be sure you are ready to play at the time given.
  - ii. Bring a book and or an MP3 player as much to tune everyone else out as to relax your mind
  - iii. There will be many new things to detour your volition and your focus – e.g. old friends, different horns, group warm up room. You don't need to be a jerk but be sure you do not lose sight of why you are at the audition.
- d. **Prelims:** Assuming you get a warm up room before you take the stage,
  - i. take the opportunity to check in with some of the harder excerpts or, if you already have the list, practice starting each one and perhaps play through some of the trouble sections.
  - ii. Nervous/unresponsive face: Circle the wagons & rest your strength on good breathing.
    - 1. Don't kill yourself trying to make nervous chops feel good – about the only thing you can do is a couple minutes of buzzing and possibly dialing back the dynamic/exertion level of the louder phrases
    - 2. Remember that good tones starts with a world – class inhalation.
  - iii. On stage do your utmost to reflect the best example of the music in your mind.
    - 1. Take your time! Nervous minds often move too fast to take much care. Remember how far you flew and that it's okay to take 30-45 seconds between each excerpt instead of 5-10 if it will make you play better. Use time before each piece to solidify your musical intent.

2. Enjoy the excitement but do not forget to keep your breathing world class.
  3. Do not stop unless you have a false start.
  4. Remember if the committee asks you to do something over again it's a good thing.
- e. Post audition
- i. As you wait for results enjoy that you are finished, but remember there is probably still more to come.
    1. According to the Art of War, the victorious general is always he who is constantly preparing for the next battle.
    2. If you are dismissed – even if you already feel you know why, you must ask for comments. These are essential. You'll read a lot of things you probably already know, but you may gain insight into something that fell under your radar. Humble yourself to the process that you can bring more to the next time.
  - f. Repeat as necessary until you have won. (this make take several tries☺)

*If you are dismissed, take time before you go out to celebrate with friends at the audition to write down what you will do differently the next time and what you feel really worked well this time that you plan to repeat. I have come to really enjoy and look forward to the clarity that happens right after the audition is over and I feel as if I know **exactly** what is necessary to be more successful next time. These moments are fleeting and it's important to write things down as soon as you can so you can learn as much as possible no matter what the outcome of the audition.*

Toby Hans Oft  
1234 Fake St.  
San Diego, CA 92104

Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx  
[toby@tobyoft.com](mailto:toby@tobyoft.com)

November 27, 2007

Orchestra Personnel Administrator  
Symphony Hall  
301 Massachusetts Ave.  
Boston, MA 02115

To Whom It May Concern,

I was delighted to learn of your upcoming audition for Principal Trombone. I hereby submit my resume and would be pleased to receive an invitation to the audition.

Sincerely,

Toby Oft  
Principal Trombone  
San Diego Symphony

## Résumé

### **Toby Hans Oft**

1234 Fake St.  
San Diego, CA 92104, USA

Telephone: xxx-xxx-xxxx  
E-Mail: toby@tobyoft.com

**Date and Place of Birth:** February 24, 1976 Portland, Oregon, USA

**Nationality:** American

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### Professional Experience

<b>Boston Symphony Orchestra</b>	<b>Principal Trombone</b> <i>Fall – 2008</i>
<b>San Diego Symphony</b>	<b>Principal Trombone</b> <i>2006 – Present</i>
<b>San Diego Opera</b>	<b>Principal Trombone</b> <i>2006 – Present</i>
<b>New York Philharmonic</b>	<b>Trombone Substitute</b> <i>Present</i>
<b>Los Angeles Philharmonic</b>	<b>Trombone Substitute</b> <i>Present</i>
<b>Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra</b>	<b>Principal Trombone Substitute</b> <i>2006</i>
<b>Tonhalle Orchester Zürich</b>	<b>Principal Trombone Substitute</b> <i>2005</i>
<b>Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra</b>	<b>Principal Trombone</b> <i>2004 - 2005</i>
<b>Florida West Coast Symphony</b>	<b>Principal Trombone</b> <i>2002 - 2006</i>
<b>Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra</b>	<b>Principal Trombone</b> <i>2001 - 2002</i>
<b>Chicago Lyric Opera</b>	<b>Substitute / Extra Trombone</b>

### Instruments

Tenor Trombone, Alto Trombone, Bass Trumpet, Euphonium

### Education

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois - Master of Music, Trombone Performance

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana - Bachelor of Music, Trombone Performance

### Other Qualifications

Performing the *Gröndahl: Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra*  
with the San Diego Symphony – March 7, 8, 9, 2008

San Francisco Symphony –  
Finalist – Runner-Up - Principal Trombone Audition – February 2008

Berlin Philharmonic; Berlin, Germany –  
Semi-Finalist – 2<sup>nd</sup> Trombone Audition – January 2007

Gran Teatre del Liceu Opera Orchestra; Barcelona, Spain –  
Finalist - Solo Trombone Audition – June 2005

Tonhalle Orchester Zürich; Zürich, Switzerland –  
Finalist - Solo Trombone Audition – April 2005

### Teachers

Joseph Alessi - Principal Trombone, New York Philharmonic  
Michael Mulcahy – 2<sup>nd</sup> Trombone, Chicago Symphony Orchestra