



## & The Business Shed

*- A Creative Initiative*

### How to prepare a Recital (and an audition)

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**So you want to “strut” your stuff on stage and impress people with your voice, which you know is great and you really, really want to be a singer.**

So how to do go about making sure that you’re in control; that the performance you’re about to give is going to be the best you can do on the day; that people will remember you and your voice as something special.

Whether it is a recital or an audition, the work you need to do before hand is much the same. Preparation, preparation and preparation will always hold you in good stead.

Consider the following “W” questions:

#### **What really suits your voice – where your voice is at right now?**

- Composer – who feels right for you?
- Historical Era – Baroque, Romantic, Contemporary – what’s the best for your sound?
- Tessitura – too high, too low, too much chest – lots of chance to shine, but also many chances to bomb out! Interestingly, the root Latin of this word means texture – so the texture of the voice, not just the pitch.

Finding a song (and for this article let’s use that word to cover everything from song to aria and back) that really shows off the voice can make or break a recital or audition. Some of us are made to sing certain songs – other songs we should leave alone.

#### **What’s the audience?**

- Who are you singing for – many, few, an audition panel?
- What is the audience make-up – old, young, a cross-section?
- Who’s in the audience that you want to impress – any critics, future employers, conductors etc?

#### **Where?**

- Where is the venue – get really good directions if this is the first time you’ve sung there (especially for an audition)?

#### **What is its layout?**

- Large, small, round, high ceiling, low ceiling, rectangular, a drawing room, music rehearsal room, small theatre?

#### **Where are the seats?**

- How close will the front row be – this can be intimidating both near and further away?
- Are you above them on a raised stage?
- Is there a balcony with seats?
- Will the audience also be behind you – like a Town Hall?

#### **What about lighting?**

- Do you have any say in this?
- Can you make it work to your advantage?

So, you’ve got the where sorted and now you need to consider the what.

Obviously a recital is very much in your control (unless for some specific composer’s “club” or “society”. An

audition is usually different – the panel need to hear a similar set of songs from a number of singers to gauge them against each other or a benchmark. So what to sing?

When choosing a recital program, think about these points:

- Everyone wants to be entertained – we need to feel, from the audience, that we're having fun and are enjoying being there.
- Open with a good warm-up for you and the audience – something that really suits the voice – this is the first time you can impress.
- Balance the Program – there's nothing worse than a whole lot of the same – for auditions the program may be "balanced" for you.
- Mood changes – light, dark, fun, serious, humorous, sad?
- Composers – who else has written the things you want to sing about?
- Languages – a variety of languages shows off your skills – but they must be correctly pronounced and don't forget your own native tongue.
- Keys – do the keys the songs are written in "go together" – some key changes work well, others are too much of a clash?
- Flow – do the songs flow throughout the program in some sense of order?
- Are you sharing the recital with another performer – or are you alone?
- Theme – do you want to have a theme to the recital – such as love, letters, war, travel, names of flowers, places etc?
- Ending – this is what they will remember most first – the last song is as important as the first – how do you want to be remembered?
- Who is playing for you – have you worked with them before?

So weeks have passed and you've now got the venue, the accompanist and the program – and of course you have given copies of the music to the pianist!

You must now learn the songs completely and totally – we can't emphasise this enough:

- Who is singing / saying the poem?
- Why was the poem written and what it is really about?
- What is the context of the song / poem?
- Who is your character and how does he/she fit into the opera?
- To whom are you singing?
- Is it a soliloquy or a monologue?

You must communicate and tell the story of the song truthfully – the audience need to get as much from you as possible – yes, of course there are program notes, but you don't want people reading these while you're singing.

Go even deeper into the song:

- Learn the words by themselves without the music.
- What is the meaning of each word if the language is foreign to you?
- Translation – word for word and line by line and then overall colloquial so you get the full sense of the language of the words.
- Pronunciation – get it as right as you can – even your own language – there's nothing worse than hearing English miss-pronounced by someone whose home tongue is English (yes, it does happen!).
- Now learn the music – get the pianist to play the song all the way through and just listen.
- Hear the melody and the harmonies, the changes in key, the musical nuances.
- Assimilate the song "into" you.
- Book sessions with language coach(es) – at least two sessions one at start of learning and then a short while later – don't learn bad habits – these take more effort to correct than proper learning in the beginning.

Preparation:

- Get with a pianist as often as you can (afford) – the more muscle memory you can build up around a song correctly sung, the more prepared you will be to get it right on the night.
- Book a couple of times at the venue – and bring along a couple of extra sets of ears / eyes to give you feedback and allow them to be honest.
- Get the piano lid height sorted out to suit your voice, power and the venue – you can nearly always get the best balance for any venue.
- Try and have a practice run – perform the recital in a "safe" place a few days before the main event – less pressured and get feedback that is valued and trustworthy.

The day has arrived - the Recital itself:

- Nerves are normal – get used to them and make them work for you.
- Make sure you are hydrated.
- Dress – to suit the songs, venue, but always the best you can – add colour to the all black look with a flower for you and the pianist (and other instrumentalists)
- If you must wear a stole make sure it is pinned and can't slip –there is nothing more unattractive and disturbing to the audience than a piece of clothing that gravity has taken hold of!
- Entrance – you the singer first, then the pianist – and try and bring on stage with you the emotional context of the first song – be ready to sing.
- Wait until the pianist is in position before bowing
- Position yourself in the curve of the piano and make sure that your posture is comfortable and correct
- Pre-arrange your "contact" with the pianist – how to know when to begin – a look?
- Stillness – stiffness – movement – don't go over the top as this can distract the audience but make sure that you gesture as you feel fit – you'll have had the feedback earlier for your extra ears/eyes.
- Do not expect applause during song cycles or groups of songs – make this known in the programme if possible.
- Between songs, your job is to be getting ready for the next one – but acknowledge the applause when it happens.
- Eye contact - if it is appropriate use it, but don't stare some poor unsuspecting person down in the

audience!

Above all, enjoy your recital, express yourself completely through the poet, words and music – and of course entertain your audience – they may have paid to be their!

And the audition?

All this of course applies to preparing for an audition – the exception may be that the program is chosen for you – and there are a couple of excellent books which are worth getting hold of if this is going to be part of your life for the next while.

- The Art of Auditioning: A Handbook for Singers, Accompanists and Coaches by Anthony Legge and Trevor Ford
- Nail Your Next Audition – The Ultimate 30-day Guide for Singers by Janet Williams.

Both books are listed in our library.

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*Creating Possibilities and Finding Solutions*

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