



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

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# **CLEARING THE UNKNOWN**

## **HOW TO PREPARE ORCHESTRAL EXCERPTS FOR A VIOLIN AUDITION**

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Abstract:

The purpose of this master thesis is to find out how to prepare any violin orchestral excerpt to be played in an audition for a professional orchestra. As information sources, I have used my own experiences in auditions, as well as the feedback from them, and interviews from people that have been on a jury and people currently auditioning. In addition, I have elaborated my own practising system which can be applied to any orchestral excerpt to minimise the time an applicant spends preparing them and make the practice before an audition more effective in order to achieve a better final result.

Key words:

*Orchestral audition for violin, Orchestral excerpts. Preparing techniques, Feedbacks*

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

When I knew that I had to do artistic master thesis as a part of my master programme in symphonic orchestra performance, I automatically thought about finding something useful both for my master studies and my professional future and, since my professional goal is to work in a symphony orchestra, I did not find anything more useful for me than finding out how to prepare an orchestral audition in the best possible way.

To better understand the point of this work, I think I should start by explaining what led me to investigate this topic.

## **1.1 Personal background**

During my previous student life, I never wondered whether it would be the same process preparing some music for a lesson, a concert or for an exam; I just tried to play it as well as I could, without thinking about the final situation. However, a couple of years ago, I met a friend who was starting to do auditions at that moment and we had a conversation that changed my mind.

We studied together for some years, before he moved abroad, so I knew quite well how he played the violin and how well-prepared he always was for auditions. He told me that, even though he was trying so hard to succeed in the auditions and that he was happy most of the time after playing, he had never gone through the first round. One day, he spoke about this with a friend of his, who recently had done two auditions with very good results, and she offered to listen to him playing the audition repertoire and to give him some advice. In this lesson, she told him to change some small things in his playing which she knew were really important in auditions. Although he thought

that they were minor details, he decided to try them in the next auditions; as a result, he managed to get to the second and even third.

He did not want to tell me these tricks (until he had a job), but after listening to this experience, I became so interested in this topic, because I could not help but wonder how well I was preparing for my future with the violin, and I started to analyse and question every step I did during my practice.

## **1.2 Audition versus Concert**

The first question that came to my mind I think was quite obvious: Is there a difference between preparing music for an audition and for a concert? If so, what is the difference?

I have much experience playing in youth, student and non-professional orchestras. That means that I have played a very varied and contrasting repertoire. However, when I have applied for an orchestral position and I have received the excerpts I should play, I was never sure about how to proceed, because it is a completely different situation.

When we play in an orchestra, we play in a hall we know; either because we did rehearsals there or a sound-check before. We have an audience to play for; they are there to enjoy the music, not to judge the musicians, clapping at the beginning and at the end of each piece. Besides, playing as violinists, we are surrounded by our colleagues, sitting inside the string section. There are section leaders and a conductor, who guide the sections and have the final say on how we play. Of course, if we are playing a big piece, like a symphony, we play it from the very beginning from the first bar of the first movement, and we finish in the last bar without skipping anything. It sounds logical, but it does not happen in an audition.

In an audition, we are completely alone, standing in a hall we usually do not know (with no chance of warming up there). Instead of an audience, we have to face a screen, a camera or strange people who are going to decide if you get a job or not, depending on how you play in the next couple of minutes. In the seconds before we play, we have to imagine lots of things like: What is this hall like? How should I play in here? Many times, the excerpts are taken from the middle of a piece, and we are not playing the very beginning of the piece, but something that was meant to be the continuation of music we cannot play or listen to (and neither can the jury). Also, we must have in mind that what we play, is part of a bigger picture. Maybe it is a melody, maybe part of a fugue, or perhaps the accompaniment of another instrument or voice. We do not have the rest of the ensemble giving meaning to your music. So, another question I wondered about was: should I play as if I know the rest of the music, or just play what is written? And last but not least, there are traditions. Once we have found out how to play what is written and also know the whole context of the piece, we decide to listen to recordings and, surprisingly, they do things that are not notated in the excerpt or even in the orchestral score. They change tempi, dynamics, sometimes also articulation... It is called tradition, it is not written in the music and not everybody agrees with that interpretation. In the concert, the conductor decides, and one can hear that sometimes some musicians in the orchestra do not like the musical decisions of the conductor, but the conductor decides and we play. However, in the audition every decision is made by us.

In this Master program, I had an experience related to that. In a mock audition I played, I received interesting feedback, which was closely related to my topic. I was playing one very famous excerpt from the opera *Gianni Schicchi* by Puccini. It was the first violin part of an aria, where the violin basically plays the same as what the soprano

has to sing, in *pp*, in the higher register of the violin, and full of expressivity. So, I tried to find very special dynamics, tone colour/timbre and vibrato, even though it meant playing in quite difficult positions. Besides, this aria is written in A flat major which is not an easy key for the violin.

I played with this idea in mind, and I received good feedback about how I played it, but when they asked me about which fingerings I used, they recommended that, for an audition, if I am nervous it can be so risky to play in those positions, so I should rather play in lower positions as much as I can to be secure with the intonation, even if I do not get that kind of tone *colour* and *pp*. Then, they said if I play it in an orchestra, of course I can play the way I did. To hear the difference, I have attached the excerpt recorded in both ways, to be played in orchestra<sup>1</sup> and in an audition<sup>2</sup>.

That made me wonder which characteristics are the most important to succeed in an audition. From this feedback, I could understand that the intonation is much more important than the dynamics or the timbre, and this is just one example.

### **1.3 Purpose**

The need to answer the questions I just explained in this introduction was the first reason to start this work. I am really close to finishing my student life, which means that the professional life is already on my mind everyday. I know in fact that most of the musicians who are in the same personal situation as I am now have the same kind of questions when they have to face an audition.

When I started to think about how to write this thesis project I planned a really big work but, after being advised in one of the examinations, I decided to focus just in the preparation for orchestral excerpts, because I consider this part the most important

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<sup>1</sup> Audio 1 (G. Puccini, *Gianni Schicchi*: First violin excerpt)

<sup>2</sup> Audio 2 (G. Puccini, *Gianni Schicchi*: First violin excerpt)



one in an orchestral audition since the vacant job is to play orchestra repertoire. And I am not the only one:

« Never underestimate the importance of the excerpts. I have heard so many violinists over the years, who were dazzling in their concertos, only to fall short when it was time for the excerpts. Remember that the job you are going for will entail you playing these for years to come rather than performing solos. There have been players who were not so strong in their audition concertos but their excerpts were intelligently played which won them a trial. »<sup>3</sup>

So, my **main aim** with this master thesis is to try to find out a reliable method that I can implement when receiving the excerpts for an audition, and that maybe in view of a future enlargement of the work, can be applied not only to orchestral excerpts, but to any music. With it, I intend to minimise the time an applicant spends preparing excerpts and make the practice before an audition more effective in order to achieve a better final result.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”, May 01, 2014. <http://www.thestrad.com/cpt-latests/how-to-be-successful-in-an-orchestral-audition/>

## 2. METHOD

I think the main clue to succeed in an orchestral audition is **good preparation**. As in this master thesis I am focusing on orchestral excerpts preparation, I have tried to figure out a practising system to apply to them while preparing every audition. To that end, I have mainly used my own experience, while practising, learning and auditioning; but I have also found a blog with two different entrances from a very well-known web site for classical musicians, which provided me with very interesting and helpful information that I have been using through my text. These are: “How to be successful in an orchestral audition” by Maxine Kwok-Adams, first violin in the London Symphony Orchestra, which I already used in the introduction, and “Violinist Aaron Rosand on how to succeed in competitions and auditions”, with tips from this important violinist about the topic.<sup>4</sup> Besides, I have also added excellent advice from Alex Kerr, Concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, from a video that was really inspiring for me.<sup>5</sup> As it is a video, the quotes I have used from it are written here in a more formal way, but definitely respecting the meaning of what he is saying.

I have started with the experiences I have already had in auditions, both as an applicant and as a member of the jury, to be able to observe and compare all of them so I could have an idea about how an audition is and about the different points of view in the same situation. I have also used feedback I have received after playing auditions, to compare what they said to me and what I felt and heard while playing and to learn from them.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Strad*: “Violinist Aaron Rosand on how to succeed in competitions and auditions”, December 03, 2014.

<http://www.thestrads.com/cpt-latests/violinist-aaron-rosand-succeed-competitions-auditions/>

<sup>5</sup> “Violin Channel MASTERCLASS | Alex Kerr, Dallas Symphony Orchestra – ‘Preparing for an Orchestral Audition’”, accessed November 26, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MXa9qHTn-0>

Besides, I have written two different interview models with different questions to be answered, one by professional orchestra musicians and the other one by musicians currently auditioning. Through them, I have known their thoughts about the topic which let me draw interesting conclusions.

Finally, I have applied my experience and knowledge I have so far to my practice, in order to create my own practising system for orchestral excerpts. I have determined the steps to follow and, inside of every one of them, I have tried to go into the most important details in every excerpt, looking at different sources in order to obtain an objective and reliable information. As a model and example, I have chosen one of the excerpts I have been asked to play and I have applied the system to it to show how it is supposed to be used.

In the end, I have returned to all the information I have found during this process and drawn some conclusions about it.

### **3. AUDITION EXPERIENCES**

So far, I have had some experience in auditions, three in professional orchestras, almost ten in youth orchestras or study programmes and the mock auditions in this Master programme. Lately, I also had the chance to be part of the panel in an audition. These experiences, plus the feedback I have received, can be a good source to increase the information in this master thesis.

#### **3.1 Experiences playing**

The audition process starts with an application. While applying it is sometimes possible to know exactly which excerpts are to be played, but quite often, it is not possible to know until some weeks before the audition. Then, usually applicants have to wait for the audition day, because it is at the beginning of the first round (or pre-round) when they know the order and what to play.

Usually, the information the applicants can know before the audition, either on the orchestra's web site or in the invitation e-mail, is mostly about repertoire to be played, general rules and details about the audition place and date. However, in one invitation e-mail I could read, quite a lot of information was included about the development of the audition and even recommendations about how to prepare it. I considered it so interesting that I will copy part of the data here:

« The pianist will start about two bars before you start and skip the long interludes. You may be asked to stop before you reach the end of your prepared piece; if this happens, it is not necessarily a reflection on your playing. Please understand that all this is necessary to keep on schedule.

