

Caroline Coade: On Being Flexible and “Practicing to Bulletproof”

Description

With the exception of adjustable baseball caps and [Snuggies](#), few things in life are truly one-size-fits-all. Whether it's training for a 5k or preparing for an audition, everyone begins in a slightly different place, with a diverse range of needs and priorities and strengths and weaknesses, so I don't know that there's a single approach that works equally well for everyone.

That said, while some of the details may look different from person to person, I do think there are probably some common principles or best practices that are applicable to all of us.

But what are these, exactly?

Well, I was curious about that too. And so a few months ago, percussionist Rob Knopper and I had a chance to sit down and chat with three musicians from the Detroit Symphony. We were curious to see how similar or different their answers would be to the same three questions about audition preparation.

Specifically,

1. On the day of an audition, what do you do backstage to keep yourself in an optimal physical, mental, and emotional state?
2. From the time you wake up, to the moment you play, what does an ideal audition day routine look like for you?
3. What does your practice and preparation process look like in the final week leading up to audition day?

As expected, there was some overlap between their answers, but also some interesting differences, suggesting that there are indeed some universal principles in preparing optimally for performance, but also some personal idiosyncrasies that may be important to allow for as you figure out what works best for you.

Meet Caroline Coade

Over the course of the next week, you'll hear from flutist Amanda Blaikie (Wednesday, April 22nd), and oboist Sarah Lewis (Sunday, April 26th), but kicking off this mini-series today is third-chair violist [Caroline Coade](#), who has been a member of the orchestra since 1996, and also serves as a member of the string faculty at the University of Michigan.

In this episode, we'll explore:

- How being “physically exhausted” prior to performances actually works best for her. (3:05)
- What kind of playing she does on audition day, and why she keeps her playing nearer the softer end of the dynamic range in warmups. (3:51)
- Her love of adjectives, and how she reminds herself of the contrast between excerpts. (6:13)
- The importance of the question “Why is the committee asking for this excerpt?” (7:45)
- How the committee is looking for someone who can “think on their feet” and demonstrate their ability to make “micro-adjustments” in the moment. (9:00)
- The “expect the unexpected” mindset, and the misconception of auditions needing to be perfect. (10:25)
- A few signs that the musician in front of the screen has either a “student” mindset or an “artist” mindset. (11:44)
- The four things committees will ask you to do. (13:34)
- What it means to practice “to bulletproof” (15:07)
- Her regular daily routine on audition day, and what that looks like, from coffee (yes? no?), what to eat, social media, etc. (16:33)
- How practice looks in the final leadup to the audition, with mocks, practicing everything “upside down and backwards,” how to make sure you’re “in the ballpark,” her three tempi strategy, and my personal favorite – her awesome 90-second recording rule. (19:56)

Where to find Caroline

You can learn more about Caroline and reach out to her here:

[Caroline Coade | University of Michigan](#)

Date Created

April 2020