

The audition room

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When people think about auditioning without even having one, they tend to think that it would be like the shows American Idol, The Voice, or even Americas Got Talent. They think it would be a utopian fantasy to audition one day and be able to perform in front of thousands of people and surprise the judges and voters with your performance and finally become famous.

However, if you ask a person who auditions for a collage program, marching band, or brass corps you will hear a story that is darker, harsher, and meaner than the imaginary American Idol stories that many people think about. It is a very corrupt system that is manipulated by money, income inequality, and abusive management. At first you feel that you will make it because you worked very hard to join, but even if you're in or not in the group you do not know what will happen after your audition. Therefore the audition room is an opportunity to some, but for many good, talented, and perseverant musicians it will not end well... In the mind of a virtuous band director, an audition is usually done so that he or she can get a sense of the skill level and learning style of the musician who wants to join so that they can achieve many strengths and abilities, and overcome their weaknesses as a student of music. Usually the director must be alone with the student so that they can start a bond, much in the same way you get to know a friend or teacher for the first time.

They ask many questions and have a student play a scale so that latter on they will help them improve their knowledge by teaching and mentoring the student. However, what if you're a director that is pressured to not help a student but push them to learn and to work harder even to their limit of wanting to quit? Why is this the mentality that young band directors are

taught when in reality there are better ways to find and teach talented and perseverant students whose only desire is to learn and take any musical path they choose? It's all because there are too many rules about what is to be a musician and many of these rules hinder the musician from being an individual, and the people who make these rules see them as talented pawns of success or failure. How do they get away with this, by judging a musician by how many degrees they have and by how many competitions they won. Also a factor is who their teacher or director is based on the same expectation given by the student. Therefore, these groups are not true supporters of the art of music but they are talent factories that choose and pick musicians like apples that to their standards are the best apples on the tree and leave the smaller apples or the apples on the ground to rot and die because they don't work hard enough or grow faster like the other apples. One example of this mentality is believe it or not, in brass corps and marching bands.

Ever wonder why each person in a corps or band is almost the same height, with, and shape even though they wear different uniforms depending on the school or corps? It's because they want it that way so that they can easily judge every corps that fills their standards. If a corps or band fulfils their standards and qualifications they come home with money and a large trophy or plank that means something to the director but to us it has no meaning but other to work harder and harder to win the next one, and get skinnier and skinnier until we reach the age of twenty-one. Twenty-one is a breakoff age for brass corps which means your time in the corps is done, no matter what you did or part you played. Even if your experience was either good or

bad, where are you going to find another musical outlet for your talent and musicianship? Enter ladies and gentleman, the show Blast! The first time I saw the show Blast it was at the Witting Auditorium in Flint, and even though the auditorium stage was really small stage it was the most amazing show I ever saw. The first act was Ravel's Bolero where at first there is one drummer on the stage and as it goes on there were more and more people moving around and playing many brass instruments. They wore no colorful uniforms and had no hats covering their heads, they all wore black shirts and they also varied in body shape.

In act two there was Gee Officer Krupke with a trombonist on a unicycle and to my delight Land of Make Believe had a line of tubas sitting on the edge of the stage! At the end I cried and I felt as if I wanted to run away with them as if they were a circus troop. I was so psyched and allured that I bought the DVD and the soundtrack, and even memorized the tuba's bass line in Land of Make Believe: bum-bum-bum-bum...I also wanted to do Malaguena and the many other songs in the show and then... I joined marching in high school which I quit after they put me in the pit because I have poor depth perception. In the heat of depression, pain, and heartbreak I decided to research the audition requirements for Blast and what I found was something that broke my psyche. You have to not only march and play at the same time but they also wanted videos that proved your acting skills, and before they even get on stage they have to practice outside in rain and heat on an asphalt model of the stage. At that point in my life I was hurt and heartbroken over something I could not become. It was very hard to accept

and at one point I could not watch the DVD because if I did I would cry and make things worse.