KSO places great emphasis on the excerpts. Dynamics, sense of style, rhythm / tempo, and of course intonation. We prefer no or very little vibrato in the excerpts by Händel and Mozart, please do not skip the pauses and play the upper line of all divisi passages. It is up to the applicant to decide whether he or she

wants to play all the notes in double stops or parts of it, just as you do when you play in the orchestra. It is the aim to play all the notes, but the main thing is that the top/melody note is in the chord. With your well prepared excerpts, you may be asked by a member of the committee, in the third round, to play the piece again in a different manner (i.e. slower, stronger, faster, with greater expression). Please regard this as evidence of your musical flexibility, which will weigh heavily on the success of your audition. The occasional bowings and fingerings are not compulsory for the applicant to use. KSO tunes in 442. »<sup>6</sup>

From this text I can understand how important the excerpts are in an audition and which are the details more heavily weighed. They even give some stylistic advice about Baroque and Classical music, a thing to be welcomed, because in terms of early music there are many different ways of playing, and it is hard to know the best one for every orchestra. They are also clear about playing double stops and chords: it is not compulsory to play every note, as soon as the melody is clear, and the applicant is free to play the bowings and fingerings appearing in the excerpts. Besides, they give an important clue to the candidates: the musical flexibility is very important.

For me, reading this email was highly revealing, since it answers some of the questions I have wondered many times, and it is not only a musician's answer, but an official document from an orchestral institution. Nevertheless, this does not mean that in another orchestra the answers would be different, but it is valuable information to know.

Now, I will speak about the three experiences I have had in professional orchestras. To be clearer I will name them experience A, B and C.

### Experience A

The audition was structured in three official rounds plus a pre-round. In the document I received from the orchestra (three weeks before the audition), I received the excerpts and I could see that they had divided the mandatory repertoire into three parts:

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from the e-mail sent by Kristiansand Symfoniorkester to the applicants invited to the audition for tutti violin position on March 2016.

1<sup>st</sup> round: First movement and cadenza from Mozart's violin concerto (to choose 3, 4 or 5) and two orchestral excerpts

2<sup>nd</sup> round A: 1st Movement with cadenza of one of the following violin concertos: Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky or Nielsen

2<sup>nd</sup> round B: Eight orchestral excerpts

3<sup>rd</sup> round (to be played with members of the orchestra): First violin part of the first movement from a Beethoven's quartet and one movement to choose between four options from Bach's Sonata or Partita for violin solo.

As I did not have any experience in a professional orchestra before, I was assigned to the pre-round. I was given a date and time, and the information that I should play the same repertoire as the one chosen for the first round. I also had the chance to send a recording, but I preferred to attend in person.

The day of the audition, I was informed that I just had to play the Exposition and cadenza from the concerto and I had around 20 minutes to warm up and play with the pianist. Once playing the audition, I played a Mozart concerto and I was not asked to play anything else.

### Experience B

In this invitation email (three weeks before the audition) I received the excerpts but it was not specified the number of rounds, just the repertoire:

First and second movement with cadenza from Mozart's violin concerto (to choose 3, 4 or 5).

1st Movement with cadenza of one of the following violin concertos: Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky or Nielsen.

Fifteen orchestral excerpts.

All the applicants were there the first day, and the order to play was awarded by the drawing of lots. Then they said that in the first round, we should play three excerpts from the list. I was allowed to play all of them.

### Experience C

In this orchestra, the excerpts were available to download from the webpage even before applying (five in total). The structure was:

1<sup>st</sup> round: First movement and cadenza from Mozart's violin concerto (to choose 3, 4 or 5) and orchestral excerpts

2<sup>nd</sup> round: 1st Movement with cadenza of one of the following violin concertos: Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky or Nielsen and orchestral excerpts.

3<sup>rd</sup> round (to be played with members of the orchestra): First violin part of the first movement from a Mozart's quartet and orchestral excerpts.

Once there, I was told that I had to play just the Exposition from the concerto and one of the excerpts. Then I had about 15 minutes to warm up and a run-through with the pianist. The jury let me play everything.

The more experience I have in auditions, the more I think that having a preparation method is very useful. From these three auditions, I can count twenty-eight orchestral excerpts. Sometimes, the auditions have excerpts in common, but that is not always the situation, because just one of them was asked in two of the auditions. Though I do not have professional experience, I have quite a lot of orchestral experience, which means that I have played many orchestral pieces. However, from these twenty-eight excerpts, I had played just four of them previously in orchestra. Besides, in two of the auditions, I had access to them three weeks before the audition, and I can say that, considering that most of them were new to me, and that I had to sometimes prepare movements from

different concertos and chamber music, three weeks were not enough. I practice a lot, but I have to recognise that I did it in a “messy” way, because I did not have a good path to follow or a good preparation plan to work from. Looking back, I can say that perhaps if I had spent more time learning the excerpts and organising my time instead of just practising and playing, the results of my preparation would have been better.

### **3.2 Experience as a member of the panel**

During the last years, I have played in a certain amount of auditions, but I have also had the chance to be part of the panel in two of entrance audition for a Master programme. The applicants had to play Mozart’s violin concerto n.4 or 5 (first movement) and five orchestral excerpts.

I must recognise that these experiences completely changed my mind about the “audition situation”. For instance, I have often heard how important it is to avoid missing notes or to play with perfect intonation all the time, as well as to play with perfect pulse and rhythm. As a consequence, every little mistake while playing and audition bothered and worried me a lot.

However, as a member of the panel, listening to the applicants and talking after the audition with the rest of the members of the jury, I realised that every mistake or “not-perfect tone” is not such a big deal as I thought. Of course, if the general intonation, sound, articulation, etc. are not good, the audition is not going to go well. Small isolated mistakes are not so important if some other aspects like phrasing, style and character are well played. I also realised how important it is to try and listen to oneself as objectively as possible, because some applicants made mistakes that I did not care so much about when I was on the jury, but I am sure would have been pretty important to me if I was the one playing.



After auditions, the professional musicians in the jury talked about the applicants, and what they considered the most highly valued qualities of playing the excerpts were:

- Good character and style
- Good intonation and sound
- The knowledge of the music they were playing
- Good phrasings and musical direction

On the other hand, they did not like at all when an applicant played without knowing the music or style, and with a wrong pulse that did not allow the phrasing to be understood.

### **3.3 Feedbacks**

When someone wins an audition, it is reasonable to believe that the winner played very good and the performance satisfied most of the panel. Still, that person can be interested in knowing in detail the jury members' thoughts about his or her playing or, in other words, that person can ask them for some feedback. However, when I think of feedback being interesting the most is when a candidate does not succeed in the audition.

During the auditioning process, sometimes someone does not have a good audition day so, after playing, one is pretty sure that is not going to continue any further. However, I know from my own experience that it is really frustrating when I play my best and, nevertheless, I am not selected to continue to the next round. The first thing that comes to my mind is: **Why?** There is no better way to know the answer to that than asking the people who made the decision.

At this point I must say that, even though feedback is the way to know why I did

not succeed in a particular audition, it does not mean that what they say to me is the ultimate truth. In fact, it can happen that I find different or even contradictory comments in a feedback. I think as a candidate, I should consider it as one more opinion to know, but not more important than the opinion from people that I really estimate highly as musicians or teachers, or my own feeling. Anyway, while playing an instrument my senses can “cheat” me, that is why I ask for external opinions, to know things that I were not able to realise when playing. Speaking about audition situations, moments when it is normal that I am more stressed than usual, my own perception might be even less reliable than on any other day. It is also possible that, due to this unusual situation, I play in a different way in the audition than I do in a lesson, so even my teachers cannot advise me about something that I am playing incorrectly in the daily life.

Due to that, the best advantage feedback can offer me as audition candidate is, in my opinion, the impartiality. They do not know whether it is my first or my twentieth audition, if I have practised three or eight hours a day, or if I had a good or bad day. They just say what they heard and give their opinions about that and, especially those days when I think that I played very good but I did not pass the round, they are probably saying things that I have not been told yet.

Whatever it is they say and whether I agree or not, I take the view that it is always a good idea to know it. For this reason, I have always done it since I finished my bachelor studies and I started auditioning, and I would like to reflect here some interesting details that I got.

From teachers, I have received much feedback. I have already mentioned one of them in the first pages of my text, about playing an excerpt with an “easy” but reliable fingering in the audition to guarantee intonation, even though in an orchestra it would be better to play it with a different one due to the dynamics and the character. I have

attached two different recordings from this excerpt playing with the two options.

I have been also said that in an orchestra, with the experience we learn that some things are written in the score one way, but actually we should play them in a different way to get the best result in the general sound (dynamics, articulations...). However, in an audition jury we could find musicians playing completely different instruments, and they do not know these details. Even if they know the piece very well, normally they do not know our part, they just know what it is written in the score they have during the audition, so they want someone who plays what it is written and who “helps” them to understand the music.

As an example I am going to use one of the most famous fugues in classical music, the one from Mozart’s overture *The Magic Flute*. I have chosen an excerpt from the beginning of the *allegro*, the first violin part (bars 20-38)<sup>7</sup>. I have also added the excerpt’s orchestral score to have a better understanding of the fugue (appendix 3).<sup>8</sup>

Ex.1 : W.A. Mozart, *The Magic Flute*, Overture, b. 19- 4 (first violin)

Looking at the example, I drew see two different marks: two vertical lines to

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *The Magic Flute* (opera in two acts), libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder, ed. Julius Rietz, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts Werke*, ser. 5: *Opern*, Bd. 12, No. 20 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1879. Plate W.A.M. 620). Bar numbers and Rehearsal Marks added to match Breitkopf & Härtel, Ed.4417, n.d. ca.1890. Plate Orch.B. 209.

<sup>8</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *The Magic Flute* (opera in two acts), libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel No.4417, n.d. ca.1890. Plate Orch.B. 209). Reprinted: New York: Edwin F. Kalmus, n.d.after 1933.

demarcate the excerpt to be played and a rectangle marking the fugue's main theme. If I want to play exactly what is written, from bar 24 (once I have finished the theme) I should play in a general *piano* until the last bar (which is *forte*), this is, the same dynamics as the beginning of the excerpt. However, when I play this overture in an orchestra, the normal way to play it is by giving more relevance to the theme and less to the rest of the music, especially when another instrument is playing the theme, like from bar 27 (look at appendix no.3 for easier understanding).

