

## Tips For Successful Auditions

by Peter Lloyd as interviewed  
by James Kjelland

Former principal bass of the Minnesota Orchestra (1986-2007) and section bass of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Chamber music performances with members of the Budapest, Guarneri, Emerson, Juilliard and Orion string quartets and guest artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, BargeMusic, and the Boston Chamber Music Society. Recordings on RCA, EMI, Sony, Telarc, Virgin Classical, BIS, and Reference Recordings. Has been a visiting teacher at the Marlboro School of Music and at virtually all of the leading music schools in the United States. Regularly serves as coach for the New York String Orchestra and as a visiting teacher for the New World Symphony.

Recently I had the pleasure of interviewing Peter Lloyd--former principal bass of the Minnesota Orchestra and bass teacher at Northwestern University--on the subject of Freshman Auditions. I hope you find the following information helpful not only for your young bass players but for any young string player as they develop and grow into musical maturity.

**JK:** What general things do you look and listen for during undergraduate auditions at Northwestern University?

**PL:** The overarching concept for me is that the student exhibits a thoughtful way of touching the instrument. This is expressed in a good fundamental tone which reflects an awareness of how that is produced. Tone is the first

impression a player makes on the listener.

**JK:** How does intonation factor in?

**PL:** Intonation is integral to good sound and vice versa.

**JK:** I've heard it said that students should not react to mistakes while playing. What are your thoughts on that?

**PL:** When a student makes a mistake in an audition, I would like to see a reaction, nothing dramatic, but enough so I know he/she knows there was a problem.

**JK:** How do you assess other aspects of musicianship?

**PL:** Of course rhythmic accuracy and tempo stability are very important but I'm also listening for a sense of style and articulation and whether they have an appropriately chosen solo.

**JK:** What do you mean by "appropriately"?

**PL:** ...meaning, does the piece reflect the student's current technical and musical level?

Often students come in with something way over their heads in hopes the music itself will make a good impression. What impresses me is:

can they play with security and musicality, not just whether they can play a lot of fast notes. As part of that, I look for a certain assertiveness, not to be confused with cockiness however. In short, does he/she know their music and play without apology or exaggerated confidence.

**JK:** What do you look for along the lines of bowing technique?

**PL:** One of the true measures of bowing skill is a beautiful legato and sustained whole bow stroke.

**JK:** For the record: German or French?

**PL:** I use French myself, but it makes no difference in my audition decisions. I want my

students to have facility in the other style because each bow has distinct advantages over the other. But I don't require students to change their emphasis.

**JK:** Stand or sit?

**PL:** Again, they need to learn both, but for auditions, I don't make either a priority.

**JK:** In addition to the solo, what else is on the Northwestern double bass audition?

**PL:** Two-octave scales and arpeggios and three orchestral excerpts chosen by the student from any Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, or Strauss work.

**JK:** Scales and arpeggios in all keys?

**PL:** It's great if they know them all, but I can tell what I need to know in any key.

**JK:** Why those particular composers?

**PL:** They represent a range of styles for the double bass and give me a sense of the student's awareness of that.

**JK:** What do you look for in assessing a student's potential for further development?

**PL:** I look at the overall physical set-up--balanced posture, relaxed control, etc. Students who play relatively OK as a high school senior, but with a lot of tension, have a lot of work to do before they can make real headway.

*If you would like to contribute to the ongoing dialogue of string pedagogy and performance either as a teacher or performer, please contact James Kjelland Associate Professor of Music Education, Northwestern University, School of Music at [kjelland@northwestern.edu](mailto:kjelland@northwestern.edu) and/or voice: 847.491.4769, fax: 847.467.2363.*