

Audition Tips for Musicians Seeking Bands

By Marty Dickinson, Manager of Music Mates, LLC

At MusicMates.com, we've been helping bands find musicians since our pilot program began in 1995. We could fill pages of paper full of stories that bands have had on audition day.

- A guitar player who showed-up to audition for a tribute band and didn't know any of the songs.
- A violinist who confessed she didn't know how to play violin, but she could "out-sing the lead singer any day," or so she claimed.
- The bass player that showed up to audition for what he knew was a full-time touring act and then said "Well, I can only play when you guys are in Colorado. I don't want to travel."

The list could go on and on...

Here are a few tips that we've picked up along the way that will increase your chances of winning a band audition:

Tip 1 – Learn as much as you can about the band

How long have they been together? Do they focus on originals or covers or both? Is bringing in a new musician going to change their direction? Where will the rehearsal space be? How often will practices be? Is their intention to be in-studio soon? Will travel be involved if you get into this band? What bands were the members with before they joined this one? Even see them play live if you can.

Tip 2 – Find out ahead of time what you will be expected to play

This one goes along with Tip #1. If joining a particular band is important enough to you, it will be worth your while to practice a song (or songs) so that you can really nail it on audition day.

Tip 3 – Find out ahead of time if you should bring any specific equipment

I remember joining a Rush tribute band years ago. They asked me on the phone if I had a volume pedal and if I knew the beginning to Xanadu. They hadn't yet asked me to audition, until I said yes to those two questions. Later, they said, "Anyone who expects to play Rush in a tribute band had better have a volume pedal." I'm sure that's what got me the gig.

Tip 4 – Decide if you really want this gig

Just how important is it to you to nail this audition? Or is it just a fun thing to do on Thursday night? If it's important to you enough, you will be motivated to do what it takes to impress the band and have a shining audition.

Tip 5 – Learn as much as you can about the musician you're replacing

Is this band position a new one? Or, will you be replacing someone else? What was that person like? Why is he no longer with the band? Did they just not get along? Was it a performance issue? Get an edge on your competition for the part by knowing as much as you can about what the band liked and didn't like about the person before you.

Tip 6 – Show up a minimum of 20 minutes early, depending on instrument type

You may need setup time, of course, but you also want to have time before your audition to meet everyone. Show up late or keep the band waiting while you're setting up and you will leave a bad first impression before playing your first note.

Tip 7 – Allow for chemistry to work

Focus on meeting every member of the band, and getting to know them as much as you can in the time you're given. When you're on stage, play with the group rather than playing like you have a stereo in the background.

Tip 8 – Don't apologize for mistakes

Typically, a band will be okay with your making mistakes because they know you'll be able to play their songs better with a couple of rehearsals. Many of the mistakes you will make will only be recognizable by you! You will always be your worst critic. Others will often see your mistakes as simply adding "your own thing" to a song. So, never draw attention to mistakes when you make them.

Tip 9 – Mix

Be very careful not to play too loud or too soft. Adjust your volume as you go so that your instrument is blending well with the rest of the group. After all, that's really what they're looking for anyway...someone to be part of a cohesive group.

Tip 10 – Be flexible

Sometimes a bandleader will stop a song in the middle of an audition and change a part. "This time, how about if we make a change and play it this way?" he might ask. The reason this is done is to see how accommodating you can be to the wishes of the band and doing things differently.

Tip 11 – Look the Part

If you're auditioning for a metal band, dress appropriately. If you're auditioning for a symphony, dressing like you should be in a metal band probably isn't the best suggestion. If you're auditioning to be the front-person for a band, make sure to smile like you are having fun! Bands ask you to audition in-person because they want to hear you play, but they also want to see if your look will be a good fit for their image. Dress the part.

Tip 12 – If you're asked back for a second audition, wear the same clothing

If you're asked back for a second round, chances are good that some additional people might be showing up to watch you play. Part of the reason you're asked back is because of what you can play, but also for how you look. Wear the same thing you wore to the last audition. Whatever it was, it worked before. It will work for you again.

Tip 13 – Be careful what you practice when warming-up

Sometimes you might be the only person auditioning for a band spot. Other times, the band may schedule a dozen players to show-up on a given date and time. Be prepared that you may have to jump right into the situation without warming up. Or, you could be waiting an hour or more for your shot.

If you get the opportunity to warm-up in a separate room, keep in mind that people will hear you. The possibility exists that your audition could be judged on what you sound like when warming-up. If I remember right, that's exactly what happened with Randy Rhodes. He was practicing in the hallway and Ozzy hired him based on what he heard during Randy's warm-up.

Tip 14 – Be energetic and happy

No one likes to hang around people who are angry all time. Be cheerful and excited to be auditioning. Be "like-able." Even if you don't have the song totally nailed-down yet that the band asks you to play, they'll likely ask you back if they like you. Conversely, you could have the worlds greatest chops and not be asked back and wonder why. I've heard musicians tell me they didn't get the gig because they were "too good." It's probably more safe to say that they just didn't like you. Personality goes a long way in the music business.

Tip 15 – Allow the band time to talk about you

Sometimes the band will make their decision based off of one song you play. Others will have you play 4 or 5 songs together to allow you to get over the nervousness period. They may just ask you to leave by saying, "we'll get back to you." This is okay. Simply thank them for the opportunity and leave. If you are what they're looking for, they will call you.

Tip 16 – Always say “thank you”

Thank the band for inviting you to the audition. A simple, “thanks for having me,” will do.

In Summary...

Auditioning around to find the perfect band is nerve-racking most of the time. There are so many unknowns in the audition process. You wonder if you’re saying things right, playing songs well enough, you have the right equipment, and if the other guys like you.

That’s why the best recommendation of all that I can offer about auditioning for a band is to enjoy the process. If you look like you’re having fun, your energy will be contagious.

Best of luck!

Sincerely,
Marty Dickinson
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