As general advice, I have been recommended to look for the simplest possible solution to solve the doubts I can have while preparing excerpts. That is especially suitable in the choice of fingerings and bowings. Also, the comments I have heard the most are about intonation in some particular notes, playing really obvious dynamics and small details likes dots or accents and making clearer musical lines.

The professional orchestras I have auditioned for, I have received very interesting and helpful comments, trying to guide me on towards my preparation for future auditions.

From the first audition I played, they congratulated me for my “very nice and full” sound, but they recommended that I work really hard on the intonation, because in a stressful situation, it is the first thing that is going to be affected. Actually, and connecting with what I said some lines before, preparing the audition I was so worried that my intonation on some notes were too sharp. However, in the feedback they told me that some notes were too flat. Finally, they recommended that I play for some friends in order to get used to play being a bit nervous and also to record myself.

In the second one, they told me what they were expecting from every one of the excerpts. Speaking about technical things, they commented that in two of them it is

really difficult to play in tune, but they did not say that the intonation was bad. They also spoke about perfect rhythm, great sound and exact dynamics, but what they recommended was to improve my bow technique, to attain perfect control in rhythm and articulation. However, they really emphasised the importance of showing really good musical lines and finding a good tempo that allows me to phrase freely and that, in general, even in the things that I played well, I should exaggerate everything more in order to be clearer in what I want to do with the music.

## **4. INTERVIEWS**

Every time that I have done an audition, I have always wondered what it is like being on the other side of the screen. What do they think, how do they decide, what is the most important quality, what do they want me to do? To answer all these questions, I have interviewed two professional orchestra musicians asking their opinions about the topic. Later on I realised that, to get more complete conclusions from these interviews, I should also know the opinion about this topic from people currently doing auditions, so I have done the same but asking two colleagues who are trying auditions.

These interviews were talked, one person at the time, recorded and transcribed. For both interviews, I had a plan with some questions as a guide to structure them. Nevertheless, as they were made in a conversational way (between 30-40 minutes), we spoke about different questions as well, and what I have written here is a summary with the most important content. They all were previously informed about what my thesis is about, that the interview would be transcribed in my work and it would finally be public on the University of Gothenburg's site.

### **4.1 Jury members**

I planned these questions as the main structure to follow in the interviews for the professional musicians:

- 1) What are, for you, the essential characteristics an applicant must have to pass each round?
- 2) Is it possible to succeed in an audition making mistakes? Which mistakes are forgivable or unforgivable?

- 3) Each applicant has to play movements from a Mozart and a romantic concerto, besides orchestral excerpts. What is weighed more heavily? Orchestral excerpt performance or solo concerto performance? Would you accept a performer who is good at orchestral repertoire but weak at solo concerto?
- 4) If you know you are going to be part of the jury in an audition, do you try to know the excerpts the applicants are going to play before the audition?
- 5) Do you expect the applicants to play exactly what is written in the score, or to play following a tradition?
- 6) For a tutti position, which is more desirable, a performer who plays ‘technically perfect’ (intonation, rhythm, dynamics, articulation), or a performer who takes risks when playing, while not being so ‘technically perfect’?
- 7) Who chooses the excerpts to be played in the audition? How are they chosen and why?
- 8) Can the applicants change the bowings and fingerings of the required excerpts?
- 9) Given two excellent applicants, how do you choose between them? Does their personality influence your choice?
- 10) Do you think that the current auditioning system is good? Or would you change it? If so, how would you do it?

### 1<sup>st</sup> Interview

The first interview was with one of my teachers, who has many years of experience as a viola player, being section leader for 19 years and part of the jury in a lot of professional auditions.

She says that, when you are sitting in a jury you take into consideration the particular job requirements for the position. They are looking for a tutti player or a

section leader or co-leader, but for these three jobs, the basic technical skills they look for are the same. The most important, is to be able to play well, but also, it is very important to be able to be a team-player; she does not listen to the same things if she is attending a concert or an audition. She compares a tutti player with a choir singer: if you are listening to a choir and you can distinguish the voice of one of them all the time, probably this person is a very good singer, but it is not a good person in the section. She does find that many musicians can be both a team-player and a soloist, but during an audition, they must be able to show that they can play in a way that will fit into a section, and this has to do mainly with sound and intonation (which is extremely important). If you are a soloist, you can play with the sound in many different ways, you can even look for an ugly sound in a certain passage. With the intonation, sometimes a soloist can play really sharp just to get a more expressive result. But you do not do that in the audition. She also listens a lot to the pulse, not just keeping the tempo, but also giving a sure version of the tempo, so you feel safe with this person's tempo.

She separates what she listens to during excerpts and during the concertos. The applicant might be able to play a second violin excerpt with the kind of sound which fits in the second violin section, but he or she must also be able to play the solo repertoire with a nice solo sound, and not with an "orchestra" sound. I commented that I know people who very often play as free-lance in a certain professional orchestra, and they are very highly appreciate there, but when the audition time comes they never get further than the first or second round, and I asked her what her thoughts are regarding this. She said that there are many orchestra pieces that are extremely difficult and requires a very high level for the musicians, but they all cannot appear in the audition repertoire. This is one of the main reasons for the solo concertos, to be sure that the applicants they choose have the required level to face these kinds of programmes. She also adds that, although



maybe it is not really logical that someone has to be able to play a solo romantic concerto to be, for instance, a second violin tutti player; it can be seen as an opportunity to show the jury what kind of musician you are, because that can be hard to show just with the orchestral excerpts. In this situation, she advises that it is much better to wonder “what do I want to show to the jury with this music?” instead of “what does the jury want to hear from me?”

About making mistakes in auditions, she thinks that, the better you play and your level is, the better the jury will accept those mistakes. But if, for instance, you play with bad intonation and poor rhythm, then just one mistake can finish your audition. Anyway, everybody sitting in a jury has “survived” an audition, they know how it feels and that strange things can happen, so it is quite easy for the jury to know whether a note with bad intonation or sound is an accident or not. It also depends on the mistake: somebody playing an orchestral excerpt with many wrong notes shows that the preparation was not good. So the answer is yes, it is possible to pass an audition making mistakes, but the problem is the level of the rest: between two very similar applicants, the number of mistakes can tip the balance towards the one or the other. When I ask about if in a violin audition, the applicants are heard with different criteria by the violin players or the rest of the instruments, she answers that yes, of course. They try to always have a discussion after every round, but it depends on the number of applicants: if there are a lot, there is not time to really talk after the first round. However, what she feels the strongest point in common between all the jury members, is that they are all musicians, and they are very happy when someone is giving a musical performance of the piece. Then every small detail does not matter so much.

Without any doubt, the orchestral excerpts are the most important, because they are what the job is about. If there is somebody with a really amazing performance of the

concertos and just okay performance of the excerpts, maybe he or she is given an opportunity, but this is not common.

When she is going to be part of the jury, she tries to know the excerpts in advance. She is not sure that everybody does the same, but they usually know the music very well already. As a section leader, she is the one who chooses the excerpts and also the one who chooses the excerpts the applicants will receive. She always really tries to make sure that the orchestra sends a played edition to the applicants, so everything they have played was noted, and then it is better that the applicant plays what is written, even the “traditional” notations. However, if the score has no bowing or fingering, they expect that the applicant plays their own choices. Anyway, an applicant can change these kinds of details and follow a standard tradition. The excerpts are chosen trying to cover a wide variety of styles and technical requirements: many different musical styles, fast and slow, soft and loud, legato and short notes, etc.

About taking risks, she considers that the best musicians are the ones who take risks and are able to handle them technically. However, musical performance is essential. If they want to hire someone who can play just technically perfect, they would ask for technical etudes. The applicant’s first goal must always be to show the most musical version of the piece.

About the current audition system, she says that they have tried to improve it during the years she has been part of a jury, and the system has already changed. Some years ago, the tradition was that in the first round the classical concerto was always compulsory. However, many people complained because the orchestral excerpts are so important, that they have to come earlier, from the beginning of the audition. She does not think that there are any easy solutions to improve the system, but she thinks it is hard for the applicants nowadays to travel all around the world to play for some minutes

and then go back home. When she has been in an audition, she has always tried to let the applicants play as much as possible, thinking that maybe that person was not so experienced in auditions and, the more they play in a real audition situation, the better prepared they will be for the next one. She thinks that with the new technology we could find better and new solutions like recordings or playing through the internet, at least for the first round, and has the hope that the system will change with the years in order to make it easier for everyone.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview

This person has been a violin teacher and section leader in her orchestra for many years, so she has been on many audition juries. For her, the most important thing the applicants can show to the jury, is their musicality, which is shown by the way they are playing and can demonstrate their knowledge of the piece, style, the role of the part and their technical abilities.

About whether it is possible to pass through a round playing with mistakes, she is not very optimistic, because nowadays the level is so high that they usually are not accepted. Probably, an audition is the moment where one mistake has more weight than a wonderful interpretation of all the rest of the program but, anyway, this depends very much on the general level of the audition and also the kind of mistake(s) made. Mistakes such a wrong note, rhythm or dynamics are, in general, not acceptable.

For her, the orchestral excerpts are the most important part of an audition. However, it is required to do a good performance of the concertos, both classical and romantic. Again, if one of the concertos does not go well, it gives a negative understanding of the applicant, like the knowledge of style or musicality is missing,

technical problems or a lack of preparation. So, it is very important to prepare the whole repertoire very well.

Usually the members of the jury are familiar with the audition repertoire, and she is always interested in knowing the excerpts and she expects the applicant to respect as much as possible what it is written in the score. Certainly, as a section leader she has always tried to send excerpt with annotations, which means that the tradition her orchestra follows is expressed in the excerpts. About changing fingerings or bowings, the applicants can change them, if these changes are going to improve the sound or the style, or just make the excerpt more comfortable to perform. Anyway, specifically with the bowings, she would rather not change them, while with the fingerings the applicant is free, unless something specific is marked in the score, i.e.: sul g (on the g string). The excerpts are usually chosen by the section leaders, consulting with the section, and they try to include a big range of styles and difficulties, normally choosing standard pieces from the orchestral repertoire.