However I learned a lesson of empathy that not all musicians usually have, empathy for the musician that even though he or she works hard to achieve their goals and expand their horizons they cannot get in because they do not fit the demands, desires, requirements, and standards which like a factory are the same for every person and it is not just individuals. Sometimes even school band programs are guided by this listed system that does not question the director's attitude and leadership and how it effects the students, but are judged very meticulously on if the students know the material and do it under their guidelines based on numbers and whether every student can play it in the correct way, and be able to sight read immediately like it is on the page. It's as if every school, and collage band in the Nation goes through a conveyer-belt and is checked by men and women that are strict experts in finding malfunctions and defects as if every section and student is a product. In high school I went to band competitions and it was very mandatory for us to do so. At first I thought it was an invitation to perform at a school filled with seniors, parents, and kids, but then I saw people from other schools coming and there were a small number of people in the audience, and all the people in the audience were judges, boosters, other music educators, and also band directors that worked for prestigious and more advanced groups of players.

Our band director told us to play with joy, but instead we were playing for them, to make them give us a high score, to make them reward our director with a trophy on the shelf and money in his pocket, and all of these bands

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were coming to make them proud. After we performed we were in a cafeteria and when we entered there was a dry-erase board with our school ratings from the judges and everyone was happy and proud of our band's score, yet I could not fathom why a group of numbers and scores were so important to our band. Until our director said with excitement, " We're going to States and then... Boston!" was not our performance enough proof that we were a great band and that we worked hard at school and at home to make a good performance? Since when did a good performance of a piece of music become a number that is analyzed by people who have tons of music degrees than by a normal civilian audience? Then I finally found my answer, for band directors winning equals profit for themselves and no money is given to the humble student that needs instrument repair, mentorship, or private lessons which would save a band director from ever having to spend that much money. However because of the clannish mentality of directors and band boosters (whom are mostly parents of students in the Symphonic Band) they use this money to give students that the director favors to spend it on a collage that the director chooses for each student. Yet even though it sounds good on the school newspaper, and too their band booster parents who scream at the sky, " Wilson is going to Michigan State!" these students are still young teens that are not prepared for what happens in collage after their director or parents drop them off and say, " Have a good time!".

Unprepared they still think that the Collage Concert Band is just like their good old Symphonic Band back in High School when really it is not what they expect and this is a common shocker for all students that go to college alone and are wary about their independence. Then they have to go back to

another audition room and do a theory test with terms that were not taught beforehand because the director thought they knew all their theory, scales, and meters because they were deemed high level musicians that already knew all these things. The quote for this essay was spoken by a man named Arnold Jacobs, who knew as a performer in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and as a teacher of young to advanced brass and wind students how troubling the audition process for musicians is. His focus was to help musicians play and perform better physically and mentally for all audiences, not on how to wow the audition committee or any other person what wants to judge music like a scoreboard in a football game. To him the musician is the storyteller of sound through his or her instrument, it's not a number on a piece of paper that says weather you're a two or a one in a solo and ensemble performance.

As musicians we all tell a story though our style, tone, and joy in our instrument whether it be jovial, sad, furious, and even heart-wrenching with our passion for playing. Too many musicians are like my private instructor says, " Slaves to the music" for a singer it is easy to get away with individual interpretation but for us instrumentalist we on a daily basis get too much critique and analysis on how we interpret a solo or part in a piece of music. One time in a collage recital review I was criticized on making a part of the first movement from a Mozart Horn Concerto slow and loudly emphasized and then going back to a group of sixteenth notes at the same speed to reflect some humor into the piece (a lesson I learned from watching way too many Canadian Brass videos). At the end of the performance I and my instructor got criticized for doing this to the piece after I worked on it with

him. He rebutted by saying that many performers of Mozart Concertos, especially for the cadenzas, will emphasize the notes that are low or high in a humorous manner and even I said something similar. Sadly it was the last recital I would ever do and I still feel a sense of loss for not being able to perform solos for an audience of people who love music and not be judged but appreciated for the hard work and emotion I put into a solo.

So I ask all musicians, directors, drum majors, performers, conductors, and those in music technology and theater to imagine a world where instead of judges with degrees, trophies, and wealthy homes critic and turn music into numbers and points. That an entire audience of people that love music can say to each other, “ Hey that group was amazing” “ I really like the tuba players” “ They have a powerful sound” and come back for more of our music and our own hard work that is ours to own, not an award or a number on a board but something more and greater than all physical things, our love of music.