

Viola Wisdom from Ellen Rose

TEN SUGGESTIONS FOR LEARNING EXCERPTS

1. Analyze the technical skills needed for each excerpt you are practicing and then evaluate which ones need to be upgraded.
2. Upgrade your skills by refraining from learning them only in the excerpt. Perfect the skill first in scales, etudes and other technical exercises and, only then, apply them to the excerpt.
3. Play through the excerpt to establish bowings, fingerings and to begin to form your ideas for phrasing. The next step is to learn the intonation, then rhythm, articulations and sound and finally, the phrasing and overall interpretation.
4. Play through the excerpt you are learning frequently to monitor your progress and to evaluate any problems that need to be addressed.
5. Listen to recordings to hear how your part fits into the overall orchestral sound. This will greatly help intonation as, what you imagine to be the harmony may not be what the composer wrote. By using a score, you can play some of the important chord progressions and thus hear the keys easily that go with your line. This is especially true of Strauss, Wagner, Bruckner, and Shostakovich, and most of the Romantic literature where harmony can be extremely complex.
6. Watch your attitude toward each excerpt as you practice it. A positive attitude and a sense of challenge or enjoyment will greatly help the sense of ease you feel when you perform it at an audition.
7. Approach each excerpt as you would a sonata or concerto. An excerpt that looks easy may turn out to be the one that could trip you up. Take nothing for granted.
8. Consider electronic equipment to be your best friend!
 - a. A tuner can greatly improve your pitch. Try playing the tonic note in the key of the excerpt and play all of the notes in a phrase against that one pitch.
 - b. Use the metronome to develop a reliable and internal sense of rhythm. Refrain from using it constantly. Instead, use it as a guide, alternating using it and then playing without it.
 - c. The tape recorder can be a great teacher and can be a shortcut for learning an excerpt. Tape short phrases and listen back immediately, focusing on whatever problem you are addressing (intonation, rhythm, sound, phrasing). Practice correcting what you did not like, and tape again.
 - d. The video can be used to observe body movements that interfere with your sound, to spot tension problems, to evaluate your overall performance of an excerpt. It is sometimes easier to be more objective about your playing when you see yourself on a screen rather than in a mirror.
9. Play along with recordings in order to recreate the experience of playing an excerpt as a musical experience. Also, using my arrangements, *Viola Excerpts PLUS*, can greatly assist you in becoming familiar with the other important orchestral lines.
10. Aim to be prepared one month in advance of an audition so that the excerpts and you have time to settle down. Do practice play-throughs and visualizations to create the audition experience in your mind. Dealing with any anxiety that you notice during visualizations and play-throughs will help prepare you for the real experience.