She is always interested in an applicant who makes music; one that can look beyond the situation of the audition and make a concert performance out of it, so, being “technically perfect” is not always enough to convince the jury. Apart from the applicant’s level, it is very highly considered that an applicant looks like he or she can fit into the section.

About the current auditioning system, she says that nobody has come up with a better solution. She is not really sure if it is a good system because one of the most important things for her is that the candidate can blend in and listen to what is happening around him or her and adjust. She would like more playing time in an ensemble or orchestra, because sometimes the applicant is excellent in terms of technicality, but has trouble playing in a group and listening to the surroundings.

## 4.2 Auditioners

In the interview for people auditioning for professional positions, I decided to follow the next questions:

- 1) When did you start doing auditions? How many auditions have you done since then?
- 2) Have you ever won an audition? Can you tell me how the experience was and why do you think you succeeded?
- 3) Coming back to the preparation for auditions, would you say that it is the same playing an excerpt in a concert with an orchestra than playing it in an audition? Do you prepare the music in the same way?
- 4) Do you have any method to prepare the excerpts? What do you focus on when preparing an excerpt?
- 5) Do you look at the orchestral score or some other editions to compare the one you receive? Do you think that this is an important thing to know?
- 6) Do you listen to recordings when preparing excerpts? Does it make a difference?
- 7) Do you usually play exactly what is written in the score the auditioning orchestra sends or do you change something? What?
- 8) Do you usually ask for feedback after your auditions? Have you received in the feedback expected or unexpected comments about your performance?
- 9) Have you seen any progress since the first audition you did until the last one? Have you changed your way of practising while increasing your audition experiences? How, in which way?
- 10) Do you think it is important to have a practising method you can apply to any excerpt?

- 11) Which characteristics would you say are weighed more heavily on an applicant to be considered better than any other in the audition?
- 12) Would you say that it is possible passing to the next round with mistakes?
- 13) Do you think the standard audition system is good? Would you change anything?

### 1<sup>st</sup> Interview

The first person is violin player, 31 years old and he has played in about eight or nine auditions for professional orchestra. In these auditions he never passed the first round, until the last one, in which he got through to the final round (out of three). The position was given to another person but he was offered a four month contract as a first violin player in the orchestra. He said that he was not expecting even to pass the first round, because he did not think that he played “perfect enough” for that. However, he admits that the weeks before this last audition, he was more focused on practicing especially for that situation, many hours every day without any distractions that he had while preparing for different auditions he did before that one. The preparation was not easy, because the music he was asked to play was not the “standard”, neither the concertos nor the excerpts (there was much more than in the other auditions, from pieces that are not common and with a high level of difficulty). In the feedback he got, they said that he played the concertos well but he did not get the job because he needed to improve some things playing the excerpts.

For him, playing excerpts in an audition is definitely not the same as playing them in a normal situation. He says that in an audition one is supposed to play the excerpt more perfectly than usually played in an orchestral performance. He has even been asked to play the excerpts in a very different manner depending on whether he is

playing in orchestra or preparing for an audition, particularly concerning some dynamics and articulations, because perhaps they give a very good impression to the jury playing alone behind the screen but inside a section in “real life” they do not really work. Nevertheless, he always tries to know the piece and the orchestral score to know the musical and textural context, and he tries to show the jury that he knows what his role is in the orchestra at the moment the excerpt is supposed to be played (melody, accompaniment, etc). He considers that, in order to win an audition, an applicant needs to be lucky (with how they feel with the violin on that day, who else is playing the audition and how they are playing this day, the taste of the people in the jury, etc) and the need to be themselves whilst playing in order to “touch” the jury and to do their best. For him, the most important thing is being really well prepared, as a consequence of very good practice.

Preparing an audition, he tries to put in order the excerpts by difficulty, and he starts with the excerpts he thinks are the easiest. Looking at the scores the orchestra has sent, he sometimes changes bowings because in his opinion, his result would be better playing with the bowings he feels most comfortable with. He focuses mainly on the quality of sound, intonation, articulation and phrasing. He likes to listen to the recording he likes the most about those pieces and he always tries to find recordings from the auditioning orchestra and its main conductor. After the audition, he usually asks for feedback, but sometimes he thinks that is not always a good idea, because sometimes they are not trying to help the applicant, but just say things that the applicant did wrong, and this can be dangerous for the applicant’s self-confidence in the future.

From the first audition until now, he has changed the way of practising. In the beginning, he was just worried about playing the notes. Now, he puts attention on every detail and he tries to play the excerpts as he believes a good tutti violin player is

expected to do it, even if he would like to play in a different way. He does not consider that the current auditioning system is good because it does not work in finding good orchestral musicians. In many orchestras, people who played very well in the audition and finally won it, happened to be unable to play in the orchestra they have auditioned for. On the other hand, some other people are very good playing in an orchestra but if they are not able to be the best playing two different concertos and many excerpts in this stressful situation, they will never get the job. On the other hand, he can understand that right now there is no alternative way for an orchestra to select players, unless they are willing to offer trial periods to everybody, which is not actually possible.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview

The second interviewee is in this case a viola player. She is 26 years old, and she started doing auditions for youth orchestras in 2007 and she started trying for professional orchestras two years ago. The total amount of orchestral auditions she has played is around twenty. She has succeeded many times in youth orchestras and in one of the auditions to a professional orchestra. It was for a tutti substitute position. She was asked to play the standard repertoire (concertos and orchestral excerpts) in two different rounds. Though she played well, she thinks that what made the difference this time compared to the others, was that while playing she felt that she could win the audition. Speaking about preparing excerpts for an audition, she feels that playing them in an audition is not at all the same as playing them in an orchestra, because playing an excerpt in an audition requires perfect accuracy, whereas playing it with the orchestra requires that you listen to everything that is happening, and you have to adapt to what you are playing to achieve a general balance.



About preparing for an audition, the first step is to listen to the piece, if she has not played it before, looking at the sheet music and writing down in the auditioning score details that she might forget. Then she plays it with the metronome, first in a slow tempo, increasing the speed gradually until reaching the correct tempo. After that, she looks for possible difficulties and tries to fix them with some exercises. Then, she focuses on the intonation and articulation and finally, she plays the excerpt listening carefully to every detail she has worked on. She considers that the orchestral score is an important thing to know as well as comparing the score the orchestra sends with a better edition, but she tries not to change anything. She also thinks that it is essential to listen to different recordings from an excerpt in order to understand the musical context. For her, the most important details to focus on are: rhythm, tempo, intonation, sound, musicality and articulation. Also, in case she knows the personal taste from someone in the jury, she tries to play in the same way as they like.

Looking back, she can see an evolution from her first audition to the last one. What she has really changed is the way of practicing during the audition day because she knows that it is more important to warm up properly than play everything (excerpts and concertos) a lot of times. In regards to having a method to prepare excerpts in a faster way, she thinks that one important thing for an orchestral musician is the ability to prepare anything in a quick and effective way, so if there is not so much time, being fast is an advantage. She considers that it is possible to pass round the small mistakes, but she thinks that mistakes in rhythm are usually unforgivable. In general, she thinks that the auditioning system is right, but she also says that it is not always completely impartial and fair.

## **5. PRACTICE**

This part of my work can be considered the main part of my thesis work. As Alex Kerr says: “what I really advise for you is, first: preparation. Take the time to really think about the details. The best way you are going to be able to play well in an audition is really to show your preparation.”<sup>9</sup>

I have noticed that when I had to prepare an audition, I was practising every orchestral excerpt in a different way, without any order or method. As a result, I was finding different kinds of problems or lack of something in every one of them, and very often I felt lost and needed to have a lesson to be told what I had to do.

For this reason, I realised that it would be extremely useful to have a method which would take care of every detail and step that I should follow to prepare an excerpt very well so, by using it, I could be sure that I would not miss any important detail in my practice.

### **5.1 Practising system for orchestral excerpts**

Preparing orchestral excerpts is a big part of the orchestral audition process. Depending on the orchestra, the applicants are asked to prepare a certain number of excerpts (in my experience, I found the audition committees demanding five of them, and some others demanding fifteen). They belong to different styles, requiring different skills from the applicant, both musically and technically.

Since I realised that it is not the same preparing this music to be played in a concert or in an audition, I thought about finding out the best way to prepare an excerpt for this situation. Actually, looking at an entrance blog by Maxine Kwok-Adams one

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<sup>9</sup> *Violin Channel*: Alex Kerr, “Preparing for an Orchestral Audition”

can read: “The most common mistake I have heard in over ten years of sitting in on auditions is candidates not preparing the excerpts properly”.<sup>10</sup> That is why I decided to create a practising system that can be applied on any excerpt and that is able to eliminate every doubt about how to practise and how to play.

In the method, I have tried to identify the most important issues when preparing excerpts in order to not to leave any detail unmentioned. The first thing I did was establishing the steps to follow when I take a score for the first time and before starting to practise it. With them, I wanted to achieve an organic evolution from learning about the music, before I even start to wonder how to play it, until my final version for the audition. These steps are:

- **Collect the sources**
- **What is the music asking for? How would I play it according to that?**
- **What has the orchestra added or changed in the score?**
- **Research the tradition/different recordings**
- **Conclusion → My version for the audition**

Now, I will explain what every step is about.

- **Collect the sources**

The first thing is getting different versions from the excerpt apart from the one received from the auditioning orchestra, including the full orchestral score. It is very helpful knowing how an excerpt is played by a professional orchestra so, if I have the

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<sup>10</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”

chance to get the score that an orchestra used to play the piece, I will have more information to compare during the process.

