

2018 HARP DAY

panel on preparing for competitions and exams

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When you're preparing for something stressful and competitive, you must remember that every time you repeat a segment of a piece slowly, mindfully, and correctly, myelin will wrap itself around the nerve connections, eventually changing your bumpy logging road of synapses into a super-highway. The more correct repetitions, the more myelin, the more ease and comfort.

When entering one of these events, it is so important to READ the rules and instructions. You can be disqualified for such a simple thing as forgetting to bring a piano accompaniment for a concerto. For RCM, you must be aware of all the areas in which you will be tested. There are lists of pieces to choose from, some of which must have two selections, plus ear-training, sight-reading, technical exercises and studies, and the speeds they must adhere to.

There is an App for ear-training called Tenuto. There are lots of resources on the RCM web site.

For harp, usually we must memorize our solo repertoire. There are great articles on this, and see the resources list at the bottom.

If you can't bring your own instrument, try to play on other people's harps, to get a sense of the differences. See if you can get there early enough to get used to the harp. Lighting can be different. Try practising with your eyes closed or in the dark, or with super-bright light.

Know your pieces so well that you can name all the notes, with their accidentals, lying down on your bed, in the dark. Be able to visualize yourself playing the pieces.

Have a good warm-up - mental warm-up if you can't get a harp

Don't get injured! Take breaks every hour, and use visualization a lot. Balance your workload!

Choose repertoire wisely. If you are competing with other instruments, the judges will not understand your technical difficulties as a harpist. Choose something that sounds flashy, but is NOT too difficult. You want them to hear your musicianship, first and foremost.

Be inspiring when you play! If you have done your homework, your accuracy will be good, but if you tighten up and only worry about being note-perfect, you will lose that joy and passion that makes a winner. They will forgive a few wrong notes, but not a dull performance.

Don't melt down! Even if you are really struggling, don't burst into tears and stomp off the stage. Don't snub the judges if you feel they underestimated your great performance. Don't refuse to play in the grand finale concert if you only came in second. They'll remember that stuff for years. Even if you don't win anything, at least one judge will probably have voted for you and may end up mentoring you and helping you behind the scenes for years later. And audiences remember their favourites, too. The second-prize winner of a Tchaikovsky Piano Competition, many years ago, Ivo Pogorelich, had a much bigger career than the first-prize winner.

Record yourself. Do a sound recording, then videotape. Do plenty of practice performances. Wear your concert clothes and shoes, set up an audience of teddy bars or whatever, enter, bow to them, and play your recital. The first performances won't be great, but learn from them and try again. Once you're feeling confident, do the same for friends. Then schedule a real recital for the public, if you can tour, great. Then do your competition. There's a reason that world-class soloists sound so good: they've done this a million times before.

For uncomfortable situations, make yourself uncomfortable: run up and down stairs, or jump up and down, then play.

Resources:

<http://insidemusicteaching.com/> - a fabulous web site!!

Philip Johnston - The Practice Revolution

Noa Kageyama - The Bulletproof Musician <https://bulletproofmusician.com/>

Rob Knopper - The Audition Hacker <https://www.robknopper.com/>

Eloise Ristad: A Soprano On Her Head

Dr. Carroll McLaughlin: Power Performance

Elizabeth Volpé Bligh web site has an article on memorization

<http://www.elizabethvolpebligh.com/>

Royal Conservatory web site <https://www.rcmusic.com/>