➤ **What is the music asking for? How would I play it according to that?**

This step is the most important for me, because no matter how I play something, the music always has to make sense. I think we are all aware of that, but I am sure that at some point in our daily practice we all wonder: **How?**

To answer that question, one of the best options is to look for advice from professional musicians. Some of the ones I read: “the successful candidates are those that perform with careful attention to literal accuracy, rhythmic control, and good intonation”.<sup>11</sup> Also: “The main things I am looking for when I sit on an audition panel are quite simple – good rhythm, technique and intonation, all within a beautiful sound. These are going to be at the crux of a good orchestral musician”.<sup>12</sup> These quotes made me wonder which the most important parameters to have in mind while playing the violin are. Probably, I already have the most of them in mind while practising, because after so many years of playing, they are intuitive for use. However, I do not want to leave anything to chance and play on “auto-pilot”, with this system I intend to be sure that every detail counts. So, I decided to set some parameters to analyse according to the musical requirements. I placed them in a certain order, but it can be modified later on while practising with the violin.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Strad*: “Violinist Aaron Rosand on how to succeed in competitions and auditions”

<sup>12</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”

- Character / Style
- Tempo
- Sound
- Dynamics
- Rhythm / Pulse
- Articulation
- Fingerings
- Bowings
- Phrasing
- Acoustics

In this step, I should start by placing the excerpt into context: musical period/year, country, composer and piece. Once I have a historical and musical context, I start deciding how to do each parameter according to the music. Quoting from Kerr: “I really want to know how the music goes. I want to know that you have a knowledge of the structure of this piece of music: how it works? What is the role of the violinist, rhythmically, musically, sound wise?”<sup>13</sup>

➤ **What has the orchestra added or changed in the score?**

This step is about what the orchestra adds to the music. Sometimes, they send an original score, but many times they send a ‘used’ or ‘annotated’ score, with fingerings, bowings or different dynamics or articulations. But one of the most important things they can add to it, are notes about “traditional” details, such as changes in the tempi or dynamics. I should analyse these indications and figure out the reason to change or to add them.

➤ **Research the tradition/different recordings**

As well as finding different sources for the score, I also want to find many different recordings from the excerpt (I will always be able to eliminate the ones I do

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<sup>13</sup> *Violin Channel*: Alex Kerr, “Preparing for an Orchestral Audition”

not want to use). That step is about researching the performing traditions by listening to different recordings, noting down what they do and comparing between them. The auditioning orchestras usually send the excerpts three weeks before the audition; therefore, recordings could be really helpful, especially if I have the possibility to listen to recordings from the orchestra I am auditioning for, so I can know the sound and the way of playing. Recordings could be a source of inspiration, because by listening to different versions of the same spot, I could have a better idea of both what I want and what I do not want to do, as well as understanding the music in a very complete way. Kwok-Adams is very clear about that: “The worst is when the auditionee has obviously never heard the excerpts before and therefore the tempi and style are completely wrong. There’s no excuse for this and shows a lack of real interest in orchestral playing.”<sup>14</sup>

➤ **Conclusion → My version for the audition**

With all that information, I think one could have a complete idea about the music. Finally, I have to draw a conclusion from all the steps, deciding how much I take from each step and creating my own version.

To show how it works, I have taken one excerpt I had to prepare for an audition and I have applied this system to use it as an example of the way to know how to prepare an excerpt. I have chosen this particular excerpt because I had to prepare it for an audition in the end of 2014 and I felt that it is full of different details to keep in mind and to work on (also because is longer than more common excerpts). For that reason, I thought I would be a great example for my system.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”

### 5.1.1 Example

Excerpt: G. Mahler, Symphony No.5, 1<sup>st</sup> Mov (bars 155-231) – First violin

#### ➤ **Collect the sources**

First of all, I look for different editions of the orchestral score and the first violin part to be able to compare between them. In this case, I looked for the manuscript (available online), the orchestral score from the revised edition (the one mostly played and that matches with the excerpt sent by the auditioning orchestra) and I also got the score played by the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra (GSO) with annotations. There are two reasons for me to look for one more first violin score apart from the one the auditioning orchestra sent to me. The first one might be that the orchestra sends a score that has not been played and, consequently, it does not have any notes. As you have read before in some interview, the importance of a noted score in preparation for the audition is really important, because it adds many important details to the performance that are not printed by the publishers. The second reason is, even if the score that the orchestra sends has been “used” (like in this case) it is never bad to have a second option to compare and to choose. To get this second score, I could have tried to contact any orchestra and ask for their part. However, I decided to ask the GSO because it is in my opinion a very good orchestra I can trust and since many of the people working there, including the librarian, also work very close to me on my Masters, I supposed that it would be easier. Honestly, I think if I found a reliable edition for the orchestral score, I probably could prepare perfectly the excerpt without looking for the manuscript. However, I find it absolutely interesting checking whenever possible because very often I can find information that maybe later on was removed for practical reasons, but it can give me a better idea of what the composer’s first idea was.

Analysing material:

- First manuscript (1903)<sup>15</sup>
- Orchestral score (revised-final edition 1964)<sup>16</sup>
- Excerpt sent by the orchestra (Appendix no.1)<sup>17</sup>
- Excerpt used by GSO (Appendix no.2)<sup>18</sup>

Once I have the material, I proceed to complete every step.

➤ **What is the music asking for? How would I play it according to that?**

First of all, and before starting to answer any question about the excerpt, I try to find and collect every material and information that can help me to understand as much as possible the style and historical context, the composer and the piece. For that, I place the music in context.

First, I look for some details about the context where the composer grew up: Austria, during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His first compositions were associated with Richard Strauss' style. If I had never heard the symphony, I would have an idea about the style now. Another important thing is that I can see he was really interested in the orchestra: by conducting and by composing many orchestral pieces. For me, this would be an extra reason to check the full orchestral score, because I can assume that I could find there a lot of information involving my excerpt. As a third important detail, I can see that he suffered for many reasons during his life. This could affect his compositions, since his music is described like cathartic so, keeping this is in

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<sup>15</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No.5*, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections* (Music Division, The New York Public Library, 1903).

<sup>16</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No.5*, Vienna: C.F. Peters, 1964.

<sup>17</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No.5* (Edition unknown).

<sup>18</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No.5* (Edition unknown). Reprinted with kind permission from the music publisher C.F. Peters Leipzig – London – New York, date unknown.



mind, and I could be more sensitive to the meaning of his music.<sup>19</sup>

About the style, I have basically read that his music is not “simple” at all. First, connecting with what I have said before about looking at the orchestral score, he was very keen on writing for many “voices”, and also I can read that he used his music to describe many different characters and he was really involved in writing many annotations in the score to be sure that it was played in the way that he intended. I apply this knowledge to my practice by putting great attention into every small detail written in the score and trying to figure out the different characters in the score to bring all this information out while performing. For instance, I can read the meaning of “extreme volume levels”, so I would try to really emphasize them (I can find dynamics from *p* to *fff*).<sup>20</sup>

About the piece, I can learn that this excerpt (‘Leidenschaftlich. Wild’) is an important part in the symphony, because it is a highly contrasting point in the funeral march the symphony starts with. For the sound, it is also interesting to see that he uses a rich string sonority and again, the importance of the rest of the instruments’ role. To get inspiration about the whole piece’s character, it is also a good for me to read that at the moment he was composing this piece, he met and married his wife (who the second movement is composed for, as a love letter).<sup>21</sup>

I just summarised the information I consider important to understand the excerpt from this point of view. In this search for information, I am highly inspired by the most of the seminars we have received during this master, made by professional orchestra musicians and conductors trying to transmit us the spirit of the piece.

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<sup>19</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Mahler, Gustav.”

<sup>20</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.vv. “Mahler, Gustav,” “Musical Style.”

<sup>21</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “Mahler, Gustav,” “Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, Rückert settings.”

Symphony No.5 (1901-1902) in five movements:

- I. ***Trauermarsch (Funeral March).***
- II. *Stürmisch bewegt, mit größter Vehemenz (Moving stormily, with the greatest vehemence)*
- III. *Scherzo. Kräftig, nicht zu schnell (Strong, not too fast)*
- IV. *Adagietto. Sehr langsam (Very slow)*
- V. *Rondo-Finale. Allegro – Allegro giocoso. Frisch (Fresh)*

Now, I continue by looking in detail at the analysing material and analysing the different parameters.

- Character / Style: This excerpt is located in the first movement: a funeral march. The indication at the beginning of the movement is *In gemessenem Schritt. Streng. Wie ein Kondukt* (In measured step. Strictly. As a funeral procession) and there is no change until the beginning of this excerpt in bar 155: *Plötzlich schneller. Leidenschaftlich. Wild* (Suddenly faster. Passionate. Wild). In the first 154 bars I can see how sad and tragic the music is, melancholic sometimes. From bar 155 the music becomes so desperate, passionate, tragic and wild. I would say the first violin part is especially desperate, playing the fastest notes and lots of accents and *sforzandi*, combining binary and ternary rhythms. I can also see some more performance instructions in the score like: *molto espressivo* in bar 203, *breiter Strich* (wide bar) bars 206-210 and *viel Bogenwechsel* (lot of bow change). Preparing the excerpt, I have in mind all these indications and I study carefully the orchestral score to see how the music is written in order to show these characters. Then, I try to identify the role the first

violin part is playing during the excerpt.

○ Tempo: the time signature is 2/2, and from the first bar (155) the performance indication is *suddenly faster, wild and passionate*. Mahler did not write a metronome mark, but used a lot of words to explain how he wanted his music to be played. As Gilbert E. Kaplan noted in his article *Mahler and tradition. Is there or isn't it there?:*

«Mahler was especially concerned that conductors get his tempos right. “Tempo is for me a matter of feeling” Mahler said. “You know how meticulous I am in my work. I never trust the conductors or their capacities. Yet even if they follow every indication, all is lost if they make a mistake in the first tempo.” Mahler could have made it easier for conductors providing metronome marks – and if some of his early works he did just that. But later he removed most of them because he felt they put a straitjacket on music that needed room for some flexibility. Mahler called metronome markings “almost worthless; for unless the work is vulgarly ground out in barrel-organ style, the tempo will already have changed by the end of the second bar.”»<sup>22</sup>.

As I mentioned already, in the symphony there is just one general indication about the tempo/character before this excerpt, the one at the very beginning, therefore, I must relate this *suddenly faster* to that. In the beginning of the excerpt (bar 155), I can see in the orchestral score that the trumpet is playing the melody and the lowest instruments are the most rhythmically stable ones playing half notes, so I think about them to estimate the appropriate tempo. In my opinion, a good tempo can be: the half note = 106 – 112. I can read some advices about this topic from Kwok-Adams: “Download a free metronome app and start slowly. This is invaluable as having a strong basis in the rhythm is going to be helpful come the audition, when most have a tendency to rush due

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<sup>22</sup> Gilbert E. Kaplan, “Mahler and tradition. Is there or isn't it there?” *The musical times* Vol. 133, No 1797 (1992): 559-61.

to nerves”.<sup>23</sup> So, when finding a good tempo I think about one that is coherent with the music’s character and a tempo I feel comfortable with. Then, I use the metronome everyday, increasing gradually the speed until I achieve my good tempo for the audition. I also use different subdivisions in order to develop a really good internal pulse.

- Sound: when I think in the sound, I wonder about what I can do in order to get different kinds of sound, and I can count on many choices. With the left arm, I can vary the vibrato. I can produce it with the fingers, the hand or the arm; I can use different speeds and I also can make the movement wide or narrow. With the right arm, I can vary the speed, the pressure and the sounding point.

Trying to express with the violin what the music is asking for in this excerpt, I think in the beginning the best is playing with an intense vibrato (very narrow and fast) and sound (quite slow bow speed, on the lower part of the bow as much as possible). For the *piano, molto espressivo* in bar 203, I use much bow with less pressure and a bit wider vibrato, retaking again the more intense vibrato in bar 221. Though I think the appropriate sound for every different excerpt should be reached with good use of the bow, vibrato can be a very good tool to achieve very expressive notes, especially in this kind of music (it can be a bad choice in Baroque and Classical excerpts because it could change the style too much). As I can read from Ivan Galamian: “An exception to the principle of the double contact will apply in the playing of expressive passages. In order to facilitate the vibrato action, the hand can release the double contact, retaining only that of the thumb”.<sup>24</sup> With the double contact, he means that the left hand, in order to assure good intonation, must have two contact points with the violin, one in the thumb

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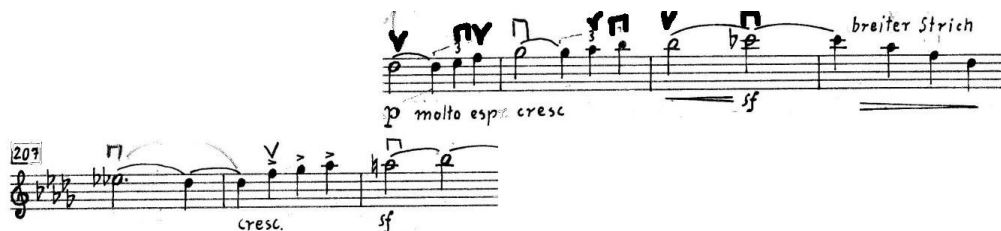
<sup>23</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”

<sup>24</sup> Ivan Galamian, *Principles of violin playing and teaching* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2013), 21.

and the other one in the side of the index finger. However, as he explains, once I have found the perfect position to press the finger in order to obtain the best tone, I have the chance to eliminate the contact with the index obtaining more freedom in the hand, which allows me to get a different and expressive vibrato.

According to Aaron Rosand: “Varying your vibrato may be the key to your success. Learn how to control your vibrato speed and how to use a wider or narrower vibrato depending on the character of the music. A fast, narrow vibrato is undesirable and not appropriate for classic composers. Work towards developing an even vibrato that remains constant in a phrase. Avoid the stop and go variety from note to note and every bow change”.<sup>25</sup>

I can take as an example the next phrase:



Ex. 2: G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch*, b. 203-209.

To play piano, there are basically two ways: one playing with a small amount of bow and slow speed (maybe with medium pressure)<sup>26</sup>, and with a big amount of bow and a fast speed (which requires soft pressure and playing *sul tasto*)<sup>27</sup>. I tried and I

<sup>25</sup> *The Strad*: Violinist Aaron Rosand on how to succeed in competitions and auditions.

<sup>26</sup> Audio 3 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch*, b. 203-209: First violin excerpt)

<sup>27</sup> Audio 4 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch*, b. 203-209: First violin excerpt)

recorded both of them. After trying and listening to the, I decided that the *molto espressivo* is much more convincing in my opinion if it is played in the second way.

○ Dynamics: I think they are very clear in this excerpt; I play exactly what is written. In my opinion, in this kind of music it is not so important to have a huge contrast in dynamics as it is in character. For instance, from bar 155 the dynamics indication is fortissimo, mainly all the way until arriving at bar 203 where it is indicated piano, except for a small cresc. and dim. I think instead of trying to play the written dynamics exactly it is better to think that in the beginning of (bar 155) the music is very dramatic and loud but the role of the first violin is as an accompaniment for the trumpet, and then in bar 165 the role is the main voice so, it must be louder and more direct than before, maybe with a sharper sound. However from bar 203, the character is completely the opposite. For me, it is like the calm after the storm, so I would try to show these different characters and roles instead of being too worried about decibels.

○ Rhythm / Pulse: Quoting A. Rosand again: “Rhythmic control has many facets: giving every note full value; an inner sense of tempo; an ability to maintain constancy; pacing when needed and an instinctive return to a tempo; not panicking and maintaining control in rapid passage work”<sup>28</sup>. This is very much related with what I just mentioned in dynamics. This is not the kind of music that one can start the metronome in the beginning of the excerpt and follow it until the end. The pulse will change throughout, with the different indications and characters. I try to be coherent and organic with these changes, so that I do not change drastically the pulse and that the tempi I choose helps me to show the musical message better.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Strad*: Violinist Aaron Rosand on how to succeed in competitions and auditions.

○ Articulation: This excerpt is full of articulation contrasts: legatos (slurs), accents and *sforzandi* (which I think in this example are a big part of the articulation, rather than a dynamics indication). I think that trying to emphasize these contrasts is one of the keys to get the character of the music. I try to work a lot with the legatos, with both left and right arms, and to get the accents, I ‘bite’ the string with the bow (the tone starts with the bow stopped on the string and with weight enough in the index finger to make the beginning very clear) and then I release the sound, as I do in the sound example.<sup>29</sup> However, to get the *sforzandi*, I think about going deep on the string with the bow in the beginning of the note, but avoiding the ‘biting’ I mentioned for the accents, so I can imagine a fast *crescendo* in the beginning and then releasing the weight of my right arm and also, intense vibrato in the beginning and then lighter, so it would sound like in the sound example.<sup>30</sup>

○ Fingerings: the results I obtain when playing can vary depending on the fingerings I decide to use. Galamian does summarise the functions of a good fingering really well: “There are two aspects to fingering: the musical and the technical. Musically, the fingering should assure the best sound and finest expression of the phrase; technically, it should make the passage as easy and comfortable as possible”.<sup>31</sup> So, the closer I am to find the balance between both musical and technical aspects with the fingering I choose, the better this will serve my purpose. As the violinist and pedagogue Carl Flesch wrote: “among the resources of the violin that serve musical expression, the diversity of available timbres plays a leading role. [...] An appropriately chosen timbre can greatly illuminate the musical structure of a composition and its melodic line [...] Dynamics, though primarily controlled by the bowing technique, also

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<sup>29</sup> Audio 5 (Accent example)

<sup>30</sup> Audio 6 (Sforzando example)

<sup>31</sup> Galamian, *Principles*, 31.

depend greatly upon timbre- that is upon the choice of the strings and so in turn upon fingering.”<sup>32</sup> Aaron Rosand also gives special mention to fingerings in auditions: “Intonation is a key issue and must be treated with careful practice. Fingerings play an important role in deciding on how to negotiate a lyric phrase or a fast passage. Choose wisely to best express the music and to assure that the intonation will be as accurate as possible under strenuous conditions”.<sup>33</sup>

I try to play the legatos on the same string, avoiding big position changes and string crossing. To get the *Pesante* in bar 194 I decide to play on the G string. In the long notes with *sf*, I would preferably use the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> finger, because these are the fingers that work the best for me to get an intense vibrato. In bars 225-228 octaves appear in double-stops. Usually in the orchestra, the violin section does *divisi* in the double-stops (unless *a non divisi* is written), especially in fourths, fifths and octaves, because the intonation is very sensitive for these kinds of intervals. For instance, to play a fifth on the violin, I have to use just one finger and press two strings at the same time. Depending on the position and the finger I am using, this can be very hard to tune and it may require placing the hand and/or finger in an unusual position so, if I find a fifth in a melodic line, playing both strings could be not the best option, because the quality of the phrasing would not probably be the best.



Ex. 3: J. Brahms, *Symphony No.4, Allegro non troppo*, b. 170-175. *Divisi* example

If I take a look at example number 3, I can appreciate six different kinds of double-

<sup>32</sup> Carl Flesch, *Violin fingering: its theory and practice* (Milan: Edizione Curci, 1960; English translation and adaptation, London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1966), 280.

<sup>33</sup> *The Strad*: Violinist Aaron Rosand on how to succeed in competitions and auditions.



stops (unison, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and octave) and it would be really hard to get a whole section playing this kind of excerpt in a beautiful way. Flesch was very clear in this matter. About playing in unison: “its perfect execution is extremely difficult, because even the smallest difference between the frequencies of the two tones is painfully obvious” and “when performed on the violin, however, the tonal result is nearly always disappointing. Perfect consonance of the two tones can rarely be achieved, and any correction through vibrato is practically impossible, owing to the strained position of the hand.”<sup>34</sup> About fifths: “whereas impure intonation in all other intervals can be quickly and inconspicuously corrected by shifting one finger, “false fifths” can be rectified only by changing the position of the whole hand or even of the arm, a procedure that can never be successfully concealed. Besides, when the strings get out of tune during a performance, the situation is beyond the control of the performer, as far as double-stops in perfect fifths are concerned.”<sup>35</sup> Some exceptions can be chords, that are ruled differently, depending on the style and the moment when they appear. On the violin, the simultaneous sounding of more than two notes is not possible, so playing a four-tone chord requires breaking it in two parts. In a three-tone chord, if the speed of the bow is quick enough and the dynamics allow me to “attack” three strings, I can play it, as soon as the chord is short and I do not have to sustain it:



Ex. 4: W.A. Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, Overture, b.1-4. The chords are usually played *non-divisi*

<sup>34</sup> Flesch, *Violin fingering*, 158-159.

<sup>35</sup> Flesch, *Violin fingering*, 205.

Anyway, and to be completely sure, if I find these situations I can always write to the auditioning orchestra and ask in which way it should be played.

○ Bowings: I want to try to respect the bowings, but without disturbing the articulation, dynamics (*cresc* and *dim*), character and phrasing. For instance, in bar 165-166, if I did not change the bowings and I just play the slurs Mahler wrote, I would have to play almost the whole bar down-bow (because of the previous bar), and just a quarter note from a triplet up-bow. Doing that, it would be almost impossible to keep suitable phrasing and a continued and intense sound. With *ff* and *passionate*, probably the best option is to play the first note with the whole bow, the two last notes in the bar up and down bow and the next bar just the opposite bowings. I do not want to lose the intensity of the sound because of the bowings, so I think I am going to break some slurs between the long notes.

Assuming that the first note in bar 155 would be always played down-bow (musically, it is the resolution of the things happening before and also the start of a new melody in *ff*, playing up-bow is highly improbable), if I do not change any bowing and I play as in example number 5:



Ex. 5: G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch*, b. 155-156.

This would sound like in my sound example.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Audio 7 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch*, b. 155-156: First violin excerpt)

However, if I play the bowings I think are better:



Ex. 6: Bowings that I suggest (bars 155-156).

We can hear that it sounds in a different way.<sup>37</sup>

From this page, every musical example included in this part of my master thesis belongs to the same piece and the same movements, so I will just title them with a brief explanation and the bar numbers.

○ Phrasing: according to this music, I try to do very long phrases, looking for some bars where to 'conduct' each phrase, linking it with the next one, according to the harmonic tension and the direction of the melody. In the next example, I marked the length of the phrase which must be understood despite the small slurs inside it.



Ex. 7: Example of long phrasing (bars 195-202)

<sup>37</sup> Audio 8 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 155-156*: First violin excerpt)

○ Acoustics: I should consider if I know the place where I am going to play in, because the different acoustics can change many of the previous parameters, especially tempo, dynamics and articulation. For instance, in a very reverberant hall, I should avoid playing too fast, the articulation should be sharper than usual and the difference between dynamics quite big, if I want to be understood by who is listening to me. If I do not know either the place or the acoustic, this is not something I can decide before starting to play and listening how it sounds. As Kwok-Adams says, “Also auditions can be held in everything from rooms the size of broom cupboards to being onstage at a concert hall. Try to temper the dynamics accordingly.”<sup>38</sup>

So far, I have investigated and thought about the musical context and about technical decisions that I think are the best to try to answer to the excerpt’s musical requirements during my performance. However, I do not have yet the version for the audition. Let me turn now from the general to the particular with the next steps.

➤ **What has the auditioning orchestra added?**

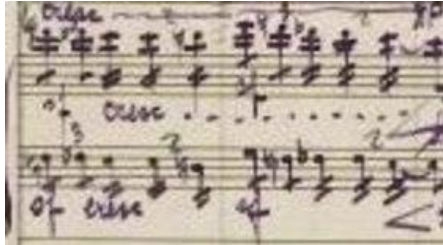
This orchestra has added several items to the score, interpretation marks which are the same written by the composer that for some reason were not printed in this edition and have been added later, and mainly bowings and fingerings, and a few dynamics (*piano* after each *sf* in bars 227 and 228).

In the beginning I think that they probably added it because they wanted to emphasize the crescendo. Comparing the auditioning excerpt with the rest of the analysing material, I can observe that in the revised edition from 1964 the *piano* is already printed as well as in the score played by the GSO.

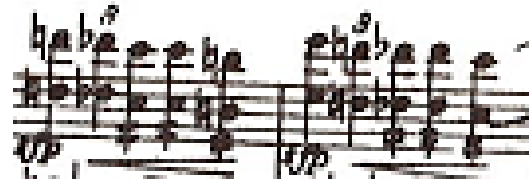
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<sup>38</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”

Therefore, I think this change added by the auditioning orchestra is a detail which has to be played:



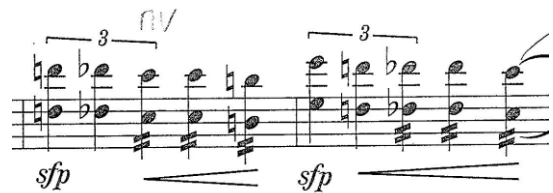
Ex. 8: Manuscript (bars 227-228)



Ex. 9: Orchestral score, 1964 (bars 227-228)



Ex. 10: Auditioning excerpt (bars 227-228)



Ex. 11: Excerpt from GSO (bars 227-228)

228)

If I continue reading Kwok-Adams: “Don’t worry about fingerings and bowings in the part you are given; use them as a guide but if you really feel strongly about changing something, go ahead”.<sup>39</sup> I think the bowings and fingerings they have added follow the same principles that I argued in the step before. Speaking about these parameters, I think the smartest thing is just comparing the auditioning orchestra notations with the ones written in the score a professional orchestra has already played because, more specifically with the bowings, the best way to know whether they work or not is playing and trying them. In this comparison, some things have been changed in both scores in the same way:

<sup>39</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”



Ex. 12: Auditioning orchestra (bars 155-156)

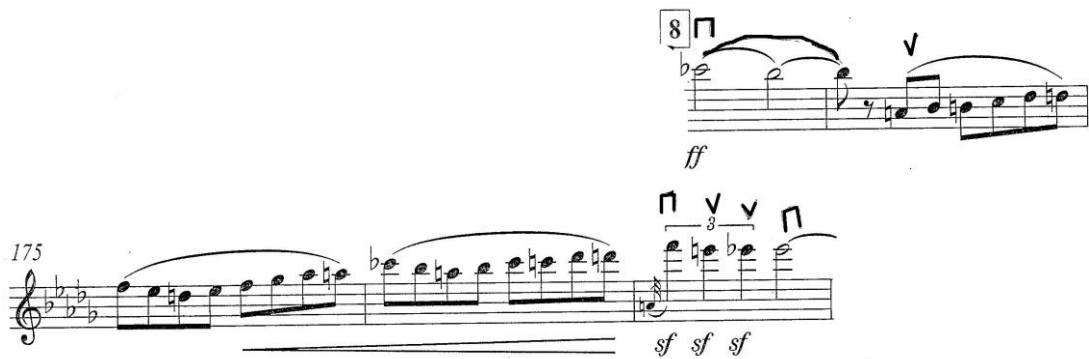


Ex. 13: GSO score (bars 155-156)

Some others in a different way:



Ex. 14: Auditioning orchestra (bars 173-177)<sup>40</sup>



Ex. 15: GSO score (bars 173-177)<sup>41</sup>

Better that looking at the score, one can be aware of the differences by listening to both audios.

<sup>40</sup> Audio 9 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 173-177*: First violin excerpt)

<sup>41</sup> Audio 10 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 173-177*: First violin excerpt)

➤ **Research the tradition of various performances through different recordings**

Regarding recordings, nowadays I have within my reach a huge amount of them, both in audio and video, that I can listen to. For use in this example, I have chosen four recordings available on the internet, from different years, orchestras and conductors (but of course this system can be applied to any number of recordings).<sup>4</sup>

Listening material:

- Wiener Philharmoniker conducted by Claudio Abbado (1980)<sup>42</sup>
- Wiener Philharmoniker conducted by Leonard Bernstein (1987)<sup>43</sup>
- Berliner Philharmoniker conducted by Sir Simon Rattle (2002)<sup>44</sup>
- World Orchestra for Peace conducted by Valery Gergiev (2010)<sup>45</sup>

I have chosen different recordings of this piece, from different orchestras, conductors and years, and I have made a comparative table in order to easily observe the changes they made:

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<sup>42</sup> Mahler: *Symphony No. 5* / Abbado & VPO, accessed October 27, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32nmt68KNWU>

<sup>43</sup> Mahler: *Symphony No.5 in C sharp minor - Bernstein / Wiener Philharmoniker*, accessed October 27, 2015. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpitDloV-GA>

<sup>44</sup> *Simon Rattle's Inaugural Concert from 2002*, accessed October 27, 2015. <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/es/concert/12988?a=youtube&c=true>

<sup>45</sup> Mahler: *Symphony No. 5 / Gergiev · World Orchestra for Peace · BBC Proms 2010*, accessed October 27, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjmthMDpyco>

Bar number	A C. Abbado, Wiener Philharmoniker, 1980	B L. Bernstein, Wiener Philharmoniker, 1987	C Sir S. Rattle, Berliner Philharmoniker, 2002	D V. Gergiev, World Orchestra for Peace, 2010
155	$\text{♩} = 114/116$	$\text{♩} = 110$	$\text{♩} = 106$	$\text{♩} = 102$
165	$\text{♩} = 110$		$\text{♩} = 88$	
173			$\text{♩} = 106$	
178		<i>accel.</i> until $\text{♩} = 116$		
188	<i>ritardando</i>	<i>ritardando</i>	<i>ritardando</i>	<i>ritardando</i>
195	$\text{♩} = 114$	$\text{♩} = 122$	$\text{♩} = 106$	$\text{♩} = 108$
203	$\text{♩} = 104$	$\text{♩} = 90$	$\text{♩} = 88$	$\text{♩} = 97$
210				<i>ritardando</i>
211		<i>accelerando</i>	<i>accelerando</i>	
214			<i>ritardando</i>	
215	<i>ritardando</i>			
221	$\text{♩} = 104$	$\text{♩} = 118$	$\text{♩} = 110$	$\text{♩} = 97$

- In common
- Orchestra A
- Orchestra B
- Orchestra C
- Orchestra D

At first glance at the table, one can realize that every recording has not only its own *tempi*, but also tempo changes in different places.

There are four places in common where they all change tempo. In bar 188 all of them play *ritardando*, and in bars 195, 203 and 221 they all change *tempi*. However, these changes are not made in the same way. For instance, if I take a look at the relationship between the tempo in the beginning and the tempo in the end of the excerpt, orchestras A and D finish the excerpt slower than they started it, but orchestras B and C finish faster. In the rest of the places, every recording does different or even opposite things. From bar 210, orchestras A and D coincide again playing a *ritardando*, though orchestra D starts it some bars earlier. By contrast, orchestra B plays *accelerando* and



orchestra C plays both of them, firstly *accelerando* and then *ritardando*.

Apart from these observations and comparisons between the recordings and the score, listening to different versions can suggest different ideas about the way of playing the excerpt: about the musical lines, tone colour, articulation or tempo, and I can get an idea about what I want or I do not want to do while playing the excerpt. As Kwok-Adam says, “Think carefully about how you would perform them [the excerpts] in the orchestra. Is this passage an accompanying figure? What kind of articulation would work within a section? By listening to the music, these questions should be easily answered”.<sup>46</sup>

#### ➤ **Conclusion → My interpretation for the audition**

Now with all the information, I think I can decide how I am going to prepare the excerpt.

I am a person who thinks that the learning process of a musician is endless and that many times during my musical life I will need someone to listen to me while playing to give me a more objective opinion than I can have (especially if that person is a teacher or professional and experienced musician). However, I also think that it is essential for a musician to become self-sufficient to be able to prepare any music in a very good way by themselves.

Placing the music in a context has never been a priority for me in my first years in music. I assumed that with a general idea about the composer and period was enough to play a good performance, that the rest of the work was just working with the score. Even now in the last years, sometimes, I have received the scores to play in an orchestra concert so close to the first rehearsal that I did not have the time to investigate what that

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<sup>46</sup> *The Strad*: Maxine Kwok-Adams, “How to be successful in an orchestral audition”

piece was about before. These times, I realised how different can be the approach to a piece depending on whether I knew these kinds of details or not. Therefore, I would say that it is worthy to spend some time knowing the music before playing it.

From the interviews I can read that intonation, quality of sound, articulation, rhythmical accuracy and musical phrasing are the main strengths to focus on. In general, it looks like the intonation is the most important detail to keep in mind. A general bad or not so good intonation automatically takes the applicant out of the audition. According to the most of the answers I have obtained, to pass the round with a general just okay intonation means that the rest of the details are great, because one mistake would then finish the audition. But playing with a perfect or really close to perfect intonation means that the applicant has already won one of the “audition’s battles”, because, no matter how big the section is, if everybody is playing perfectly in tune and one person’s intonation is not so good, the whole section work is ruined. Therefore, an important time in my daily practice would be devoted to the intonation.

However, having a good intonation and pulse is not going to make me the winner. As Kerr says, “the basics: of course intonation and rhythm. They are something that I need to see from you. However, there are things that go further than that: how the piece goes. What kind of sound are you using? Are you developing a kind of sound that can blend with the group? How is your vibrato? These things are incredibly important.”<sup>47</sup>

To make these decisions, I would try out all the different options I discussed in the step *What is the music asking for?* and finally I would choose the one more convincing and comfortable for me. For instance, speaking about double-stops, I would definitely play just the highest voice in an audition, because it is more probably that both intonation and quality of sound would be well. Then, I would add some things from the

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<sup>47</sup> *Violin Channel*: Alex Kerr, “Preparing for an Orchestral Audition”

next steps (what the orchestra has added and the research of the tradition by listening to recordings).

In this example, I agree with the bowings the orchestra sent. I think they are really good because they help to express what is written and I would use them. About the fingerings, I think they are also thought of in the same way, so in theory, I think they work out (though maybe once I have played it, I would change some of them because I could find more comfortable ones for me). I also think the dynamics they added are a good idea. It is quite difficult playing in *ff*, then a *sf*, *cresc*, *sf*, *cresc*... If I want to keep a great sound, it is better to release somehow, somewhere; I also agree with the idea of playing less between the *sf* and the *cresc*, so I can emphasise that effect. In general, the score played by the GSO respects the original bowings more than the excerpt the auditioning orchestra sent and, if I could choose I would play them, but since I think both of them are perfectly playable with an acceptable character and articulation, in the audition I would keep the bowings of the auditioning orchestra.

I find essential listening to recordings while preparing an audition (and I am not the only one, according to the interviews). From the recordings I have listened to, I can understand that according to the tradition, it is common doing a *ritardando* from bar 188 to 195, going slower from 203 to 210/215 and then a *ritardando* until 221 (though not all of them played exactly like that).

About *tradition* I have mentioned before, Aaron Rosand has interesting words:

« “There were numerous occasions where I had bitter arguments with respected judges after remarks such as, ‘That’s not how Beethoven should be played’ or ‘That’s not Bach!’ My response was, ‘If you know the right way let me in on the secret formula we can do away with individuality and give it to a robot.’ It is so presumptuous on the part of many judges to think there is a right or wrong way to interpret music. This narrow minded attitude has seen many gifted young players eliminated in early competition rounds. Individuality and style have taken a

back seat to a concept of the correct manner of playing”. »<sup>48</sup>

During my whole preparation process, I would make use of a recording device, in order to be sure that I can obtain what I mean from my performance. Also, I find it very important to play the excerpts to my colleagues and teachers of course, to consider their comments as an objective opinion that can provide me with ideas I did not come up with before. Actually, when I decide to prepare an audition, the first thing I do is to plan my time until the audition day. I try to guess how much time I will need to prepare the whole repertoire and, by the day I think I will be able to play everything, I organise daily “mock” auditions with teachers or/and colleagues to try my nerves and my control of the situation, and to listen to their opinions. Since I am doing this, I have experienced a significant improvement in my self-control during auditions and I have practised the repertoire from new points of view for me that have helped me to raise my performance level.

In short, I would try to somehow keep the tradition in mind while playing, but always following my own vision and interpretation of the music and, in general, trying to respect what is written, using the third and fourth steps as a complement for the first and second.

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<sup>48</sup> *The Strad*: Violinist Aaron Rosand on how to succeed in competitions and auditions.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The idea of facing an audition is something concerning every violin player who wants to work in an orchestra. After practising the violin for many hours a day for most of our lives, we find that this big challenge is standing between us and our dream job, and it is very common that, probably after trying some auditions, we have the feeling that we do not know how to prepare for that. As we can read in the interviews, most of us have something clear in mind: it is not the same preparing excerpts for an audition than preparing them to play in an orchestra. I think that it is very important going to an audition being confident enough that I am as well-prepared as possible, so, with this work, I have tried to clarify the way to prepare an important part: the orchestral excerpts.

Starting with my own experiences and what I have learnt from them (from my own mistakes while playing, living the audition from the jury's side or the feedback after my playing), continuing by interviewing professional orchestral musicians and candidates and elaborating my own practising system, I think I can say I have compiled an important amount of information.

My purpose was not finding the one system to prepare excerpts for auditions. I have not meant to say to any applicant how an excerpt must be played. What I have tried is to raise the main questions the violin player can wonder during the audition preparation process about orchestral excerpts. For some questions, I have found some possible answers, some of them from other musicians, some of them from my own conclusions.

Nevertheless, with my system, my goal has been to chart a way forward, by setting all the steps I consider essential for good preparation. From now on, every

applicant should apply their own criteria to do his or her best in the audition. To be sure whether the system works effectively or not, we will have to wait until that is put into practice in some auditions by different people.

# APPENDIX

## 1.- G. Mahler, Symphony No.5, 1st Mov (bars 155-231) – First violin (Excerpt sent by the auditioning orchestra)

155 ⑦ *Plötzlich schneller. Leidenschaftlich. Wild.*  
*ff sf*

160 *sf*

165 *ff/leidenschaftlich*

170 *sf*

175 *sf sf sf*

180 *ff*

184 *ff sf sf*

189 *Pesante*

195 ⑨ *Al tempo*  
*ff sf sf sf dim.*

204 *breiter Strich*

207 *sf sf dim. molto espr. cresc. breit gestrichen*  
*viel Bogenwechsel*

214 *cresc. sf ff*

219 *atpda sf sf fff*

224 *V poco rit. sf fff*

228 *sf sf*  
*allmählich sich beruhigend*

2.- G. Mahler, Symphony No.5, 1<sup>st</sup> Mov (bars 155-231) – First violin (Excerpt played in GSO)

4 Violine I

155 **7** Plötzlich schneller. Leidenschaftlich. Wild  
*ff sf*

160 *ff sf*

165 *leidenschaftlich ff sf ff*

170 *sf ff* **8**

175 *sf sf sf*

179 *ff*

183 *ff sf*

188 *sf*

192 *ff* **9** *Pesante a tempo ff*

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Violine I

5

197

*sf sf sf dim.*

201

*sf sf sf dim. p cresc. sf*

*molto espr.*

*3*

206

*breiter Strich!*

*cresc. sf*

*breit gestrichen*

10

211

*viel Bogenwechsel*

*ff sf sf*

217

*sf fff ff fff*

*poco rit. a tempo*

222

*ff*

*get. 3*

226

*sf sfp sfp ff*

*zus.*

230

*Allmählich sich beruhigend*

*1 6 11 3*

3.- W.A. Mozart, *The Magic Flute's* overture (b. 9-36)

9

Allegro.

The musical score consists of 15 systems of staves. The first system includes a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a piano part (treble and bass clefs). The second system continues the grand staff and piano part. The third system introduces a flute part (treble clef) and continues the grand staff and piano part. The fourth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The fifth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The sixth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The seventh system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The eighth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The ninth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The tenth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The eleventh system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The twelfth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The thirteenth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The fourteenth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The fifteenth system continues the flute part and grand staff/piano part. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *p*, *sf*, *mf*, *f*, *cresc.*, and *sfz*. The tempo is marked *Allegro.* at the beginning and end of the page.

Allegro.

2.  
*p* *f*

*p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *sfz* *sfz* *f* *p* *f* *p*

*p* *f*

*p* *f*

This page of musical notation is a score for a piano piece, likely in the style of a 19th-century composer. It consists of 14 staves, with the first four and last four staves grouped by a brace on the left, indicating they are for the right and left hands of a grand piano. The notation is in a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The piece is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, particularly in the bass line, which features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often with dynamic markings of *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The upper staves contain more melodic and harmonic material, including some trills and slurs. The overall texture is dense and rhythmic, typical of a virtuosic piano work.

#### **4.- Recordings**

- Audio 1 (G. Puccini, *Gianni Schicchi*: First violin excerpt)
- Audio 2 (G. Puccini, *Gianni Schicchi*: First violin excerpt)
- Audio 3 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 203-209*: First violin excerpt)
- Audio 4 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 203-209*: First violin excerpt)
- Audio 5 (Accent example)
- Audio 6 (Sforzando example)
- Audio 7 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 155-156*: First violin excerpt)
- Audio 8 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 155-156*: First violin excerpt)
- Audio 9 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 173-177*: First violin excerpt)
- Audio 10 (G. Mahler, *Symphony No.5, Trauermarsch, b. 173-177*: First violin excerpt)

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## Recordings

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